MORE THAN AN "UNHAPPY OBJECT":
THE ETHICAL, RELATIONAL AND PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF
TALKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY

ALANNA CAROLINE GOLDSTEIN

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Abstract

Despite its ubiquity, online pornography has retained its status as an "unhappy object" (Ahmed, 2008) that is taken-for-granted as uniquely and inherently harmful for viewers, for participants, and for society in general. This is considered particularly true for young people, who are constructed as incapable of engaging with pornography in critical or nuanced ways; assumptions that have resulted in pornography's continued omission as a topic in contemporary sexual health education curricula. But what happens when we actually talk to young people about their relationship to pornography? What do we learn about how young people engage with pornography, and how might these conversations challenge the things we think we know about youth, sexuality, pornography, and about the point and purpose of education altogether? This dissertation draws on data from four focus groups undertaken with undergraduate students at a Canadian university around the topics of online pornography and sex education to consider the value of addressing pornography in our pedagogies. Using narrative thematic analysis and case-centred analysis methodologies (Riessman, 2008), this dissertation argues that discussions around pornography provide insights into young people's "thick desires" (Fine & McLelland, 2006)—their desires for relations and conditions of equity, dignity, justice and care. At the same time, these discussions also point to the complexity and opacity of young people's "psychosocial subjectivities" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013) in that pornography often emerged as a "limit object" in terms of what participants could or would say about it in relation to their sexualities, identifications, needs and desires. This limit suggests the impossibility of developing a traditional curriculum around concepts such as 'sexuality' or 'pornography' at all, but rather indicates the need to embrace ambivalence, uncertainty and vulnerability in our pedagogies; a move that might better enable young people to engage in more compassionate and hopefully more ethical relations with themselves, with others and with the world. To that end, the focus groups discussed in this dissertation serve as a potential model for thinking about and educating around difficult and complex topics of all kinds.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Several years ago, in a moment of between-degree existential angst, I was browsing

through local volunteer opportunities looking for something meaningful to do with my time

when the position of "sexual health peer educator" jumped out at me. Although I possessed

no real, formal knowledge about sexual health *per se*, (I wasn't exactly sure what my cervix

did, for instance), I knew that I liked sex, and I liked public speaking, so why not? As a "peer

educator," I discovered that I would be conducting workshops on sexual health--with a

specific focus on HIV/AIDS prevention--for youth in Toronto's "priority" neighbourhoods.

While this was the official mandate, it turned out that I was (luckily) working under a woman

who had a slightly different idea in mind; she was young, queer, fun and sex-positive, and

wanted to include a more expansive vision of sexual health in the workshops, one that took

up issues of pleasure, desire and consent in addition to the "use condoms or die" message of

our official mandate. To that end, she contacted a local sex-shop and had them donate a wide

range of sex toys to our project. These sex toys—some novelty, some award-winning, some

upscale, some fetish—allowed us to take a few minutes during the workshops to move away

from the doom and gloom discourses of disease and death to talk about sex as something that

could also be fun, pleasurable, creative, and life-affirming. Of course, this aspect of the

workshop always ended up being the most enjoyable, as participants would giggle and poke

and wonder and squirm at these objects, trying to figure out what they do and imagining how

they might feel. But "sex toy time" was also the most challenging portion of the workshop, as

we routinely lost control of the group and our ability to frame the ways in which sex "should"

be talked about or practiced. And it was during one such "out of control" moment that I

encountered the thread of an idea that would later germinate into the study described in this dissertation.

A young man, around the age of 16, picked up a large, novelty dildo (the dildo was almost two feet long and probably as thick as my calf). Looking at me quite seriously, he began to thrust the dildo forward rather forcefully, asking, "Is this how you use this?" I was a bit stunned, as he seemed genuinely curious and confused, unable to recognize that this was a novelty object that was unlikely to ever enter a human orifice without serious practice, preparation and lubrication. A little uncomfortable, I replied with something along the lines of, "Well, this isn't something you would use in real life. And anyways, you probably shouldn't just lead with that kind of thrusting without asking first, as you might hurt your partner." "But," he responded, "I saw in this porn once…" While I don't recall exactly what it was he saw in that porn, that one sentence, uttered in my direction many years ago, stuck with me. There we were, earnest "peer educators" reiterating for the thousandth time the need to use condoms, while in the privacy of their homes, in the online spaces we could not enter with them, young people were learning something else entirely, something that had little to do with disease or pregnancy, condoms or pap smears, but with dildos, and thrusting, and communication, and complicated, uncertain desires.

As I later pondered over that moment, I came to realize that "porn" was the great elephant in the room of all contemporary sex education, both within formal spaces of schooling and informal spaces such as my workshop. While I myself had come of age in the early years of the Internet, when it might have taken 10 minutes to download a single pornographic photo, those who grew up within the ubiquity of Web 2.0 have had every possible iteration of pornography available to them at the click of button. And young people are definitely taking advantage of this unprecedented access: studies indicate that upwards of

90% of young people have seen online pornography (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). In considering this reality of young people's lives, I began to think about what it might look like to develop a sex education that addresses the ubiquity of porn, but that could also address all the tangential elements that go along with porn; the oversized thrusting dildos, and everything else. What was missing, however, was information that would point to how this kind of education might be developed, particularly within a Canadian context; information about what young people think about and do with porn, how they make sense of it, draw on it, reject it, play with it, hate it, love it, laugh at it or cry because of it, as well as information on whether and how educators could or should try to address it. It is in an attempt to begin to fill in just the very small edges of these gaps that I developed the research study that will be described and discussed in detail throughout this dissertation; a study that involved focus groups with undergraduates at York University around their thinking on, and experiences with, both porn and sex education, past and present. To that end, this study reflects an intervention in the field of sex education curriculum development in Canada in general, and in the Province of Ontario in particular - a field that I see as continuing to negate the reality of young people's sexual lives and experiences, which increasingly involve some form of engagement with online porn. In particular, this study asks: What might it look like to develop a pedagogy that doesn't assume engagement with porn is necessarily problematic from the outset? And what might we, as educators, learn about young people's sexual and social lives from listening to the things they have to say (or the things they cannot say) about a contentious object such as porn that might change the ways we think about youth, about sex, about porn and about the point and purpose of education altogether?

1. Context of the Study

Before considering the potential value of engaging with porn in our pedagogy, it's helpful to consider the broader context in which porn continues to be neglected as a topic in Ontario's sexual health curricula. As Canada's most populous and diverse province, sexual health education in Ontario has historically been a political, moral, religious, legal, social and pedagogical battleground rife with competing perspectives on what should be taught in schools about sex and when. The debates surrounding this issue came to the fore in 2010, when updates to the 1998 sexual health education curriculum were proposed by Ontario's Ministry of Education. The 2010 *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* expanded the 1998 curriculum's focus on puberty, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases to include, for example, identifying and naming genitalia (Grade 1); teaching about gender identity and sexual orientation (Grade 3); teaching about different kinds of sexual relationships (Grade 8); and teaching about sexual decision-making, consent and abuse/harassment (Grades 9-12) (Ontario Physical Health Education Association, 2012). Despite all these updates, however, the topic of pornography was nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, due to public opposition from a handful of religious and conservative groups concerned with the content of the updated curriculum, specifically its inclusion of LGBTQ identities and issues, the updates in the proposed 2010 curriculum were shelved, and for several years Ontario's curricula remained unchanged from the one previously implemented in 1998. As the only province still using a sexual health curriculum developed before the millennium—and prior to the widespread proliferation of the Internet as well as the 2005 legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada—it was clear that Ontario's curriculum was woefully out-of-date. Upon winning the 2014 provincial election, the Liberal Party Premiere, Kathleen Wynne, renewed her commitment to updating Ontario's sexual health education curriculum. After further consultations with teachers, parents, school boards and community organizations, and with

the inclusion of several new updates (including online bullying and 'sexting' - but still, no porn), the new *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* was finally implemented in Ontario's schools in September 2015.

In order to convince wary parents of the need to implement these updates, the Ministry of Education drew in part on the language of what might be called a "risks and dangers" framing of adolescence. This concept is captured by the Canadian Paediatric Society's website (2008) which describes adolescence as "a time of experimentation and risk-taking…[wherein] young people engage in behaviours that have potentially negative outcomes" concluding that "the provision of education about the potential risks and ways of reducing them may impact on these behaviours" (2008). This view of adolescence as a time of risk, and education as a necessary form of intervention, was visible in the debates around sex education in Ontario. For instance, then-education minister, Liz Sandals, argued in a 2015 interview with the *Guelph Mercury Tribune* that "Our children's safety depends on providing them with the best information about their health and well-being. Our children need accurate information about health and physical education and this revised curriculum will help keep our students safe" (Konesavarathan, 2015). Beyond needing protection from themselves, "as a consequence of the supposed 'volatility' of adolescence" (Allen, 2007, p. 250), young people are also deemed at risk from pregnancy and STIs, abuse, exploitation, and loss of self-esteem and reputation (Connell, 2005, p. 258). This kind of pragmatic framing ultimately proved effective as a method to 'sell' the need for an updated "comprehensive" sex education curriculum that speaks frankly about young people's sexuality and practices and that aims to intervene in spaces deemed necessary to "keep our students safe."

While protecting young people from danger and risk certainly appears a noble goal, there are several limitations to this approach in its emphasis on "safety" that make it

problematic for addressing something as complex as youth sexuality and pornography use. Nancy Lesko (2010) argues that in equating sex with harm, a comprehensive sexualities approach (much like the abstinence-only framework it purports to contest) actually doesn't really seem to want young people to have sex at all, but rather is "intent on policing children's access to sexual knowledge and discouraging sexual contact" (p. 291). This concern with "protecting" children from both their own and others' sexuality reflects a notion of the "Romantic child" as "naturally asexual" and "pure" (Irvine, 2002, p. 13) and reinforces "adultist" assumptions that "young people are at their best when sexually innocent—free of sexual experience and knowledge" (Fields, 2008, p. 152). In this context, sex is seen as disruptive to the lives of young people, and education becomes the means by which undesirable adolescent sexual behaviour can be curbed.

Comprehensive approaches to sexuality education also tend to reinforce a "hidden curriculum" which reproduces entrenched social inequalities including sexist, racist and heteronormative understandings of relationships, practices and bodies. As Lisa Trimble (2009) argues, "Riding sidecar with the stated curriculum in sexualities pedagogy is a host of hidden lessons, including the 'right' way to engage with femininity, masculinity and gender codes…which sexualities are 'normal', and who (and what) the Other is and how to respond to them" (p. 58). Much of this hidden curriculum is rooted in what Michelle Fine (1988) has termed "the missing discourse of desire," which describes the ways in which

> the naming of desire, pleasure or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality. When spoken of it is tagged with reminders of "consequences" – emotional, physical, moral, reproductive and/or financial (p. 33).

In this context, Fine argues, young women are "trained through and into positions of passivity and victimization" and are "educated away from positions of sexual self-interest" (p. 42). This framing is reflected in typical comprehensive approaches to sexualities

education, wherein women are constructed as passive victims in need of protection from aggressive masculine desire while lacking in sexual agency or desire of their own (Connell, 2005; Carmody, 2005; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Fields, 2008; Hirst, 2014). In this construction, "boys are active agents and 'studs' with an insatiable appetite for sex, while girls are passive, uninterested in sex and only submit to it under pressure. Boys have desire and girls do not" (Connell, 2005, p. 260). However, this construction of feminine passivity, innocence and victimhood is not evenly applied; working class, LGBTQ and racialized women are constructed in opposition to middle-class, white, heterosexual women as dangerous, hyper-sexual and in need of increased surveillance and regulation (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Fields, 2008). Thus the "risks and dangers" framework and the missing discourse of desire look very different depending on who is constructed as having desire, who is deemed in need of protection and who is assumed to be capable of causing harm.

Arguably, sexual health curricula have evolved since Fine first wrote about the "missing discourse of desire" in 1988, and discussions of pleasure and desire have increasingly found their way into the curriculum, as have discussions around diverse identifications, practices and relationships. For instance, the 2015 updates to the Ontario curriculum do involve calls for the inclusion of masturbation, same-sex relationships, and oral and anal safe-sex practices. However, as valuable as this information is, such updates continue to be rooted in a framework that views young people--and especially LGBTQ young people--as always already potential victims, emphasizing the need for sex education mainly as a strategy to combat homophobia and prevent negative sexual health outcomes for queer youth (Rasmussen, 2004). A similar framing is at work in the inclusion of discussions of pleasure and desire. Lamb, Lustig & Graling (2013) argue that "discourses of desire and pleasure are linked with messages about danger and risk, including desire being uncontrollable, desire carrying emotional and health risks, desire used in peer pressure, and

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desire in relation to victimisation" (p. 315). In this context, pleasure and desire are rarely discussed "in a way that is meant to enhance self-knowledge, fun, getting to know someone else, or sexual subjectivity" (Lamb, Lustig & Graling, p. 312). Within the updated Ontario curriculum, discussions of "desire," "pleasure" or "eroticism" appear sparingly, with little elaboration. When they do appear, they are placed under the rubric of "making healthy choices" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The inadequacy of this kind of approach can perhaps best be summed up in this quote from one of my focus group participants, Adriana, in her reflection on her school-based sex education: "Not once did they say the good part of it, of having sex with somebody that you like... they almost scare us out of it without telling us why so many people still do it." Young people are no fools - they watch films, they are active online and they see sex and discussions of sex, everywhere. They know that STIs, unwanted pregnancy, abuse and regret are but a small part of the story, and when we fail to acknowledge this reality in our educational practices, we not only do a disservice to young people, but we risk rendering ourselves and our pedagogy irrelevant and obsolete.

While pornography is not formally included as a topic in the updated sexual health curriculum in Ontario, a similar "risks and dangers" framework still structures the ways in which young people and pornography get discussed in the research, in media and elsewhere. This is because pornography (as will be discussed in my literature review in Chapter 2) has been constructed as an inherently and uniquely problematic object, and young people are understood as being necessarily harmed through contact with it. In response to this framing, two approaches have emerged to deal with the issue of young people watching porn: 1) attempting to stop young people from accessing it (for example, through porn-blocking software, as is being implemented in the UK come April 2018); or 2) educating them out of or away from porn through engaging them in a form of media literacy education. Since prohibition is unlikely to be effective in the long-term, media literacy has emerged as the

preferred response for talking with young people about porn (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009).

A media literacy approach is rooted in critical theory and describes "a demythologising process" whose aim is to "reveal the selective practices by which images reach the...screen, emphasise the constructed nature of the representations projected, and make explicit their suppressed ideological function" (Masterman, 1985, p. 9). The goal of such a process is "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 behaviors promoted by the media" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, p. 161). While there is certainly much value in helping young people make sense of media industries and images-- including the pornography industry and its representations--such an approach tends to reproduce notions of the media as a one-way flow of information that injects viewers with negative messaging or false ideologies that will directly influence their behaviours and beliefs. This kind of approach makes little space for the possibility of other ways of engaging with something like pornography as an object that might have value for young people, assuming again that young people are naive, sexually innocent and always at risk of falling off their proper course without adult guidance.

Much like the educators whom Adriana sensed were misleading her about sex, I believe that simply telling young people that pornography is *bad* and that they should either not watch it, or that they should deconstruct and de-mystify it (a method that would likely empty it of its erotic value) is a limited approach that risks pushing young people's questions about thrusting dildos further underground. Furthermore, as Kath Albury (2014) argues, it is doubtful that "simply adding a critique of porn to an existing sex and relationships education programme will address broader cultural inequities—particularly if other areas of the

curriculum do not directly address questions of power, gender relations and sexual negotiations skills" (p. 174). This is to say that porn is not an object that stands alone, despite the fact that it is often conveniently constructed as a scapegoat for many of society's ills - as that which exists 'outside' of normal and healthy sexual and social relating. While there are many well-founded concerns to be had with pornography's gleeful representations of race, gender, class, sexual orientation and bodies that seem to "eroticise inequality" (Crabbe & Corlett, 2010), as I will argue throughout this dissertation, there are real dangers to over-emphasizing the representations in porn as the cause rather than as a symptom of inequality and oppression.

2. Theoretical Framework

What unites both the "risks and dangers" framework of comprehensive sexualities education and the media literacy approach to porn it engenders, is the epistemological and pedagogical view that education is simply a matter of information transmission, what Nancy Lesko (2010) characterizes as a belief "in the power of correct knowledge, rationally implemented, to effect desired outcomes" (p. 290). This belief is rooted in the taken-for-granted assumption that language is a transparent symbolic system that can unproblematically and directly transmit "truths" about something like sex from educator to student. At the heart of this assumption is a modernist understanding of the subject, which assumes a coherent, conscious and fully-formed self that always makes decisions based on rational self-interest. In this formulation, a naive young person would receive new knowledge about something like pornography and would ostensibly then change their minds and assume a new, more educated relationship to it, reflecting the dream of progressive models of education that view pedagogy as about moving students from ignorance to enlightenment (Lather, 1991).

Psychoanalytic and queer theorists have, however, contested the stable, coherent and rational self that lies at the heart of contemporary pedagogical practices, suggesting instead that selves are dynamic and often opaque, mired in the interplay of conscious and unconscious processes that influence how we engage with the others and objects we encounter. Importantly, this dynamic self is also structured in, and revealed through, social contexts and discourses, reflecting what Jefferson & Hollway (2013) call a "psychosocial subject." This concept refers to the ways in which our subjectivities are both psychic, because they are "a product of a unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended against," and social in that they affect and are affected by discourses and others through intersubjective processes, and because "real events in the external, social world… are discursively and defensively appropriated" (Jefferson & Holloway, 2013, p. 20). In this understanding of the subject, the things we might think and say about an object such as porn do not emerge fully formed from within a conscious, coherent and rational self, but are always in relation to past attachments and old wounds, unspoken desires and oft-unexamined anxieties, projections of selves we wish to be and defenses against that which we fear we are. And these imagined, idealized and feared selves are themselves structured in relation to the norms of the worlds we already inhabit; norms which have told us from the very start what we ought to want and be. Avery Gordon (2008) uses the term "haunting" to capture the notion that our subjectivities are never purely our own, nor are they ever entirely or cohesively present in the 'now.' For Gordon, all of our relations are always imbued with the ghosts of both our own personal histories and our collective social histories; ghosts which are themselves produced through unfathomable and often unspoken and unacknowledged traumas, omissions and losses. The past does not therefore remain in the past—indeed there is no such thing as "over-and-done-with"--but rather "haunting and the appearance of ghosts and specters is one way…we are notified that

what's been concealed is very much alive and present" (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). Histories of racism and white supremacy, homophobia and transphobia, misogyny, sexism and violence of all kinds are always present in both the structures of our lives and our lived experiences within and through those structures, and any understanding of young people's accounts of their relations to porn must therefore acknowledge the ways in which those histories are always also present, even if not consciously acknowledged.

Engaging with porn, and in discussions about porn, is not, however, only a psychical and social experience; it is necessarily an affective and embodied one as well. This is to say that the psychosocial and haunted subject is always also a feeling subject, and to make sense of this feeling subject in relation to porn, I find it helpful to draw on the work of "Public Feelings" affect theorists such as Sara Ahmed (1998, 2004, 2010) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 2012). They argue for an iterative relationship between culture and the body, suggesting that there is no pre-social body, but rather that even our "sensations are mediated" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 25). As with Judith Butler's (1991) concept of 'performativity,' Ahmed (2004) contends that the body is always already implicated in a field of social norms which orients its affective responses to that which it encounters, and through the repetition of these responses, norms are reiterated and further secured. In this formulation, objects become "sticky" with certain affects as they are taken up in particular ways, and in relation to other "bodies, objects, and signs" (p. 90). For instance, affects such as "disgust" or "fear" do not emerge spontaneously from within the body as a function of an encounter with a certain object, but rather are understood by Ahmed (2004) as being (re)produced through encounters with objects already circulating under the signs of "disgusting" or "frightening." And, importantly, these signs are attached to objects—or bodies—within and through hegemonic relations of power, such that certain bodies (queer, racialized, immigrant) come to be experienced affectively and named cognitively as "disgusting" or "frightening" due to their

status as that which is already "outside" the norm. This "unhappy" status (Ahmed, 2010) would most certainly be applied to the object of pornography as well.

In contrast to the modernist understandings of the coherent subject that underlie traditional approaches to sex and pornography education, what psychosocial and affective theories of the subject offer is a more nuanced understanding of how young people might engage with and talk about an object such as pornography; an object that occupies both an affectively contentious position in society and that also touches on many highly intimate aspects of the conscious and unconscious self. The question then becomes: How can we make sense of, and educate around, young people's engagement with porn in ways that go beyond concerns with whether porn is 'good' or 'bad,' and whether watching it is 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'? That is, what would a pedagogy that takes seriously young people's complex psychic, social and affective experiences--whether of objects such as porn, or of sexuality more generally--look like? And how might talking about the object of porn--as an especially "unhappy object" that young people nonetheless seem to increasingly engage with-- potentially produce the kinds of fissures that could open possibilities for living and relating differently?

To address these questions, I am suggesting the need to move away from the "risks and dangers" approach to sex education that would seek to intervene in young people's porn use and, through media literacy, inoculate them against it, and instead situate porn pedagogy in relation to Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland's (2006, 2014) concept of "thick desire." "Thick desire" seeks to "interrupt visions of sexual desire that insisted on only locating desire in hearts, minds, and genitals" (Fine & McClelland, 2014, p. 16) in order to encourage "researchers and policy makers alike to situate desire as an 'entry point'…a window through which we might begin to notice the extensive web of factors in a person's life, family,

community, and nation" (Fine & McClelland, 2014, p. 12). Developing a notion of "thick desire" requires attending to all the ways in which our seemingly individual experiences of our sexuality do not develop independent of our social context. It also suggests that what it is that young people desire far exceeds the sexual--that their desires include having access to the means and modes necessary to live meaningful, pleasurable, equitable and just lives. "Thick desire" therefore situates "sexual well-being within structural contexts that enable economic, educational, social and psychological health" (Fine & McClelland, 2014, p. 301). Such an understanding of desire moves beyond a vision of teens as simply "at risk," and instead regards them as legitimate "sexual subjects" (Allen, 2006) with a range of complex and intersecting needs. This requires a re-imagining of progressive sexuality education—one that goes beyond simply including discussions of more diverse topics (such as pornography) to consider the affective and ethical import of all our relations, whether sexual or otherwise.

A number of feminist researchers and educators (Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013; Carmody, 2005; Lamb, 2014; Lamb, Lustig & Graling, 2013; McAvoy, 2013; Rasmussen, 2014) have begun to develop what has been termed an "ethical erotics" (Carmody, 2005) approach to education in response to the framework of "thick desire", resituating sexuality within the realm of the social and the relational rather than as a "self-focused, neo-liberal project of self-management" (Lamb, Lustig & Graling, p. 309). This approach acknowledges that "all sexual experiences, no matter how brief, are moments of interdependence and thus require those involved to understand their moral obligations to others, including above all concern for the other's well-being" (McAvoy, 2013, p. 492). It also asks young people to "recognize themselves as sexual beings within the larger social context (McAvoy, 2013, p. 492.) This understanding of sex connects us back to ways in which the subject never operates in isolation of the affectively-charged discourses surrounding them and/or the psychical and social histories and contexts haunting them. Our job as educators must therefore be to help

young people recognize themselves as situated in this network of relations at all times--both during relations that might count as 'sex' and otherwise--and give them the tools to intervene in their (and our) own tendencies to reproduce oppressive relations and to see themselves as responsible for undertaking this work.

A relational approach to sexualities education also requires a re-imagining of pleasure as about more than that which is owed to or sought by the individual, sexual body. Allen and Carmody (2012) suggest that the dominant vision of pleasure as a form of liberation undergirding the most "progressive" forms of sex education actually re-essentializes the gendered body, and pleasure (and sex education that includes pleasure) then becomes about simply helping young people find the right sexual buttons to push. This vision of pleasure as inherently individualistic and embodied makes it easily co-optable by capitalist and medical formations that seek to further regulate, manage and profit from the creation and circulation of new norms about what bodies should feel, want and do (Fine, 2005). Allen and Carmody (2012) instead call for "a more expansive 'discourse of erotics', of which 'desire' and 'pleasure'" both form a part (p. 458), and in which "sexual pleasure need not be conflated with bodily sensation, emotional response or cerebral decisions" nor seen as "a route to, or evidence of, 'empowerment' or 'sexual health'" (p. 459). Instead of focusing on individual experiences of pleasure, Mary Lou Rasmussen (2004) calls for an "ethics of pleasure," which "does not bind pleasure to notions of resistance or liberation" but instead, like Quinlivan (2014b), situates pleasure "as part of ongoing practices of being and becoming" (p. 456). This notion of pleasure as not a possession of an individual subject, but as the product of affective encounters, points to the ways in which "sex refuses to be pinned down" (Gilbert, 2010, p. 233). It also makes space for the production of new and creative ways of relating, expanding our understanding of what pleasure looks like to include relations of joy, love, hope and other affective orientations and ethical relations that open us up, break us down, bind us together

and that may even surprise us (and that may include supposedly "negative" affects and experiences of pain, fear, anxiety and loss). Because we cannot know what pleasure might be, Allen and Carmody (2012) suggest the need to "queer" the seemingly progressive desire to "teach for pleasure" -- a desire which seeks to insert "pleasure in sexuality education as something which young people should strive for in relationships, or learn skills for how to successfully achieve" (p. 464). Instead, they suggest bringing pleasure into the classroom as an open-ended question in order to see what such a discourse can do, what kinds of fissures can be opened that might enable us to think differently about sex, bodies, genders, identities and desires (p. 464).

In constructing sexuality as a space of relationality rather than as a strictly biological or even individual experience, a new approach to education becomes possible—one that views sexuality as central to the project of education, rather than as that which disrupts it. For in open-ended spaces of relationality, carefully and caringly engaging with the others we encounter becomes essential. And in centring care, we can begin to do a different kind of pedagogical work; work that may start with a focus on sexuality, but that can extend far beyond it. For instance, Cameron-Lewis and Allen (2013) argue that "learning skills in regard to negotiating ethical sexual relations supports the development of non-violent relating across all spheres of relationships, not just sexually intimate relationships" (p. 125). Additionally, in moving away from a concern with only teaching the "facts" of sex to situating sexuality in a world of encounters, an ethical approach to sexuality education also acknowledges and can even make use of the affective messiness and "difficult emotional realities" of sexuality (Gilbert, 2013, p. 31). As Trimble (2009) claims, "many of the things we find confusing or unsettling require us to engage in dialogue (with ourselves, our context and others) before they can be resolved [and] part of an ethics of care in sexualities teaching means we consider how to help [young people] explore rather than retreat from these complexities" (p. 54). In

emphasizing complexity, relationality and dialogue, an ethical approach to sexuality education rooted in theories of affect can therefore serve as a model for reimagining the project of education altogether, as being about more than the techno-scientific transmission of knowledge, but instead about also helping students become more ethical in their engagements and entanglements with each other and the world.

Expanding our understanding of what sexuality education encompasses would mean bringing discussions around both the social and individual dimensions of sexuality into the entirety of the curriculum, rather than relegating it outside of or "beside" the curriculum. Indeed, this is the only way for a truly ethical approach to sexuality education to emerge. Considerations of power, pleasure, bodies, identities, emotions, norms, discourses and practices are the stuff of everyday life and yet are rarely acknowledged in the teaching of mainstream subjects, whether social science, biology or math. This "ghettoization" of sexuality education renders it "other" to the regular curriculum, making it difficult for students to form connections between their sexual selves and their worlds. It was out of a desire to make these kinds of connections that I decided to undertake my focus group study, as a means to make visible the ways in which an object like online pornography (for instance) is about more than just "sex" in the strictest biological sense of the term, and is always also about the social, the psychical, the affective, and the intersections between. And when it comes to thinking about a pedagogy that might include porn, or draw on it, or use it as a catalyst towards educating around something else altogether, what truly matters under an ethical erotics approach to pedagogy is that we are centring not the object itself, but rather ethics, relationality and care.

3. Chapter Summaries

Before explaining how my research and analysis reflects the principles of ethical erotics pedagogy, and therefore serves as a small intervention into traditional thinking about what sex education should look like, I will first provide an overview, in Chapter 2, of the ways in which the issue of teen pornography engagement has been taken up in both research and the literature. Unsurprisingly, the majority of research on teens' use of online pornography tends to reproduce the assumptions and limitations of a "risks and dangers" framework, using quantitative studies to make direct causal or correlative links between pornography use and (usually problematic) developmental, cognitive or behavioural outcomes (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Lo & Wei, 2005; Mesch, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Such "effects" research is limited for several reasons. First, such studies tend to offer a homogenous (and generally negative) view of pornography and fail to acknowledge the variety of pornography available, including feminist and queer porn. Second, the effects of pornography use are understood as "negative" because they fail to reproduce normative notions of monogamous, heterosexual, marital sex. Third, "effects" studies assume an overly simplistic notion of teen viewers as passive recipients of pornography messaging and fail to account for the myriad and complex reasons young people seek out and use online pornography. Together these omissions and simplifications allow for the construction of pornography as an inherently "unhappy object" that must be kept away from teens – a call for prohibition that is reflected in political discourse and popular media.

While there are certainly problematic aspects of teen pornography use—some of which are captured by effects research—a mandate to simply prohibit teens from engaging with pornography is unrealistic and results in this experience being relatively ignored in educational contexts. In failing to address the prevalence and import of this object, schools,

curricula and educators are proving themselves irrelevant and out-of-touch—prompting the question of why teens should listen to anything we have to say on the topic of sex in the first place. I conclude my literature review with a consideration of alternative approaches to researching and addressing teen pornography use as proposed by sexuality and media studies scholars seeking to move beyond the limits of an "effects" tradition (Albury, 2013; Bale, 2011; Measor, 2004; Hare et al., 2015; Kubicek et al., 2010). Such approaches, which are generally qualitative or mixed-methods in nature, tend to draw on a "media-practices model" (Escobar-Chaves, 2009), which considers young people as capable of actively seeking out pornography for a variety of complex reasons, often moving beyond the simplistic belief in a one-way relationship between pornography and harm.

While these studies were valuable in helping me think about what it might mean to research young people as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008) rather than as innocent and easily manipulated beings, the majority of these studies use interview and/or questionnaire methods, treating young people's engagement with pornography as an entirely individual matter. However, as my discussion on ethical erotics suggests, young people's lived experiences of pornography are always already embedded in social contexts that structure those experiences--and their understanding of those experiences--in myriad ways. To educate around young people and pornography, we must therefore seek to understand and make visible the social *and* individual meanings attached to objects such as pornography, and to do so requires a different kind of method for studying this issue. My own approach to this topic, which will be described in detail in Chapter 3, was to undertake four focus groups with York University undergraduate students in order to gain insight into what young people think about and do with pornography and how (or whether) they think pornography might be included in sex education curricula in the future. I chose focus groups precisely because of their social nature, in that they make visible the ways in which young people 'talk' about an

object such as porn -- talk that will always necessarily be in reference to the socially-constructed discourses that already circulate about pornography. However, I also chose focus groups because of the ways in which they bring bodies together in space and time, and in that way replicate some of the features of the sex education classroom, pointing to the challenges and possibilities of discussing an object like porn in schools. In addition to the focus groups, I also had participants complete a questionnaire that asked for some demographic data, and that had them reflect on their past and current experiences with and thinking on pornography. Following the focus groups, participants were then sent a follow-up questionnaire that offered them a final opportunity to reflect on the issues raised in the focus groups with further anonymity. These supplementary forms of data enabled me to produce a holistic understanding of each focus group as its own unique, idiosyncratic "assemblage" (Quinlivan, 2014b); an assemblage that could never be replicated, but that, I argue, has much to teach us about what it might mean to educate around difficult objects such as pornography nonetheless.

In thinking about what my study might mean for the development of a pedagogy of pornography that works from within an ethical erotics framework, the analysis I provide of my data and of the focus group encounters as a whole in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 is therefore structured by the following questions: What is the pedagogical value for educators in talking to young people about pornography? What can educators learn about young people's lives, desires, hopes and fears through listening to young people's discussions on pornography? How are those lives, desires, hopes and fears always both individually-experienced and simultaneously indicative of socially constructed discourses and contexts that tend to reproduce relations of inequality? And how can we potentially use these kinds of discussions and encounters to develop a pedagogy that might interrogate or even disrupt those relations of inequality, enabling our students to produce and live in a more just and ethical world?

In Chapter 4, I will draw on thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) in order to make sense of how the participants in my focus groups tended to problematize pornography as an object that is inherently harmful for young people. Thematic narrative analysis looks beyond single words for evidence of themes within the data, focusing instead on individual storytelling and collective story-building amongst participants for themes that carry across all four focus groups. I argue that the ways in which participants problematize pornography often reflects and reinforces common-sense discourses around pornography as an "unhappy object" (Ahmed, 2010) that circulate in political, social and academic discourse, as identified in my literature review. These discourses are generally structured along gendered lines, with young men constructed as those who internalize and reproduce pornography's harms, and young women as the victims of those harmful actions. Without wishing to discount the very real harms that young people relate within these themes, I will also draw on Jefferson and Hollway's (2013) notion of the 'psychosocial subject' to suggest that young people's investments in these themes of harm also potentially point to anxieties they may have in relation to their social and sexual lives more generally - anxieties that extend beyond the object of porn itself to encompass the unequal relations of power in which young people live out their everyday lives. I therefore suggest that through listening to how young people problematize pornography we might gain insight into their "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014) - insights that could help us to think differently about what kinds of topics an ethical erotics approach to sexualities education might include.

In Chapter 5 I also draw on thematic narrative analysis to make sense of the *other* ways that young people talk about pornography as an object that has immense sexual, social and pedagogical value for them; a "happy" object that they engage with in relations of joy and pleasure, and that they draw on to fulfill their own sexualities education. In this way, the themes generated through analyzing participants' responses challenge the common-sense

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discourses that posit porn as inherently and inevitably harmful for young people, instead suggesting that as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008), young people are capable of thoughtful and positive engagements with pornography. Interestingly, as my analysis will show, discussions of porn's potential benefits are again structured along gendered lines, with young women more likely than young men to share their positive porn experiences and stories. I see this discrepancy as indicative of the ways in which young men (despite being constructed as more aggressively sexual) are in fact heavily influenced by discourses that problematize their pornography use, while young women are freer to take up discourses of feminist empowerment and sex positivity that construct their engagement with porn as healthy and fun.

When all the themes (and the utterances that make up these themes) are taken as a whole, what becomes evident is that young people overwhelmingly hold deeply ambivalent relationships to porn. This ambivalence manifests itself in the form of both inconsistent statements made by participants over the course of the focus groups and in the form of singular, deeply conflicted statements made by particular participants unable to express cohesive, unambiguous thoughts on porn and their relationship to it. I therefore end Chapter 5 with a consideration of this ambivalence and how I see it as potentially serving the principles of an ethical erotics framework, in that ambivalence as a state of thinking and feeling different things in different contexts, or indeed of feeling many things all at once, points to the fallacy of the coherent and fully-rational individual; a fallacy that is at the heart of our current approaches to sexual health education and that is likely at the root of their continued failure. And to the extent that pornography emerges as an object that young people feel ambivalent about, I suggest that it can prove an immensely valuable pedagogical object indeed.

In Chapter 6 I move beyond narrative thematic analysis to apply a more focused, case-centred analysis (Riessman, 2008) as a method for making sense of two small-scale interactions that occurred within the focus groups. A case-centred analysis draws on the focus group transcripts of the interactions, but also takes into account the answers provided by participants in their initial and follow-up questionnaires, as well as my own field notes and reflections in order to develop a more complete and holistic understanding of what happened within these two interactions. My reason for choosing these two particular focus group encounters is that they reflected moments of affective intensity that emerged as a result of the defensive utterances made by 'psychosocial subjects' (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013) who felt themselves exposed in moments of intersubjective relationality with others. I argue that these moments of affective intensity produced an ethical response on the part of other participants within the focus groups - an ethical response rooted in practices of attention and care directed and focused on vulnerable others. To the extent that talking about pornography--as that which takes us to some of the most personal and therefore most anxiety-provoking aspects of ourselves--produces the kinds of affective moments that engender ethical responses, I suggest that pornography in fact emerges as an ideal object for ethical erotics educators seeking to help our students practice being and living as their most ethical selves. However, the anxiety-provoking elements of talking about pornography also have the potential to make participants in group encounters--whether in the focus group or in the sexualities classroom--immensely and perhaps even intolerably vulnerable. I therefore end this chapter with a consideration of the work I undertook as a facilitator/educator to "contain" the vulnerability of the participants (Bion, 1962) through taking on some of the difficult affects that emerged. I suggest that these moments point to the tension that exists between openness and safety, joy and anxiety in the group encounter, while also suggesting that it is this very tension that makes it possible for young people in these encounters to think about and practice engaging in their ethical

responsibilities to and with others--whether those in porn videos, those in sexual relations, those in classrooms, or anywhere else.

What I hope to show throughout this dissertation is that not only do we fail our students when we ignore the reality of pornography as an object that they engage with on a regular basis, but that there are in fact many good reasons for why we should include pornography in our pedagogy; reasons that go far beyond mitigating pornography's "harms." Instead, we might think about how porn is *us*; not outside of us, not a devil on the collective shoulder of society, but a reflection of who we are now, of what we dream and what we fear. And tapping into this space of dreams and fears might be just what we need to reimagine and reinvigorate our pedagogy; to move our students towards engaging in more ethical relations with themselves, with others, and with the objects they encounter in this world. But I also want to consider how porn emerges through these focus groups as an object that points to the very limits of thinking and educating around sexuality more generally, in that sexuality fundamentally refuses representation even as it haunts our subjectivities, practices and institutions at every turn. Attending to the things participants do not or cannot say in relation to themselves, to porn, to sexuality, identity and desire, and to the things I do not or cannot say as an educator/facilitator grappling with what it means to talk with young people about these issues, makes space for the possibility that even our best-intentioned educational and research projects will always in some ways come up short. What is important, then, is not the extent to which a "truth" about young people and porn emerges, but rather whether we can find value in the difficulties and joys of encounters around objects such as porn, even as they inevitably confound us. To that end, this project points to new modes for "educating" around thorny and nebulous concepts of all stripes—whether porn and sexuality, or race and racism, or power and politics and inequality and hate—all of those topics that aren't really "topics" so much as they are the air we live and breathe, making them in some ways impossible to

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"teach" at all. Educating around the un-teachable; speaking about the unspeakable; this is what encounters between porn, youth and pedagogy somehow ask us to do, and wrestling with what this might look and feel like is at the heart of this dissertation project.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

What does porn do to young people? Or, what do young people do with porn? This chapter will provide an overview of how the issue of young people's engagement with pornography has been taken up in research and the literature. The majority of studies on this subject tend to be quantitative in nature, utilizing survey methods to draw conclusions about the meaning of young people's engagement with porn. However, while such studies do offer insights into general trends around young people's porn habits and sexual lives, these studies are also often limited in that they draw on a "media effects" research tradition that tends to reflect and reproduce common-sense discourses of pornography as a "bad object" that directly and negatively impacts and influences young people, and young men in particular. The assumption built into these studies—that porn is dangerous for young people--leads to the pedagogical conclusion that intervention in the form of media literacy is the best solution to the "problem" of teens and porn. In contrast to the "effects" tradition, there is however a different, more nuanced approach to studying porn's meanings for young people, rooted in what is known as the "media practices model" (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2009). Research drawing on this model generally uses qualitative and mixed-methods to gain insights into young people's many and varied reasons for seeking out pornography without assuming harmful effects from the outset. This approach imagines young people as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008), who are not *inherently* at risk through their encounters with pornography, and it is in this camp that I am situating my own research, while also deviating from it in several significant respects, particularly through my use of the focus group methodology. To that end, my research study and analysis reflects an intervention into the fields of both porn studies and sexualities education.

Why porn? Why now? With the confluence of new media technologies and new web platforms in the mid-2000s offering unprecedented "accessibility, affordability, and anonymity" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009, p. 161), pornography has truly come into its own. No longer relegated to the forbidden shelves of late-night convenience stores or the dungeon-like caverns of adult-only video arcades, the last fifteen years have seen pornography welcomed into the world's homes at an astounding rate. An estimated one fourth of Western Internet users access online porn (Parikka & Sampson, 2009, p. 3) and the pornography industry annually generates approximately $100 billion worldwide (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 7). Of the 1000 most visited websites on the internet, 10% are sex-oriented (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009, p. 157). With these numbers in mind, it is clear that "there has never been more porn, nor has it been more easily available" (Maddison, 2003, p. 117). In this context it is unsurprising that young people are increasingly engaging with online pornography. Exact figures capturing the extent of teens' use of online pornography are difficult to come by, as research into this area varies by location, age range, gender, participant intention (intentional or unintentional exposure) and time-frame studied. An overview of representative data from a variety of international studies (Allen, 2006; Cameron et al., 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Tsaliki, 2011; Weber, Quiring & Daschmann, 2012) suggests that adolescent exposure to online pornography ranges from 38%-87% (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). Whatever the exact numbers, there is no doubt that teenage consumption of pornography "is an everyday reality" (Weber, Quiring & Daschmann, 2012, p. 422).

Along with findings indicating that young people are increasingly watching pornography, there has unsurprisingly been a corresponding academic interest in drawing conclusions around the meaning of this use. To make sense of this research, it is first helpful to understand how the object of pornography has been constructed both within and outside of

academia, as this construction arguably makes certain kinds of research, and the drawing of certain kinds of conclusions, more possible.

1. Pornography as an Unhappy Object

Social understandings of pornography—and particularly pornography in relation to young people's engagement with it—have predominantly been characterized by a framework of concern. This concern is rooted in a long history of anti-pornography rhetoric that has dominated both popular and academic discussions around the meaning and value of this object in contemporary society. Curiously, this rhetoric emerged through a tenuous affinity between anti-pornography feminism and religious-conservative ideology. While anti-pornography feminists, including most notably, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon (1988), rooted their critique in concerns that pornography reproduced and reinforced misogyny, patriarchy and violence against women, religious-conservative ideologues rooted their critique in concerns that pornography threatened normative family values (Attwood & Smith, 2013). Together, these discourses work to produce an understanding of pornography as an inherently bad or "unhappy object" (Ahmed, 2010) that will inevitably cause misery for those who come into contact with it. Some porn studies scholars have also argued that the perception of pornography's "badness" is rooted not only in the kinds of non-marital, non-pro-creative, violent and misogynist sexuality often represented onscreen, but is a function of what Paasonen (2010) calls "the low cultural status of pornography"—a status resulting from "its preoccupation with sexual acts, genitalia, and bodily fluids that are deemed obscene" (p. 145). Drawing on the work of Walter Kendrick (1987), Bobby Noble (2013) argues that pornography is less a genre than a regime of regulation, "a collection of processes focused on objects that have little in common with each other but that become rendered recognizable by

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virtue a of a classificatory, discursive, and definitional practice" (p. 303). Pornography is the name given to any object that transgresses social boundaries or sexual taboos, or which offends what is commonly considered to be "good taste" (Paasonen, 2011, p. 60). As Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has argued, what is considered to be "good taste" is inextricably bound up with class, as those in positions of power are able to reinforce their own tastes as naturally and inherently "good." And so pornography as the arbiter of "bad taste" has become associated with "brutish, animal-like, sexually voracious" lower-class [people], their desires, and their actions" (Kipnis, 1999, p. 175). Regardless of the content of pornography, then, it is this object's very tendency to focus on "low-status" bodies, drives and desires that renders it problematic.

This perception of pornography as "base" and "low-status" feeds into the popular construction of pornography and its use as corruptive and corrosive to "healthy" and "normal" ways of being sexual. This is particularly true of young people's engagement with porn, which is widely considered to be "a national health problem" that is "in need of urgent diagnosis and cure" (Attwood & Hunter, 2009, p. 549). Indeed, as of April 2018, six American states have declared porn a health crisis (Arkansas, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Utah and most recently, Florida), and in the UK, policies have been set to further limit access to pornography for those under the age of 18. The language of "health" as it pertains to teen pornography use is pervasive. However, as Gayle Rubin (1984) argues, claims regarding "unhealthy" sexuality--though rooted in the seemingly uncontroversial, neutral and objective language of science--are in fact value-laden and serve a regulatory function. Such discourses are often used to reinforce normative and hegemonic ideals, further solidifying a binary between "good" and "bad" sex, and therefore between "good" and "bad" subjects. In contemporary Western society, "good" sex remains narrowly defined as: heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, non-commercial, coupled, relational, in the

same generation, at home and free of pornography, sex toys, fetish or gender role-play (Rubin, 1984, p. 280). To this list I would add penile-vaginal penetrative, able-bodied and intra-racial. Any sex that falls outside of this "charmed circle" is labelled as undesirable and "unhealthy," suggesting that concerns about young people, porn and "health" are actually rooted in concerns that porn will interfere in young people's supposedly "healthy" and "natural" sexual innocence and heterosexuality (Overall, 1990).

2. Media-effects research and pornography

The ubiquity of health-morality discourses around porn and young people have--to a certain extent--framed the ways in which it is possible to research this issue. As Attwood and Smith argue (2013), "arguments that do not begin from a suspicion of pornography are relatively invisible…because the terrain has been so clearly demarcated by a framework of concern" (p. 47). As a result, the majority of studies on this topic have utilized what is known as a "media effects" paradigm, which assumes that 'exposure' to sexual images or texts "influences sexual subjectivities in measurable and predictable ways" (Albury, 2013, p. S32). Susanna Paasonen (2011) argues that effects-based research of any kind historically emerges out of moments of moral panic concerned with the corruption of social norms and values by the media. In effects studies, exposure to the media is almost always treated as inherently negative, and this is considered especially true of exposure to pornography (McKee, 2009, p. 636). These studies tend to rely on quantitative methods—generally surveys tracking age of first use and/or frequency of use as correlated to a variety of behaviours and/or psychological attributes measured on a Likert scale—to demonstrate links between pornography use and a range of outcomes. This includes research into the links between exposure to pornography and favorable attitudes to uncommitted/non-marital sexuality (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Lo

and Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006;), earlier onset of sexual behaviour (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Lim et al., 2017), sexual objectification of women and/or increases in sexually aggressive behaviour (Flood, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Rothman & Adhia, 2015; Ybarra et al., 2011), and increases in "risky" behaviour (such as anal or oral sex, sex with multiple partners or unprotected sex) (Carroll et al., 2008; Lim et al., 2017; Luder et. al., 2011; Mesch, 2009). These studies are valuable in that they offer a preliminary look at young people's porn habits and how such habits might correlate to a range of behaviours. However, in terms of developing an ethical erotics approach to sexualities education that might address and include discussions of porn, such effects studies are limited in what they tell us, and often reproduce normative assumptions around young people and pornography without considering the larger context in which young people engage with porn. I will provide an overview of these limitations before considering alternative approaches to studying this issue that don't necessarily start from an assumption of harm.

One of the central conundrums of studying an object like pornography is that there is no real consensus about what pornography *is*. This lack of clarity was exemplified in Justice Stewart's famous utterance in his 1964 obscenity ruling that pornography is something "we know when we see it" (Wirtz et al., 1997). In the majority of effects research I examined, pornography was similarly described in mostly vague and sweeping terms, as, for instance, "the explicit representation of sexual acts with visible genitalia intended to arouse the viewer sexually" (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). However, the type of pornography that is actually under investigation in the majority of effects studies can be inferred from the types of behaviours and attitudes under scrutiny, which seem to assume that viewers are only watching mainstream, heterosexual pornography, which itself is associated with misogyny and violence against women. This is evident in the number of studies seeking to measure

correlations between, for example, pornography use and "male sexual aggression against women" (Flood & Hamilton, 2003), "sexual harassment perpetration" (Brown & L'Engle, 2009), "beliefs that women are sex objects" (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) and "sexually aggressive behaviour" (Ybarra et al., 2011) including "adolescent dating abuse" (Rothman & Adhia, 2015). And while each of these studies did include results from both men and women in their data-sets, the emphasis in most of these studies on measuring attitudes related to male sexual violence against women tells us much about who is assumed to be the "real" viewers of pornography. This understanding of men as the assumed viewers of pornography is illuminated starkly in one particular study by Luder et al. (2011) who, in their large-scale survey of Swiss Adolescents aged 16-20 around their exposure to pornography and "risky sexual behaviour", divided males into three groups (wanted exposure/unwanted exposure/no exposure) and females into two groups (exposure/no exposure) (p. 1028). This erasure of the possibility that young women might *want* to be exposed to pornography further entrenches the 'common-sense' notion of young men as aggressively and inherently sexual and young women as sexually passive, lacking in agency and desire.

Interestingly, while many effects studies examined how young people's engagement with pornography might affect their beliefs around and behaviours towards women, none of the studies mentioned above explicitly sought to make connections between pornography use and racist, homophobic, ableist or classist behaviours or attitudes, despite the critical work that has been done by feminist, queer, post-colonial and intersectional porn studies scholars to demonstrate the ways in which mainstream pornographic tropes often reproduce these oppressive representations and relations (Diamond, 2005; Hill Collins, 1997; Mayall & Russell, 1993; Miller-Young, 2010; 2013). In over-emphasizing male violence against women at the expense of other forms of oppression and violence, the effects tradition inadvertently participates in reproducing those same oppressive relations by delineating what

"harm" looks like – which bodies and relations are in need of protection from the ills of pornography (middle-class white women, children and heterosexual families), and which bodies are invisible to, or incapable of sustaining harm (racialized, queer and working-class bodies).

The reification of pornography as a singular entity--heterosexual, misogynist--also fails to account for the ways in which "pornography is not one thing" but "a living, breathing genre" (Lee, 2013, p. 214). This is particularly evident in the pornography made available in recent years via the relatively accessible medium of the Internet. The increased possibilities for amateur production and distribution has enabled what Ryberg (2013) terms "counter public spheres of pornography" to emerge (p. 148). These counter public spheres are comprised of queer, feminist, and lesbian pornography in which "dominant notions of sexuality and gender are challenged" (Ryberg, 2013, p. 148). Such spheres work to "disrupt both convention and content" of mainstream pornography by converting "the traumas of being differently gendered into a sexual grammar that desires to see differently" (Noble, 2013, p. 309). In this way, these counter public pornographies expand the genre to provide "a platform to model diverse modes of sexual desire, fantasy, communication, pleasure and orgasm—diversity that is sorely lacking in other forms of media" (Taormino, 2013, p. 262). And, as trans* pornography gains increasing prominence, they can even "provoke questions about the names, meanings and uses of body parts" (Noble, 2013, p. 309). Despite the increased availability of these alternative pornographies, none of the effects studies in my sample explicitly asked participants if they accessed "other" kinds of pornography, whether queer, feminist, or something else entirely.

In addition to the prevalence of studies seeking to make connections between young people's engagement with (presumably mainstream) pornography and various sexist,

misogynist and violent behaviours, there is also a glut of studies that seek to make connections between engagement with porn and various sexually liberal behaviours and outcomes. Although these outcomes are not always called out as explicitly harmful or negative, that they are considered behaviours worth studying—and that they are linked to the "bad" object of pornography--tells us something about where they fall in relation to "the charmed circle" of "normal" and "healthy" sexuality and are in many cases those beliefs and practices which threaten to disrupt "the edifice of heternormativity and the family structure that is its ideal" (Attwood & Smith, 2013, p. 45). For instance, several studies investigated links between pornography use and "sexually permissive attitudes," including acceptance of "premarital" or "casual sex" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Huston et al, 1998; Wright, 2015) and "hooking up" (Brathwaite et al., 2015). Along a similar trajectory, other studies sought links between pornography use and "nonmarital cohabition" (Heaton, 2002; Kline et al., 2004), which has been found "to be associated with less marital stability in future marriages" (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 26). In focusing on permissive attitudes towards casual sex or sex outside of marriage as a potential outcome of engaging with pornography, these studies implicitly position such outcomes as negative and reinforce monogamous, heterosexual and ostensibly procreative marital sex as a normative ideal.

Many effects studies also seek to investigate links between teen pornography use and specific sexual practices not contained within "the charmed circle." For instance, Flood (2009) states, "Internet pornography often depicts sexual practices which are outside common cultural norms or even criminal, including anal intercourse, multiple partners, bondage and sado-masochism, transsexual sex, urination and defecation, bestiality and rape" (Flood, p. 390). The inclusion of legal and consensual practices, such as anal sex, transsexual sex and multiple partners, in a list alongside illegal practices, such as bestiality and rape, serves to construct the former practices as similarly harmful and as a violation of "common cultural

norms" that borders on the criminal. Flood (2009) continues, arguing that "children…may be troubled or disgusted by images or accounts of non-mainstream sexual behaviours and relations in particular, just as adults may be, given the wide range of sexual activity found on the Internet" (p. 389). The "trouble" and "disgust" children might feel when confronted with "non-mainstream sexual behaviours and relations" is constructed as normal and natural given that adults "may be" troubled and disgusted as well. In this formulation, there is no consideration of the ways in which feelings of disgust may be socially constructed (and performed) in relation to hegemonic notions of "normal" sex, and not as a "natural" effect of encounters with representations outside of the norm. Flood (2009) also fails to account for the ways in which feelings of disgust may in fact be part of the sexual appeal of particular representations (Paasonen, 2011), nor does he leave room for the possibility that pleasure might be found in relation to non-normative sexual acts, identifications and relationships. Instead, the paralleling of non-normative sexual acts with illegal sexual acts tells us much about the ways in which supposedly neutral and scientific effects studies are in fact influenced by hegemonic constructions of what "good" sex looks like.

The assumption that engagement with representations of "other" forms of sex causes harm (and that these "other" forms of sex are harmful in and of themselves) is evident in several effects studies. For example, Hald et al., (2013) sought to demonstrate links between pornography use and forms of "adventurous sex," which included "threesomes," "sex with a partner met online" and "sex with a same sex partner" (p. 2989). Same-sex sex also featured as an outcome in a study by Johansson and Hammaren (2007), reinforcing same-sex practices and desire as "other" to "normal" and "non-adventurous" sex. Other "risky" behaviours investigated included "one-night stands" (Brathwaite et al., 2015; Hald et al., 2013; Johansson & Hammaren 2007), "sex with multiple partners" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Hald et al., 2013; Morrison et al., 2004), and "heterosexual anal

sex" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Haagstrom-Nordin et al., 2005; Johansson and Hammaren 2007; Lim et al., 2017; Rogala and Tyden, 2004). Again, each of these behaviours and practices--though perfectly legal and ostensibly performed consensually--are constructed as "risky" (and therefore "unhealthy") due to where they stand in relation to "the charmed circle."

At the heart of this concern with finding links between pornography use and non-normative and "unhealthy" sexual behaviours, practices and beliefs is a moral panic around pornography's contamination of the "pure" space of normal childhood development. Such moral panics "operationalize the figure of the child as innocent, in need of protection, and under the acute threat of moral pollution" (Paasonen, 2011, p. 45)—an understanding of childhood reflected in contemporary debates around the content of sexuality education as well. In both these spaces the child is constructed as both naturally innocent and asexual, and as naturally heterosexual and monogamous (Overall, 1990). Pornography is therefore generally investigated as an object coming from outside to deviate or distort the asexual or naturally heterosexual tendencies and desires of the child, rendering invisible the possibility that the child is always already sexual and that non-hegemonic forms of identifying, relating and desiring may be already present. For example, Flood (2009) examined correlations between pornography use and "greater sexual knowledge (about such topics as pregnancy, menstruation, homosexuality and prostitution" (p. 390), while Hald et al. (2013) examined correlations between pornography and "sexual sensation seeking," which is defined as the "extent to which participants are looking for sexual excitement, physical pleasure and sexual exploration" (p. 2989). Both of these studies implicitly assume young people to be sexually innocent, ignorant and/or conservative prior to their exposure to pornography. Finally, Johansson and Hammaren (2007) examined links between pornography use and masturbation, finding (unsurprisingly) that there is indeed a correlation. However, young

people's masturbatory habits are lumped together in this study with their positive feelings towards prostitution, pornography, and sex without love, thereby demonstrating an orientation towards masturbation—and sexual desire/knowledge/activity of any kind—as unhealthy, unnatural and undesirable in young people.

The assumption that because pornography is "bad" it must be causing harm is so engrained in the effects tradition that even when study results contradict these assumptions, they are retained rather than abandoned, and explanations are provided to fit the lack of coherent data (McKee, 2009). This can be seen, for instance, in the work of Hald et al. (2013), who found that use of Sexually Explicit Media (SEM) was only marginally correlated (0.3%-4%) with a range of behavioural and attitudinal outcomes. Rather than positing that perhaps SEM was not a significant influence, they contend that "the findings of the present study should not be interpreted as an indication that the influence of SEM consumption on sexual behaviors is negligible, nonexistent or unimportant as effects of SEM consumption may be more indirect (i.e. mediated by other factors)" (Hald et al., 2013, p. 2993). In a similar manner, although Carroll et al. (2008) found that "the acceptance of pornography was as strongly correlated with emerging adults' attitudes and behaviors as their actual pornography use was (or more so)" (p. 24), rather than questioning pornography's influence on behaviour, their conclusion was that "scholars need to define pornography in terms of both values and behavior" (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 24). In order to retain their hypothesis that teens' pornography use has negative behavioural effects, the term "pornography" is expanded beyond its literal meaning as a media object to become a system of values and an orientation towards the world.

Not all effects studies construct harm in the heteronormative, vanilla ways described above. As previously discussed, many effects studies of teen pornography use start from the

assumption of pornography as misogynistic and sexist and seek to make correlations between engaging with pornography and increased sexual objectification of and/or aggression towards women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Rothman and Adhia, 2015; Ybarra et al., 2011). From a feminist standpoint, sexual violence and objectification are indeed forms of harm, and to the extent that much mainstream pornography can be seen to "eroticise inequality" with respect to gender (Crabbe & Corlett, 2010), as well as in relation to race, class, sexuality and ability, it should be roundly critiqued. However, all studies which seek to draw direct links between pornography and harm (however that harm is defined) rely on a "behaviourist model of 'effects' whereby audience members are perceived as 'passive consumers', influenced by representations in a literal way" (Bale, 2011, p. 305). This model, rooted in what is known as "cultivation theory", "posits that heavy exposure to mass media creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media-directed version of reality than with reality itself" (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2009, p. 304). The media is seen to act as a "super-peer," influencing what teens consider to be normative behaviour to a degree even greater than their own human peers (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2009, p. 305). This is seen to be especially true in relation to pornography, as many effects studies assume that "of all the various factors that might cause negative attitudes towards women, pornography is, if not the most important, at least a key component" (McKee, 2009, p. 636). For instance, in his study of the harms of pornography on young men's attitudes towards the sexual coercion of women, Flood (2009) contends that "Pornography may have stronger effects among children and young people than other forms of sexual media, and it may have effects on domains of sexuality which are relatively unaffected by other forms of sexual media" (p. 387).

There are several problems with this understanding of teens' use of the media in general, and of pornography in particular. First, according to Attwood and Smith (2013), such a model reflects "an enormous amount of distrust of mediation of any kind" as "the 'healthy'

world is imagined as one in which industry, commerce and representation…appear not to exist" (p. 51). Pornography is constructed as problematic because it "is often seen as disturbing the boundaries between reality and representation" and is criticized "as a poor substitute for 'real sex'" (Harma & Stolpe, 2010, p. 110). This returns us to the notion of pornography as existing "outside" of (and infringing upon) a hegemonic conception of "normal" culture—a culture populated by "real" people, having "real" (charmed) sex. However, as Linda Williams (1989) argues, "we need to beware of arguments that state that pornography is inadequate to the whole truth of sexuality. Here the implication is that a whole truth of sexuality actually exists, outside of language, discourse, and power" (p. 23). Indeed, Williams contends that pornography is not outside of culture, but is in fact integral to our contemporary understanding of sexuality, reflecting the field of discourse (and practice) in circulation around sex. And while many of the representations within pornographic discourse do indeed present women as sexual objects for male pleasure, these types of representations should not necessarily be seen as akin to actual violence against women, nor should they be understood as directly producing that violence. Rather misogynist representations in porn reflect the ways in which "existing power relations between the sexes are inextricably tied both to our fantasies and to the expressions and enactments of sexual pleasures" (Williams, 1989, p. 18). This is evident in the fact that many women—even many feminists--enjoy and get off on misogynist pornography, despite the fact that they would never endorse such behaviour in "real life" (Williams, 1989). The relationship between culture, fantasy and pornography is therefore much more complex than anti-pornography rhetoric and the behaviourist model of effects would have us believe.

A second weakness of the "cultivation theory" of youth engagement with pornography is that it relies on what Shannon and Weaver (1949) call a "transmission model" of communication, which assumes that media messages are directly and unproblematically

transmitted to viewers in a fairly straightforward way. Such a model reflects the view of "pornography as a carrier of 'messages' and 'arousal' as the means or mechanism by which those messages are received" (Smith, 2003, p. 205). In order to combat the assumed harm that is pornography, media education and other forms of pornography intervention aimed at young people which draw on a transmission model of communication tend toward discourses of "inoculation" or "prohibition" (Albury, 2013, p. S35). Such discourses see the solution to the problem of pornography either in teaching young people that it is "bad" and that they should stay away from it for their own good, or in keeping them away from it altogether, through enhanced forms of online regulation, screening and filtering of pornography websites (Paasonen, 2011, p. 45). This desire to prohibit young people from using pornography and/or the belief that young people can somehow be inoculated against its effects reflects an overly simplistic approach to addressing the issue of teen pornography use. First, as the statistics around teen pornography use demonstrate, teens have access to this object to an unprecedented degree and no amount of parental supervision/filtering software is likely to change that. Second, the belief that young people can be "inoculated" against pornography—and that they should be—reflects a perspective of teen viewers as a homogenous group that is sexually innocent, passive and "lacking their own critical faculties or ability to make judgments…consuming both the media and their values without thought" (Bragg, 2005, p. 321). Under the transmission model of communication and through the effects studies drawing on it, all young people are assumed to come to the same objects of pornography in the same way.

3. Media-practices research and pornography

Contemporary media and cultural studies theorists are increasingly rejecting the overly simplistic and deterministic "cultivation theory" of media use, rooted in a "transmission model" of communication and reiterated through "effects-based" studies. As Barker (2014) argues, the use of qualitative methodologies to study engagement with the media yields very different results: "When you give audiences of any kind the chance to speak for themselves, the first thing that you find is that they differ from each other, and usually in ways which were not anticipated by the researchers" (p. 150). "Young people" are not a monolithic category and research that claims to tell us anything definitive about how all young people are affected by pornography does not in fact tell us much of anything at all. An alternative model to understanding teens' engagement with online pornography is known as the "media practices model." This model seeks to "explain media use in a comprehensive and contextual framework and highlights connections between adolescents' identities and media selection, interaction, and application" (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2009, p. 304). McKee (2012) argues that this model "has the advantage of recognising the agency of young people. They do indeed have developing sexual identities, and they seek out information, and make decisions, about them" (p. 505). In terms of online pornography use, this model offers a powerful critique of the methods used and conclusions drawn in much effects-based research. As Albury (2013) notes, a media effects perspective would look at correlations between pornography use and "risky" sexual behaviour and "assume that young people who stumble across such media find their sexual behavior changing because of it" (p. S33). Alternatively, through a media practices approach, "a new possibility opens up: that young people who are sexually active (and/or sexually curious) are also likely to engage with mediated forms of sexuality" (Albury, 2013, p. S33). This approach does not necessarily problematize teen use of online pornography, but rather seeks to construct a more complex understanding of the

various ways in which different teens might engage with and make sense of pornography in their lives.

A range of research drawing on what can be described as a media practices approach has emerged concurrently alongside the effects-based research of the past fifteen years. These studies are overwhelmingly qualitative or mixed-methods in nature, and explicitly draw "upon young people's experiences and accounts [of using online pornography] to develop themes for analysis" (Bale, 2011, p. 305). Through these studies it becomes evident that young people are not always simply exposed to pornography as passive recipients, but rather prove active in their desire to know more about both themselves as sexual beings and the field of sexuality in general. This is particularly true in a context wherein "other sources of sexual information are lacking" (Albury, 2014, p. 173) due to "the missing discourse of desire" (Fine, 1988).

For instance, Hare et al., (2015) conducted interviews with young adults aged 19-30 and found that they

> Elected to use SEIM [Sexually Explicit Internet Movies] because they were viewed as collectively existing as a counter-narrative space that allowed individuals to navigate the continuum of sexual identities, expressions and behaviors without direction or interference, rather than health promotion-based alternatives that would be accompanied by the (perceived) specific purpose of deterring sexuality (p. 278).

For these participants, pornography is sought out specifically because it does not seek to promote 'sexual health' (which is seen as about deterrence) but is promoting 'sexuality' instead. Beyond seeking out pornography to satisfy a general interest in sexuality, Bale (2011) found through her interviews with 16-19 year-olds in the UK that they sought out pornography for a variety of other reasons, including "satisfying curiosity, facilitating masturbation and relieving boredom" (p. 306). Additionally, she found that "young people

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also report accessing such material to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in relation to sexual practices and their sexual experiences" (Bale, 2011, p. 307). This finding that young people access porn as a means of knowledge acquisition and skill development is also evident in several other studies into young people's use of pornography (Allen, 2004; 2006; Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Measor, 2004; Smith, 2012). For instance, in his interviews with 51 young adults around their use of Sexually Explicit Media (SEM), Smith (2012) found that young people referenced "SEM for sexual ideas or as a way to explore new sexual activities without the risk of trying them personally" as well as to learn about "sexual terms and topics they may have heard about elsewhere" (p. 69). And in a large-scale, mixed-methods study of adolescents in the UK around where they get sexual health information, Measor (2004) found pornography to be particularly valuable for young men as a resource because "knowing what to do in a sexual encounter is defined as a male responsibility" (p. 158). This suggests that the finding that more young men than young women access pornography (Bohm et al., 2014; Haagstrom-Nordin et al., 2005; Hald, 2007; Lim et al., 2017; Luder et al, 2011; Measor et al., 2004) might not necessarily be a function of young men's supposedly higher sex drive, but could be related to the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is constructed as always already hyper-sexual, and of young men's desire to live up to that construction.

Indeed, qualitative studies are particularly apt at identifying the nuances in gender differences in engagement with pornography and in the ways in which pornography gets discussed. This is because pornography is one space that provides "resources for the different ways in which girls and boys perform and display gender" (Attwood, 2005, p. 80). For instance, in his study involving interviews and focus groups with adolescents aged 16-18, Scarcelli (2015) found that while young men's pornography consumption and open displays of that consumption were constructed as a 'natural' function of their perceived hyper-

sexuality, young women often performed 'disgust' in relation to pornography. Scarcelli (2015) posits that the object of "pornography" acts a symbolic border between the genders, and that consuming it provides an opportunity for young women to cross that border (p. 246). He suggests that "the internet permits girls to explore the boys' universe without dealing with the stigma that society frequently places on adolescents and women who want to watch pornography" (Scarcelli, 2015, p. 246). At the same time, the young women in his study also discussed the utilitarian value of pornography in that "it can reduce anxiety related to first time intercourse; it can lead to fuller discoveries of boys' desires; and it can help them understand what their peer group defines as 'normal'." (Scarcelli, 2015, p. 243). In web-based focus groups with Dutch adolescents aged 16-19, Doornwaard et al. (2017) similarly found that young women discussed porn's value primarily in relation to learning about sex and satisfying curiosity, while young men primarily reported accessing pornography to facilitate arousal and for masturbation (p. 1043). A similar division was evident in Bohm et al.'s (2015) mixed-methods study of German young adults aged 20-30, in that more men than women engaged with porn strictly for masturbation, while women were more likely to cite using porn for curiosity, entertainment and fun. In focus groups with Swedish teens aged 16-19, Mattebo et al., (2012) found that both young men and women drew on pornography as a source for sexual knowledge and inspiration, but that young women in particular felt more apprehension and anxiety in relation to what they perceived to be the unrealistic bodies portrayed in porn, as well as the expectation that they would have to be as sexually available as the women in porn. Similar gendered differences were also reflected in a study by Lofgren-Martenson and Mansson (2010) involving focus groups and interviews with Swedish youth aged 14-20, with young women expressing more critical attitudes towards the bodies represented in mainstream porn, as well as what they "perceived as a lack of sexual pleasure portrayed by the women acting in pornographic films" (p. 575). Both the young men and

young women in this study also discussed viewing pornography with friends, not necessarily for sexual arousal but as a form of "social intercourse," as "a way of testing one's own and others' reactions to the actors' and actresses' behaviors, appearances, and bodies" (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2010, p. 573). As in Scarcelli's (2015) findings, here pornography is useful for youth of all genders as a means to determine what "normal" sexuality is and what normative reactions to sex look like, particularly amongst young people who may themselves lack sexual experience (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2010).

Beyond making visible the at-times differing ways in which young men and women engage with and discuss pornography, studies drawing on a media-practices model have also revealed pornography as an immensely valuable source of information and education for LGBTQ young people, particularly to the extent that many formal sexual health education spaces do not address same-sex or queer forms of identification, desire or sexual relationships (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Barker, 2014; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Kubicek et al., 2010). For instance, Kubicek et al. (2010) conducted a mixed-methods study on young men who have sex with men (YMSM) and found that for many of the young men "pornography was usually described as one of the only resources available to them…[for] learning about 'how it works' or the mechanics of sex" (p. 251). For the same-sex attracted young African-American men (SSA) in a study by Arrington-Sanders et al., (2015) this learning extended beyond the mechanics of sex to include clarity around "sexual roles and responsibilities during...same-sex sexual experiences" as well as the "gestures and sounds" one should make during sex (p. 603), again suggesting that we need to look beyond our understanding of sex as a purely natural event motivated by internal desires and drives.

For young people who are exploring their sexuality, pornography also emerges as a valuable resource in that it is both expansive and anonymous, offering a wide range of sexual

representations at the push of a button. Kubicek et al. (2010) found that pornography "offered some young men a confirmation of their growing awareness of their sexual attraction" (p. 252). Hillier and Harrison (2007) too found that the Internet provided a safe space for same-sex attracted youth to "take up subject positions as they wish without fear of persecution for their difference" (p. 86). The widespread representation of non-heterosexual, non-cisgendered sexuality in pornography is particularly important for LGBTQ young people, because "to find resources that confirm one's sexual identity helps to warrant such a person's sense of self" (Barker, 2014, p. 154). In this way, then, pornography might be understood not as directly influencing young people's sexual behaviour, desires and identifications, but rather as offering "possible sexual stories that can be tried on for size" (Albury, 2014, p. 650) while also serving as a valuable form of education for queer youth who are underserved in traditional educational spaces.

What is evident from these studies is that when research into teen pornography use does not attempt to definitively prove harm from the outset, a much more nuanced picture of this issue emerges. Young people are as diverse as their reasons for accessing pornography, and overwhelmingly they do not view their use of pornography as harmful. As McKee, Lumby and Albury (2008) found in a large-scale study of 1000 Australian porn consumers, "the majority of those consumers of pornography felt that exposure to pornography had a positive effect on their attitudes towards sexuality, while only a tiny minority felt that it had a negative effect" (p. 637). Many of the studies in my sample in fact conclude with the observation that participants revealed themselves to be "pornography competent" (Bohm et al., 2015, p. 88) having "acquired the necessary skills of how to navigate in the pornographic landscape in a sensible and reflective manner" (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2010, p. 577). When asked, young people do not necessarily see themselves as victims of pornography, nor do they see themselves as sexually innocent. Indeed, McKee (2012) argues

that we need to reconfigure the very notion of "childhood innocence" "as 'freedom from responsibilities' rather than freedom from information" (p. 504). A media practices model is therefore useful for sexuality educators seeking to move beyond a discourse of prohibition and inoculation, as it enables an understanding of young people as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008) capable of exercising agency and engaging critically with the world.

While there is certainly more to teen pornography use than "effects" studies would indicate, I do not wish to argue that pornography is entirely unproblematic, nor that parents and educators should indiscriminately encourage its use in the lives of young people. Despite the ways in which queer and feminist pornography challenge normative discourses around what sex can look like, the majority of pornography available online still falls into the category of "mainstream" porn. In terms of providing information about sex, Allen (2014) states that, "while mainstream pornography is a legitimate source about [sexuality], it is unlikely to be helpful in enabling young people to experience sexual activity in mutually negotiated and pleasurable ways" (p. 174). This is because mainstream pornography creates a "fantasy of complete sexual commensurability where both men and women are ever willing to engage in sexual acts outside of intimate commitments and where what is pleasing to the male partner is also pleasing to the female" (Paasonen, 2011, p. 125). And when an intersectional lens is applied to mainstream pornographic representations, the fantasy produced also includes a world where, for instance, racialized bodies are presented as both hypersexual and subservient (Hill Collins, 1997; Miller-Young, 2008; 2013), and where lesbian sexuality exists only for the titillation and pleasure of heterosexual men. (Diamond, 2005; Morrison & Tallack, 2005)

The application of a media practices model to investigating teens' engagement with online pornography does not necessarily preclude the discovery of concerning correlations

between oppressive attitudes and the search for and use of oppressive pornography. However, rather than assuming that pornography alone causes undesirable attitudes and behaviours, a media practices model enables a consideration for the ways in which pornography exists on a "continuum of other media representations" (Albury, 2014, p. 174), many of which also reproduce the oppressive relations that continue to circulate at all levels of society. It is here, then, that I am situating my own research into young people's engagement with and thinking around pornography, as an object that has sexual, pedagogical and social value for young people and that might *also* be reproducing and re-circulating harmful sexual and social relations.

While there are certainly some qualitative/mixed methods studies that draw upon a similar framework when thinking about young people and porn, the majority of these studies use individual interviews to gain access to young people's thoughts, behaviours and beliefs on this subject (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Bale, 2011; Bohm et al., 2014; Hare et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Scarcelli, 2015). As I will discuss further in my methodology chapter, while interviews are valuable for providing insight into individual experiences and thoughts, to the extent that I am interested in attending to the connections between the individual and the social, I see the focus group method as particularly valuable for gaining access to how young people *talk* collectively about an object such as porn, as well as for highlighting the affective dimensions of that talk. Only a handful of studies have undertaken focus groups with young people around their thinking on and experiences with pornography (Cameron et al., 2005; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Scarcelli, 2015). Of these, three studies involved online focus groups (Doornwaard et al., 2017; Cameron et al., 2005; Scarcelli, 2015) and drew upon text-based chat between participants for their analysis. The other two focus groups (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012) were conducted in-person--however, each of these studies divided

participants by gender, keeping young men and young women separate from each other. These studies were also both conducted in Sweden, a country with a homogenous population racially, ethnically and socio-economically, and indeed, in Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson's (2010) study, the stated goal was to "capture the meaning of pornography among normative middle class young people" (p. 570). All of the focus group studies mentioned above also emphasized thematic analysis in their discussion, rather than any interpersonal or affective elements that might have arisen within the focus groups as a function of talking about such a complex subject, and therefore their results are valuable mainly as a tool for thinking about what kinds of topics could be added to a traditional sexual health education curriculum.

It is for all these reasons that I see my research and analysis as reflecting an intervention into the field of pornography studies as it has been taken up in relation to young people. As far as I can tell, mine is the first study to undertake in-person, mixed-gender focus groups with young people around pornography (with one exception in the Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson study (2010) in which they state that one male focus group had a single female participant). As a study that was undertaken in Toronto -- a major urban centre in which 51% of residents were born outside of Canada (Surman, 2014) -- my study also reflects the first in-person focus groups around porn involving participants of vastly different ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions, as well as the first to include several trans*/genderqueer participants. My focus groups therefore don't seek to reflect only the thoughts of "normative" Canadian youth (whatever that could mean in a city like Toronto), but rather a wide spectrum of young people who may or may not share anything when it comes to their thinking on and experiences with something like pornography.

As my next chapter will discuss in detail, in bringing together these disparate individuals into focus group discussion, my interest was not only in observing what young people talk about when they talk about porn, but *how* they talk, who they become, what they feel and how they relate to one another through this talk. And in that sense my study was and is about more than gaining access to the themes that might prove useful in developing a media literacy pedagogy around porn; it is also about understanding the dynamics, challenges, possibilities and limitations of the pornography focus group itself, in order to perhaps think differently about what our sexual health education pedagogies, and indeed all of our pedagogies, can be.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

As my review of the literature shows, while there has been a surge in research around

young people's engagement with pornography, much of this research starts with the premise

that pornography is inherently harmful for young people. Studies that start from this

perspective tend to draw on a media effects tradition that looks for direct correlative or causal

links between pornography use and negative beliefs or behaviours and do so through the use

of quantitative methods that often paint these issues with broad strokes, leaving little space

for complexity and nuance. Beyond the tendency of these studies to overreach in their

conclusions, such media effects studies are problematic in that they often fail to consider the

larger social context in which porn appears and in which young people consume it, such that

intervening in young people's porn use becomes the solution to problems that actually extend

far beyond the object of porn itself. To address these gaps in the research, particularly within

a Canadian context, I conducted a study that takes a step back from the tendencies of the

media effects tradition in order to gain a deeper understanding of not only what young people

think about and do with porn, but also to try to situate their thinking and use in the larger

social contexts in which they live their lives. It is through making these kinds of connections

between the individual and the social in relation to objects such as porn, and through treating

young people as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008) who have a right to pleasurable

and fulfilling sexual experiences that might include porn, that we can begin to develop a

pedagogy that teaches towards young people's "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014). To

that end, my research study was guided by the following questions: What is the pedagogical

value for educators in talking to young people about pornography? That is, what can

educators learn about young people's lives, desires, hopes and fears through listening to

young people's discussions on pornography? How are those lives, desires, hopes and fears always both individually-experienced and simultaneously indicative of socially constructed discourses and contexts that tend to reproduce relations of inequality? And how can we potentially use these kinds of discussions to develop a pedagogy that might interrogate or even disrupt those relations of inequality, enabling our students to produce and live in a more just and ethical world?

In order to begin to address some of these questions, I decided to conduct focus groups with recent high school graduates. I chose focus groups because this method draws on both feminist and queer research methodologies; two postmodern forms of inquiry that seek to make visible the ways in which relations of power construct notions of truth that serve to reify the status quo, and that therefore reflect the principles underlying ethical erotics approaches to education. Patti Lather (1991) notes that "the overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (p. 71). Feminist research has therefore historically sought to "address the imbalance of power between the researcher, who has the capability to decide the design and direction of a project, and the researched, who often have little control over the conclusions and theories that are drawn from their accounts" (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006, p. 455). Feminist research methodologies provide space for the researched to produce knowledge about their lives and experiences in a way that has the potential to disrupt the hegemonic discourses in circulation about them.

Queer methodologies too seek to disrupt normative ways of thinking about and researching subjects, in that queer theory problematizes the very notion of stable selves that might have something like a 'truth' to share through research at all. Rather, queer methodologies point to the ways in which subjectivities are produced in and through

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moments of encounter, and are therefore always "fluid, blurred and contingent" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 11). As a method rooted in encounters between these 'nonunitary subjectivities" (Bloom, 1998) that also makes space for the increased visibility of youth voices, focus groups therefore offer a unique opportunity to gain valuable data from a variety of angles that better captures young people's experiences with and thinking on pornography, as well as the affective and interpersonal complexities of talking and educating around the object of porn at all.

Beyond larger methodological considerations, there are several unique features of focus groups as a method that make them ideal for addressing my research questions. Because focus groups involve small numbers of participants (typically between 6-10), they ostensibly enable participants to interact with one another rather than (always) with the researcher. In this way, focus groups allow individual participants to "create not a series of controlled and contrived bilateral exchanges with the moderator but rich and meaningful multilateral conversations between themselves" (Johnson, 1996, p. 523). Sue Wilkinson (1998) argues that in practice, this format has the tendency "to shift the balance of power during data collection, such that research participants have more control over the interaction than does the researcher" (p. 114). This "taking control" of the discussion means that participants can set the agenda in terms of what is important to them, guiding the researcher as to what appropriate questions might be (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 115). When it comes to talking about young people and pornography, this feature provides an opportunity for participants to shape the conversation around their use of and thinking on pornography in ways that reflect their experiences, rather than through pre-conceived notions I might have had about what their experiences are or should be.

By enabling a space for informal conversation between participants to take place (albeit around pre-determined topics selected by a researcher), focus groups are also unique in that they can "mimic…parts of the normal everyday interaction that permeate the sub-culture in settings beyond the interview" (Brady et. al., 2005, p. 2592), providing "access to the language and vocabulary which participants commonly use" (Frith, 2000, p. 279). By reproducing everyday forms of interaction, the focus group also provides insight into "the manner in which knowledge is produced, or reified, into social truth" (Goss & Leinbach, 1996, p. 118), and makes visible the kinds of discourses in circulation about pornography in our society. However, while focus groups do provide space for bottom-up knowledge production around pornography use to take place, it is important to note that the "talk" produced in these groups does not reflect a form of "truth" or even consensus around this issue. In her deconstructive work on the discourses of "empowerment" in anti-oppressive pedagogies, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) proves critical of the tendency to view group settings as inherently democratic spaces. As Ellsworth (1989) explains, the belief that something like true "dialogue" can emerge in a group setting is based on "assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, all members respect other members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak, and all ideas are tolerated and subjected to rational critical assessment" (p. 314). For Ellsworth (1989), "this formula fails to confront dynamics of subordination present among participants and within participants in the form of multiple and contradictory subject positions" (p. 315). While this aspect of the focus group is often considered one of its limitations—in that interaction between participants is seen as contaminating the "true" opinions of participants--I believe that this is in fact one of its strengths. In attending to *how* pornography is discussed in a group context—to who speaks and who is silent, who dominates and who relents--the focus group method can provide insight into the ways in which social power circulates within and between (always already) differently situated

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subjects and can highlight the need for dedicated educators to intervene in this inherently unequal space in meaningful ways.

A further strength of the focus group is that in producing talk between participants (and the researcher), this method is likely to enable moments of "free association" to take place; moments which Jefferson and Hollway (2013) contend are necessary for addressing the fact that all individuals are "psychosocial" and "defended" subjects. These concepts refer to the ways in which the stories we tell and the discourses we invest in through our interactions with others are those that unconsciously "offer positions which provide protections against anxiety and…supports to identity" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p. 23). These anxieties are rooted in our own personal histories, and "are often accessible only through our feelings and not through our conscious awareness" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p. 45). As psychosocial subjects, however, our histories are themselves shaped and influenced by social forces that existed before and extend beyond us, giving shape and meaning to the ways we experience and talk about ourselves in the world. Providing space for individuals to tell stories and riff on ideas—particular strengths of the focus group method—instead of asking them to merely relate the facts of their experiences, therefore makes possible the production of something closer to what Jefferson and Hollway (2013) call "the whole" or the *Gestalt* of a person's beliefs and experiences (p. 69) that may lay below the surface of what it is they actually say. This "whole" is not the same as the "truth" of a person, but rather is one that—in a very queer way— recognizes the impossibility of a fully rational, coherent subject and embraces each person's and each encounter's "inconsistencies, contradictions and puzzles" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p.70).

While each of the strengths discussed above emphasize the "talk" produced within the focus group, in bringing actual bodies together around the topic of pornography, this method

also has the advantage of making visible the ways in which meaning is produced through affective encounters with both material and non-material objects. Kathleen Quinlivan (2014b) has written extensively on the affective aspects of both the sexuality education classroom and the sexuality focus group, arguing that "affect is inextricably, relationally, affectively and materially entangled with other bodies, objects, and feelings" (p. 1). Within the focus groups I conducted, these "bodies, objects, and feelings" included not just the pornographic objects encountered off-site, but also the bodies of the other participants, myself as the researcher, the space of the room, and the discursive object of pornography itself. Quinlivan (2014b) calls this total space of affective intensity an "assemblage" which she sees as producing "beings and becomings," (p. 1). These "beings and becomings" are ephemeral moments of relationality which have the potential to produce new and surprising connections between people, affects and ideas; crucial connections which are generally missing in much of the current research and pedagogy around teens and porn.

A further strength of this method is that the affective assemblage of the focus group reflects many of the same dynamics of the sex education classroom, and therefore has the potential to highlight some of the challenges and possibilities for the development of a sex education pedagogy that moves away from a concern with simply providing students with "correct information" about sex. Talking with young people (or anyone!) about sex is always emotionally-charged and unpredictable—two factors which make this topic particularly challenging to the aims of mastery and control underlying modern educational practices. But rather than trying to shut this risk down by defaulting to the common discourses of health, risk and danger, embracing the risk and reality of affect in the sex education classroom can enable educators to approach difficult topics in a way that acknowledges their complexity and that takes seriously the people, bodies and relations touched by them. In focusing on this complexity, a broader goal of my focus groups was to provide insight into what it might

mean to create and facilitate a different kind of sex education classroom or pedagogical practice that does something more than just tell teens "no."

1. Research Procedure

The targeted demographic for this study was recent high-school graduates aged 18-24. The reason for choosing this particular age group was two-fold. First of all, pornography is only legally accessible to those over the age of 18, and so it is more ethically complex to discuss pornography use with those not technically of age to be accessing it. Secondly, this age group is comprised of what Carroll et al. (2008) have termed "emerging adults." "Emerging adulthood" describes "a period that is characterized by exploration in the areas of sexuality, romantic relationships, identity, and values" (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 7) and comprises the murky experiences of moving out of adolescence (which new studies on brain development now suggest extends into our early-20s – see Sawyer et al., 2018). Young people in this age group are frequently leaving behind the somewhat sheltered institutions of home and school for increasing involvement in the public sphere and can therefore offer unique insight into what pornography might mean to them during this time of transition and flux. They are however still young enough to remember their experiences within those institutions—school in particular—and to reflect on their experiences with some degree of clarity and detail.

To access these "emerging adults," I recruited participants from York University's undergraduate student population. York University is a large campus on the outskirts of Toronto, a major urban centre in Canada. It has a very diverse student body, reflecting a range of backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities and identifications and I hoped that recruiting

from this student body would provide me with a sample of participants with a wide array of pornography and sexual health education experiences. To recruit participants, I initially placed recruitment posters on notice boards across York University's campus, including in the student centre, faculty buildings and various dormitories. I also sent a recruitment notice to a number of on-campus groups to be shared with their membership, including the Centre for Women and Trans People and TBLGAY (Trans Bisexual Lesbian Gay Asexual at York), in order to hopefully recruit participants reflecting a range of sexual and gender identifications. The recruitment notice indicated that participants must have had some experience with online pornography, whether intentional or unintentional, and also indicated the reimbursement for participation, which included a pizza lunch and a movie gift certificate. I also offered participants three different dates/options for the focus group session they could attend, indicating that one session would be for female-identified participants only, one for male-identified participants only, and one for all gender identifications. In this way, participants could choose where they might feel most comfortable. I also divided the focus groups in this way in order to see whether and how the focus group assemblage and its affective intensities—as well as the talk produced—would differ according to differing gender configurations. This is important as debates continue to circulate about whether sex education ought to be delivered in single or mixed-gender classrooms.

This initial recruitment strategy was only marginally successful, and so to recruit more participants, I set up a table in a popular corridor in York University with a large sign reading "Let's Get it On! Join the Porn and Sex Ed Research Study" and offered chocolate candies to those who stopped by. This strategy generated quite a bit of interest, although it should be noted that far more young women approached the table than did young men - a likely reflection of the gendered discourses in circulation around porn and of the ways that frank discussions around sexuality seem to threaten young men more than they do young

women. (This finding will be discussed in more detail throughout my analysis chapters.) Ultimately, this recruitment process utilized both convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques, in that those who initially responded with interest to the recruitment posters, posts and table were asked to invite friends or colleagues who might also be interested. Altogether four focus groups were conducted - the first three focus groups took place in March, 2016 and the last focus group in October, 2016.

The process of recruiting participants for this study was, frankly, anxiety-producing. There is a glut of research studies seeking willing undergraduates at all times on campus, and I felt like I was constantly competing to be seen through the virtual and visual noise of both social media and the overflowing notice-boards around campus. And while I had many people contact me expressing interest, it was often very difficult to pin them down as a definite "yes" to participate. It is for these reasons that I accepted participants who seemed interested in the study but who, for example, fell outside my preferred age range (although in one focus group this turned out to be an egregious exceptionality). On the first day, for the female-identified session, I was fortunate to have the following eight young women participate. All demographic information is based on how participants self-described in their questionnaire. All names are pseudonyms and were generated either by participants themselves, or by myself during the transcription process:

1.1 - Focus Group 1

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality
Bella	22	African	Female	Heterosexual
Emily	19	African-Canadian	Female	Straight
Zoey	19	Asian	Female	Straight
Daria	19	Caucasian	Female	Hetero-Romantic
Karmah	19	Middle-Eastern	Female	Gay

Sara	25	Mongolian/Persian with 10% European	Woman	Straight but not narrow
Chantel	23	Caribbean-Canadian	Female	Bisexual
Anita	20	Hispanic	Female	Straight

In this group, Sara is the only participant who fell outside of the 18-24 age range I was seeking to capture, though only by a year. However, it should be noted that Sara also identified herself to me prior to the study as someone who had never seen porn, and this caused me some hesitation, although I ultimately accepted her as she seemed keen to participate (the impact of Sara's presence will be explained in more depth in Chapter 6). Overall, the participants in this session reflected a diverse range of identifications that made for some excellent discussion.

In the second focus group session, which was the all-male session, I ended up with far fewer participants, as far fewer young men indicated interest in participating in the study--or more accurately, while young men often seemed interested in the theme of my study as they passed by my recruitment table, they were far less likely to approach me than were young women. I would speculate (and I elaborate on this in much more detail in my analysis in Chapter 6) that young men, particularly when they are in a group of other young men, do not necessarily feel comfortable exposing their interest in sexuality in a way that goes beyond hegemonic performances of heterosexual masculinity; perhaps seeming interested in talking about porn with other people would mark them as "queer" in some way. Or perhaps talking with *me* about porn in a public hallway--an unknown woman in her 30s-- also felt too risky, too revealing or too intimate, particularly as institutionalized narratives around young men's sexuality construct them as inherently predatory, aggressive and potentially creepy. This is all to say that when I conducted the all-male focus group, only four participants ended up being involved:

1.2 - Focus Group 2

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality
Abdi	26	Black-African	Male	Straight
Tim	22	Guyanese	Male	Bi-curious
Omar	27	Muslim	Male	Heterosexual
Jay	20	Chinese-Bangladeshi	Male	Straight

Two out of the four participants were older than my desired age range of 18-24 years old, but due to the constraints of recruiting enough participants, I accepted their participation in the focus group and we had some excellent discussion as well.

For the third focus group, I sought to recruit a mixed-gender group of individuals. However, without realizing it, I had not put my preferred age range on one set of posters and so while I was happy to have eight participants arrive, a few of them ended up being far outside my preferred age range:

1.3 - Focus Group 3

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality
Adina	19	African (Ethiopian)	Female	Straight
Tay	21	Irish-Egyptian	Transgender/non-binary	Queer
Adriana	23	Italian-Canadian	Female	Polyamorous and straight w/bisexual tendencies
Marco	21	Italian-Canadian	Male	Heterosexual
Elena	25	Hispanic	Female	Mostly Heterosexual
Dave	35	White	Male	Heterosexual
Andrew	57	White	Male	Straight
Lisa	40	White	Female	Heteroflexible

I had not expected any of my participants to come from outside of the undergraduate student population, particularly as I had placed most of my recruiting posters in student residences

and at the student centre, and so when these older individuals arrived I was thrown off. Because I had conversed with and confirmed their attendance over email and they had made the trip to campus explicitly for the focus group, I felt unsure, ethically, of what I should do - and so I let them stay. In retrospect I should have given them their compensation and asked them to leave, but at the time I felt rather stuck. The presence of these three individuals definitely changed the tone of the focus group such that I felt compelled to rectify this error through conducting more focus groups. Following these initial three sessions I decided to run a focus group aimed exclusively at LGTBQI students, because although in each session there was at least one participant who identified as something other than straight/heterosexual and/or cis-gender, I felt that their voices were at times obscured, reflecting Ellsworth's (1989) contention that supposedly open and democratic forms of dialogue are never actually open and democratic, as differently situated subjects will feel empowered to speak differently. I went about specifically recruiting for this population, again contacting TBLGAY and the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University, both in-person and through online platforms like Facebook. And although I received some interest in the study from individuals who seemed committed to joining, on the day of the focus group, nobody showed up. This might have been because this focus group was held after the end of the regular school year, in early May, when many students have already begun summer jobs and other activities, but it also points to some of the issues with recruiting participants from a vulnerable population who may feel that exposing themselves in a focus group with strangers, particularly one that specifically addresses issues of sexuality, identity and desire may be too risky for them, and not worth a slice of pizza and a free movie.

Despite this failure I was determined to make up for the mistakes of Focus Group Three, which at the time I saw as having produced invalid data, particularly as I had planned to study the focus group experience as a complex whole, an "assemblage" of interconnected

parts, and the presence of the older participants (particularly Andrew, a 57 year-old man) seemed to make this assemblage into something that could never resemble the sex education classroom. (In my thematic analysis I do however draw on some excerpts from this focus group). When the new school year began in September 2016, I again went about the process of recruiting participants online and through postering, and I was able to recruit seven participants for my fourth and final mixed-gender focus group:

1.4 - Focus Group 4

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality
Alisha	22	South Indian/Goan	Female	Bisexual
Ken	22	Asian	Male	Bisexual w/preference for males
Harry	18	White	Transguy	Demisexual/gay
Nina	26	Italian-European	Female	Heterosexual
Kim	21	Black	Female	Heterosexual
Zhang	19	Chinese	Female	Heterosexual
Remy	21	Caucasian	Trans/non-binary	Pansexual

Although for this session I had not explicitly tried to recruit for LGBTQ individuals, more than half of the participants who arrived for this session ended up identifying as part of this population, providing some insight into the lives and experiences of these young people not necessarily captured in the three previous focus groups.

The first three focus group sessions were held in the Qualitative Research and Resource Centre - a purpose-built research space offering a room equipped with microphone and video technology, and a large circular table designed for focus group research. The fourth focus group was held in a basement room in Winters College that was much smaller and filming was done by myself on a video-camera borrowed from the Faculty of Education. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. The first fifteen minutes of each focus

group was set aside for participants to complete their informed consent form, eat some pizza and complete their questionnaire, which was designed to gather demographic data and to also gain some insight into how young people used, accessed and thought about pornography as both teenagers and now as emerging adults (Appendix A). Following the completion of their questionnaire I then explained the larger purpose of the research project, discussed how the data collected through the focus groups would be stored and used, and engaged in a brief discussion of the ground-rules for participating in the focus groups, which included the expectation that participants would respect others, use inclusive language, and maintain confidentiality. I used Powerpoint slides displayed on a large screen to present the ground-rules, and subsequently used Powerpoint throughout each focus group to present the questions and to link to certain articles that were used to spur discussion (see Appendix D for slides).

Following this introductory component, I then initiated the focus group discussion beginning with a brief ice-breaker activity that involved participants brainstorming around the object of porn in order to consider the different ways it could be understood and talked about (see Appendix B for complete focus group guide). Once participants became more comfortable talking about pornography, I began to ask more focused, semi-structured questions that used a combination of both direct and indirect styles, so that participants could answer in hypotheticals without necessarily having to reveal intimate or potentially "risky" details about themselves. I also tried to ask open-ended questions in order to produce the moments of free association and storytelling that Jefferson and Hollway (2013) identify as necessary for accessing the larger psychosocial anxieties of the defended subject.

The first set of questions focused mainly on what participants saw as the potential harms and benefits of pornography for young people, while also asking them to reflect on the

larger social discourses around porn that continue to circulate in the media and elsewhere. To spur conversation, I showed participants several examples of recent media stories around teens and porn: from the *Huffington Post*, a blog post titled "Porn: Many Teens Watch It, and Two Reasons that's a Problem" (Deem, 2014); from *CNN* a video titled "Help! My Teen's Watching Online Porn" (Wallace, 2016); and from *The Toronto Star,* an article titled "Is Pornography Changing How Teens View Sex?" (Noor, 2013). I did not ask them to read the text of each article, as that would have taken too much time, but instead had them look at the headline, the subhead and the photo to get them to begin to think about how these three popular media sources treat issues around teens and porn. From here the conversation in all four focus groups flowed rather naturally around the object of porn (see analysis in Chapters 4 and 5), with participants reflecting on issues ranging from the representations of bodies prevalent in pornography to issues of exploitation in the porn industry to the ways porn has been useful in educating them about sex and sexuality. While I made sure to ask all questions in the focus group protocol in sequence, I also allowed a lot of space for participants to return to or refer back to earlier issues or themes that seemed of importance to them. This made for rich and dynamic conversation that was able to build on itself throughout the focus group.

After approximately 45 minutes of conversation on the first set of questions, I then moved to the second set of questions which asked participants to consider issues around sex education and to reflect on their own sex education experiences, while also asking them to consider what a meaningful sex education that addresses pornography might look like. Again, to spur conversation, I began this portion of the focus group by showing participants a few examples of "pornography education" websites aimed at youth that represent two different approaches to talking with young people about porn. The first web page was by Brown University's "Health Promotion" unit and reflects a standard, health-based approach that focuses mainly on the potentially addictive or harmful qualities of porn (B Well Health

Promotion: Sex 101, 2015). The second web page showed a post on Scarleteen, a not-for-profit site that describes itself as "sex ed for the real world" and was titled "Looking, Lusting and Learning: A Straightforward Look at Pornography" (Blank, 2000). Again, this portion of the focus group made for rich conversation, as participants reflected on their own sex education experiences (or lack thereof) and imagined what their ideal sex education might look like (see Chapter 5 for more discussion of participants' sex education stories). This portion of the focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes as well, and I then wrapped each focus group with a 15-minute debriefing session in which participants were asked to reflect on their focus group experience, to think about what they liked and didn't like about it, what they learned about themselves and others from this experience, and how it felt to participate. Participants were then given their movie gift certificates and the focus groups ended. Immediately following the focus groups, I wrote detailed field notes describing what happened within each focus group - who was present, what kinds of interactions stood out, and how I felt before, during and after the focus group. These field notes were valuable for me as I developed my analysis.

The day after each focus group was completed, I sent a follow-up questionnaire to each participant (Appendix C). This questionnaire provided a list of the questions asked during the focus groups and prompted participants to consider whether they had anything to add in regards to any of the topics/questions covered. The questionnaire also again asked participants to reflect on their focus group experience, this time with further anonymity. The purpose of this questionnaire was to provide an opportunity for participants who may not have felt comfortable speaking up in the group setting to share their thoughts and insights. But I also wanted to find out how participants felt *after* the focus group session, to gain insight into whether they felt in some way changed through their participation in this study. Unfortunately, the follow-up questionnaire was not completed by the majority of participants.

In Focus Group 1, only 3/8 participants completed the questionnaire. Focus Group 2 had the highest return rate, with 3/4 participants completing it. Focus Group 3 had 3/8 participants complete the questionnaire, while Focus Group 4 had 2/7 participants. There are a number of likely reasons for why participants might not have completed their questionnaire. They might have felt that it was an intrusion on their time beyond the initial two-hour focus group session. They also might have felt that since they had received their compensation, they were no longer interested in participating in the study. They might have not had anything new to add in terms of answering the focus group questions or reflecting on their focus group experience. They might have hated the focus group experience and not wanted to put that in writing or revisit the experience, or they might have just felt too far removed from the experience to be able to answer the questions. In the future I would perhaps put aside some extra time during the in-person focus group sessions and have participants complete the questionnaire on the spot.

2. Data Analysis

Each of the four focus group sessions were audio- and video-recorded and were transcribed by myself using Express Scribe software. In my transcription I drew on a combination of what Oliver et al., (2005) call both "naturalized" and "denaturalized" transcribing techniques. In naturalized transcription, "utterances are described in as much detail as possible" (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1275) including pauses, laughter, stutters, overlapping talk, the use of slang and colloquialisms and other non-verbal and informal elements of social interaction that point to the affective and emotional dimensions of the focus groups. However, I also utilized some elements of "denaturalization," in which the emphasis is on clearly depicting the informational content of the data (Oliver et al., 2005, p.

1277) through inserting punctuation and using other formal written codes that help make the data clearer and easier to follow for the reader. This is to say that transcription is always an interpretive rather than an objective process, and in the presentation of the excerpts from my transcripts found in this dissertation, the degree to which I offer a 'naturalized' or 'denaturalized' version of the transcripts depends on the kinds of analysis I am undertaking. In Chapters 4 and 5 I use more of a denaturalized transcription method, as the emphasis in those chapters is on the content of the excerpts, while in Chapter 6 I use a more naturalized transcription method to emphasize the affective nuances of the talk itself.

Following the transcription of my focus group sessions, I initially engaged in a thematic narrative analysis of my transcripts. This process, described by Braun and Clarke (2006), typically takes researchers through six stages of analysis that include: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (p. 87). However, thematic narrative analysis extends basic thematic analysis in that it looks at sequences/stories for themes, rather than thematically coding for keywords or phrases (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). I found this strategy particularly valuable for analyzing my focus group transcripts, as sometimes participants built a story collectively through dialogue, and the theme of that story was not necessarily evident in the form of a single word or phrase. Thematic narrative analysis was also valuable for understanding the kinds of discourses in circulation around porn, as the themes/narratives that were returned to again and again by different participants point to the ways porn is and can be talked about in our society. I initially coded responses under six themes that roughly corresponded to the themes of the focus groups questions: 1) Concerns around porn; 2) Benefits of porn; 3) Personal experiences with porn; 4) Personal stories of sex education; 5) Recommendations for sex education; and, 6) Risks of developing a pedagogy that includes pornography. However, as I revisited my initial themes, I began to see

how they both broke down into smaller themes and how some themes actually worked

together to tell a larger story about porn and sex education. After a second round of coding I

developed the following three themes to describe young people's concerns around

pornography (discussed in-depth in Chapter 4): 1) Pornography is unrealistic; 2) Pornography

leads to extreme or risky desires/behaviours; and, 3) Pornography is exploitative. In terms of

the benefits of porn (discussed in-depth in Chapter 5), I broke this theme down into the

following four themes: 1) Porn as education; 2) Porn as exploration; 3) Porn as a release; and,

4) Porn as facilitator of relations. Each of the themes of harm and benefit discussed above

also included participants' personal experiences with porn, as well as some discussion of their

own (often inadequate) experiences with formal sex education.

However, while thematic narrative analysis was used to develop larger themes that

allowed me to begin to draw a picture about how porn is discussed and experienced by young

people in our society, I also took individual narratives/stories as a point of departure for

undertaking what Riessman (2008) terms a "dialogic" or "performative" form of narrative

analysis, which attends to how meaning is produced interactively and "performed as

narrative" in conversation with others, including the researcher-moderator (p. 10). According

to Riessman (2008), rather than focusing on "what" was said, "the dialogic/performative

approach asks 'who' an utterance may be directed to, 'when,' and 'why,' that is, for what

purposes?" (p. 105). The emphasis in this method therefore moves from the "told" to the

"telling," (Riessman, 2008, p. 77), making narrative analysis ideal for capturing the

ephemeral, contextual and affective dimensions of focus group discussions around

pornography. This telling, of course, does not occur outside of larger social contexts, as each

utterance "carries the traces of other utterances, past and present" (Riessman, 2008, p. 107).

Narrative analysis therefore also considers "how larger social structures insinuate their way

into individual consciousness and identity, and how these socially constructed 'selves' are then performed for (and with) an audience" (Riessman, 2008, p. 116).

Through attending to the stories participants tell in particular contexts, dialogic narrative analysis makes space for "both conscious and unconscious elements" (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013, p. 221) of the psychosocial subject. Because we are not fully known to ourselves, our narrative accounts will always be "contradictory, partial and untold" (Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013, p. 217). However, Brushwood Rose and Granger (2013) contend that "these contradictions, refusals and silences are central to understanding the place of narrative in negotiating our relations with others and the world" (p. 217). This is to say that we are not necessarily aware of the stories we are telling when we tell our stories, as our hesitancies, slip-ups, jokes, omissions and asides often point to something other than what we are saying. However, this can be understood as the power of narrative, in that the act of storytelling might serve as "a point of entry to a transitional space where we might begin to imagine asking our question" (Brushwood Rose & Granger, p. 230). In examining particular utterances made by participants I began to see how, as psychosocial subjects who experience their individual lives within particular social contexts, participants' stories about porn and themselves in relation to porn often point to unconscious or unspoken anxieties or hopes they have about the world of sexual and social relating more generally, and about the power they do and do not have, and the social conditions they require, to live pleasurable, meaningful, healthy and fulfilling lives. These anxieties and hopes are deeply connected not only to participants' own personal histories, but to their social positioning as well, and so the themes I explored in my analysis are not just the themes of what individual participants say, but are themes that point to how they live, what is possible for them to be and imagine, and what prohibits or enables them to flourish in this world.

In reading participants' utterances as indicative of their desires or anxieties, there is certainly the risk of reifying individuals as static, fixed in time, complete, and of revisiting upon them the violence of modernist understandings of the subject that claim to *know* definitively who and what an individual is. This is particularly problematic to the extent that participants were asked to reflect back on experiences from their past, to assign meaning to sexual, sensuous and pedagogical moments that themselves were lived through complex conscious and unconscious processes. In thinking about this tension between taking my research participants seriously, but of not being able to *know* or *believe* them in any definitive sense, I find it helpful to return to Avery Gordon's (2008) concept of "haunting." If, as Gordon contends, the past is always already alive in the present, and if the past is itself haunted by participants' own psychosocial hauntings, then participants' discussions of their pornography and sex education experiences ought not to be read as reflecting the 'truth' of what happened to them, but rather can be understood as what Gordon (2008) calls "fictions of the real" (p. 11). The stories told in the focus groups about sexual lives, about schooling, about pornography, about identity, are hauntings; they are moments that meant something, moments that disrupted or overturned something, moments that lingered and that therefore reach their tentacles into the now, and it is the haunting, not necessarily the details themselves, that matter. Although I am reading participants' stories for themes, these are not necessarily themes of that which 'happened', but of that which haunts, of that which remains, of that which, as Gordon (2008) argues, demands some form of reckoning with (p. 202). And to the extent that these hauntings are social as much as they are individual, I am also reading these themes and the utterances that generated them through my own understandings of histories of racialized, gendered, sexualized and classed violence and oppression—histories that shape and enable what participants can and cannot live, feel, know and speak in the now.

This concept of haunting extends into the analytic work I undertake in Chapter 6, which moves beyond the thematic narrative analysis and dialogic/performative narrative analysis of Chapters 4 and 5 to reckon with two unsettling moments that stood out from my focus group experiences. These moments were brief but significant in that they reflected moments of relational breakdown and affective intensity between participants—moments that, in their complexity, offer powerful pedagogical possibilities for thinking about what it means to educate around difficult subjects at all. To make sense of these moments, I started with a narrative analysis of the transcripts that captured these moments but expanded my analysis to include reflections from my field notes as well as participants' responses in both their initial and follow-up questionnaires to produce what Riessman (2008) calls a 'case-centred analysis.' Case-centred analysis takes into consideration the unique identities of participants, as well as the exigencies of the focus group as a specific phenomenon in space-time so that "particularities and context come to the fore" (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). I wanted to produce a story for each of these two moments that reflected not only something of "what happened" (as I experienced it), but that considered why it might have happened that way (in relation to what participants revealed about themselves in their questionnaires), that accounted for what I felt in those moments and afterwards, and that reflected what participants suggested they thought and felt as well. This analytic method is deliberately broad, offering a more holistic understanding of the focus group as a unique assemblage that can never be replicated, but that, in its particular idiosyncrasy, has much to teach us about relationality and education nonetheless. This analysis will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 6.

3. Reflections and Limitations

I found conducting the focus groups to be an incredibly rewarding (albeit anxiety-provoking!) experience that offered innumerable insights into the challenges and rewards of undertaking this kind of qualitative research on a topic that is often considered taboo and out-of-bounds. Upon reflection, there are/were however several limitations to my study that I would like to address. The first issue has been discussed already, which is the problem of recruiting enough LGBTQ students to participate in a focus group on a topic as personal and potentially revealing as pornography. For those who did partake, I found that while cis-presenting participants were generally as active as everyone else, those participants who identified as trans/genderqueer/non-binary (Tay, Remy and Harry) were generally very quiet, only speaking occasionally, and in the case of Harry, only speaking once at the very end of the focus group after I specifically prompted them to do so (while still offering them an opportunity to decline). It is clear that in a space such as a focus group that is filled with strangers, and in a culture that still deeply marginalizes trans individuals, trans youth remain understandably protective of their thoughts, feelings and experiences, again reflecting the imbalance of power that exists in supposedly democratic spaces (Ellsworth, 1989). To better access the thoughts and experiences of this group of youth I might have conducted individual interviews with these participants instead of, or at least, alongside of, the focus groups. I also could have reached out to organizations that work specifically with trans youth, and perhaps hired and trained a trans-identified co-facilitator to assist me with implementing the focus groups in a way that could have made them feel safer for participants. This was not feasible within this particular study due to time and budgetary restraints but could reflect a future direction this research might take.

A second limitation of the focus groups I conducted, and of the research project itself, has to do with the ways in which the institutional nature of academic research in many ways structured what it was possible for participants to talk about. The setting of the first three focus groups was a purpose-built research room in the Qualitative Research and Resource Centre, which is situated in the centre of York University's campus. This space features a large brown oval table with roughly twelve chairs surrounding it, microphones embedded into the table, a large television screen sitting in a corner and a wall-sized mirror--which anyone could guess acts as a two-way mirror meant for observation--overlooking the scene. It is a rather dull, quiet, sanitized space that screams "serious university research" and the overall sensation of sitting in that room was one of being under scrutiny (indeed the tech support individual for the centre was sitting in a separate room watching and recording each focus group at my behest). The fourth focus group was held in a small classroom in the basement of Winters College, also on York University's campus (due to renovations taking place in the QRRC), and in lieu of a high-tech recording system, I had a mounted camcorder filming from a corner of the room, and a projector-screen on the wall on which I showed my slides. Although the fourth focus group probably came across as more ad-hoc to participants, that it was held in a room normally used for tutorials no doubt still worked to produce a certain kind of studious and serious atmosphere. This "tutorial-like" atmosphere was also produced through my decision to use Powerpoint slides to show ground rules, ask questions and link to articles. I opted to use Powerpoint in part out of a concern with the focus groups "going well" – I believed that having concrete examples (in the form of news articles about teens and porn, and porn education websites) would give participants something to grasp on to in the event that our conversation fell flat. The effect of all of these elements combined— the institutional nature of the university and of the classroom/research space in the university,

as well as the figure of myself as a young(ish) cis, white female researcher—was that the discussions of porn took place in a decidedly un-porny way.

Bobby Noble (2014) writes about the tension between porn and the university in his analysis of the institutional and administrative difficulties he experienced in getting a Porn Studies course initiated at the undergraduate level. Noble (2014) reads the institutional hesitancies he faced as a reflection of the fact that

> 'Porn-y' bodies…as subjects in relation to the thing that makes porn porn-y, seemed to be incommensurate with 'student' bodies; that is, bodies subject to the institution, its constructions of knowledge, its pedagogies, even its architectures, and, most importantly, administrative infrastructures (pp. 101-102).

'Official' narratives of teaching, learning and students assume de-sexualized, de-eroticized, and disembodied spaces, relations and practices, and the presence of 'porn' in the classroom in many ways disrupts or denaturalizes such assumptions. Indeed, Noble (2014) describes the ways in which the porn studies classroom "produced a reality where the content and difficult knowledges of the course staged themselves in tension with pedagogical protocol" such that "student bodies productively did, or perhaps defiantly refused to do, what student bodies are often asked to do in the conventional classroom; in part, sit still and 'learn' rather than be complicit in learning to unknow" (p. 105). Noble (2014) suggests that his class became its own kind of "counter-public" space in which decidedly 'unofficial' and 'un-institutional' intimacies were formed, fluids were spilled, decentralized pedagogies were practiced, and bodies and their concomitant vulnerabilities were manifestly present.

Within my own focus groups, however, and as I will discuss further in the analysis chapters that follow, the institutional aspects of the architectural space in which the focus groups took place, the one-time nature of the focus groups, and my own presence as "leader" of the focus groups with my attendant Powerpoint slides, produced different kinds of

discussions about porn, ones that more strictly adhered to 'official' narratives around it. Indeed, the three links I showed to participants in the first half of the focus group as examples of the kinds of stories told in the media about young people and porn each took an alarmist, negative approach to the issue, likely suggesting from the outset that we *ought* to be talking about mainstream or misogynist porn and criticizing and problematizing it in straightforward, hegemonic ways. It was only as the focus groups started to 'warm up' as some participants started to share more intimate details of themselves and their lives--likely prompting others to do so as well--that some of the intimacies discussed by Noble (2014) began to emerge. Of course, by then, the focus groups were essentially over and any movement towards the focus group as counter-public space was lost.

Related to the various limitations of the institutional setting of the focus group was the fact that despite one of the strengths of this method supposedly being that it encourages discussion amongst participants, I observed that participants still generally directed their responses to me, rather than to one another, reflecting the reality of my authority within the room and the contrived nature of the focus group research setting. This was likely exacerbated by the fact that my focus groups did not reflect a "natural" group, which Warr (2005) describes as "composed of participants who belong to preexisting social groups" (p. 200). Whereas natural groups are more likely to produce moments of unguarded interpersonal exchange, that the participants within my groups were generally all strangers to one another meant that they generally engaged in what Gamson (1992) calls "sociable public discourse", which draws on participants' "conversational competencies." This is to say that within the focus groups, participants often used their public social skills to achieve accord or engaged with one another in primarily positive and supportive ways, often building on a previously told story or opinion with a similar story or opinion of their own and rarely disagreeing or challenging one another. In fact, the sociability of the focus group environments was so

pervasive that the rare moments where there was relational breakdown or discord stuck out like a sore thumb, producing moments of affective intensity that became the inspiration for my analysis in Chapter 6. In highlighting this limitation of my focus groups, I am not suggesting that I ought to have attempted to whip up disagreement or bad feelings amongst participants, or even pressured them to engage directly with one another, but rather that a one-off focus group experience between strangers is unlikely to move beyond 'sociable public discourse' amongst participants. While there was much to gain from attending to how and what participants publicly shared when discussing pornography with strangers, it would have been a different study altogether if I had facilitated focus groups amongst established groups of friends who have a shared history that likely includes the kinds of deeper debates and discussions not captured in my focus groups. Another option would have been to have held several focus groups with the same group of participants to see how their discussion changed over time as they got to know one another and build a shared history (the pedagogical possibilities of this strategy will be discussed further in Chapter 6). The content and tone of the focus groups would also likely have been very different had they been held in a different kind of space than the sanitized and serious university as 'research institution.'

This is not to say that the focus groups were all, serious, scholarly and "doom and gloom" – in fact, quite the opposite. The focus groups were by-and-large lively, fun, often hilarious and at-times deeply moving, reflecting a degree of openness I had hoped for, but not necessarily expected to find amongst strangers (although perhaps it was the very 'strangeness' of the others that made such openness possible). But had we met in a youth-oriented or community space, perhaps participants would have felt less compelled to critique pornography from the outset or would have imagined and discussed pornography in a different way. Perhaps trans* identified participants would have felt more comfortable

sharing in the conversation. Perhaps different intimacies and different affective connections would have been made.

Finally, I want to reflect for a moment on my own role as researcher in the focus groups to consider how my own psychosocial subjectivity was and is inextricable from any analysis or understanding of what happened and why. As a first-time researcher, there is certainly no denying that my own anxieties around this research project "going well" were at the forefront of my mind, leading me to make some decisions, particularly around the participants I ultimately allowed into my study, that in retrospect I should not have made. During the focus groups, my anxiety also manifested in a tendency to sometimes insert myself unnecessarily into the conversation, often to offer a pedantic digression about a topic that I perhaps thought showcased my intelligence and would impress my participants. For example, in Focus Group 2, when participants were discussing the history of deviant desires (which they thought were a relatively new phenomenon, attributable to porn - see Chapter 4), I not only corrected them but went into a long digression about Freud's (1927) study of fetishism and the case of one young man's fetish for a 'shine on the nose.' This kind of long-winded digression does nothing for participants and therefore differs from the kinds of "consciousness-raising" sometimes used by feminist researchers in group settings. However, I did at times engage in this kind of "consciousness-raising" work as well, particularly around the existence of feminist pornography, which none of my participants had heard of and which I wanted to specifically educate them on. Still, upon analysis I see that many of my interjections are about me, and not about the participants, and this is something that can only be improved through practice as I gain better insights into when and how I should intervene, and when I should shut up.

Despite all of the limitations discussed above, the focus groups still produced immensely rich and revealing data, pointing to the possibilities of this underused method for researching complex objects such as porn. The next three chapters will provide my in-depth analysis of this data and will suggest that there is much to be gained from including "pornography" as an object of inquiry and discussion in our pedagogy, particularly if we take the principles of ethical erotics seriously as about attending to our students "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014) - their desires to live well in relations of equity, dignity, justice and care.

CHAPTER 4

Problematizing Discourses and Psychosocial Anxieties

What do young people talk about, when they talk about porn? Using thematic narrative analysis, this chapter will consider some of the primary ways young people talked about pornography within the focus groups as a problematic object that reflects, causes and exacerbates harmful sexual and social relations. I will argue that these themes of harm are often rooted in hegemonic discourses that construct porn as inherently bad for young people and society more generally, and that participants' re-production of these discourses in the focus groups (as a contrived and institutionalized research moment) served to publicly situate them on the "right" side of the pornography debate. At the same time, attending to the kinds of harms that participants focused on in their discussion also offers important insights into the anxieties and concerns—around sex, bodies, technology, representation, race, desire, labour, consent and so on--plaguing the lives of young people today. To that extent, participants' problematizations of porn offer a valuable entry point into the kinds of conversations that ought to be at the core of an ethical erotics approach to sexualities education.

To begin, this chapter will explore three themes of harm that emerged to some extent across all four focus groups: 1) Pornography is unrealistic; 2) Pornography leads to risky or extreme desires/behaviour; and 3) Pornography is exploitative. Each of these themes will be considered in relation to the larger discourses in circulation around pornography that they reflect – discourses that largely fall along gendered lines, with young men constructed as the perpetrators and young women as the victims of porn's supposed negative effects. The extent to which young people took up these discourses is indicative of pornography's social positioning as an "unhappy object" (Ahmed, 2010). For Ahmed (2010), "objects we encounter are not neutral: they enter our near sphere with an affective value already in place,

which means they are already invested with positive and negative value" (p. 34). Participants'
tendency to align themselves with problematizing discourses—often citing "legitimate"
sources such as news media, documentaries and unnamed studies in doing so--suggests a
desire to be seen to be oriented in the "right," properly critical way towards the unhappy
object that is porn.

However, while participants were often quick to take up problematizing discourses
around porn, it is important to note that they did not always themselves personally identify
with these concepts of harm in terms of having had their own sexual or social lives impacted
by porn in negative ways. In fact, only rarely did participants cite their own experiences as
evidence of porn's inherent status as an unhappy object, and indeed the conversations
themselves were generally lighthearted and fun. And, (as will be discussed further in Chapter
5), it should be noted that young people's problematizations of porn emerged primarily at the
outset of the focus groups, and gradually dissolved or became more nuanced as the focus
groups progressed, suggesting that problematizing discourses are indeed the "correct" way to
approach the topic of pornography with unknown others (particularly within an
institutionalized research setting), but that such problematizations do not tell the full story of
young people's engagements with porn. To that end, the analysis in this chapter will focus on
the utterances made by participants not as indicative of their "true" thoughts on porn, but
rather of the ways in which, as "psychosocial subjects" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013), their
concerns around the object of 'porn' might serve as a proxy for *other* kinds of anxieties,
concerns and hauntings they might have around sexual and social relating more generally.
'Porn' as a topic of discussion therefore has the potential to serve as a catalyst for the kinds of
discussions that are of interest to ethical erotics educators; discussions on issues ranging from
the overrepresentation of certain kinds of bodies and relations on film, to the material
conditions under which people labour, to the confusing concept of what consent actually

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looks like in practice. This chapter will therefore end with a consideration of the value of pornography as a pedagogical object for ethical erotics educators seeking to attend to our students "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014); their desires for equity, justice and care that inform--but that extend far beyond--their sexual lives and experiences.

1. Theme 1: Pornography is unrealistic

One of the most prominent concerns around young people's engagement with porn studied in the research and circulated in the media is the idea that pornography exists outside of, and serves to distort, 'normal' adolescent sexuality (Flood, 2009; Hald et al., 2013; Johansson & Hammaren, 2007). This concern was expressed across all focus groups, particularly at the outset, and can be seen, for example, in this quote by Zoey who stated that porn *"can warp what you think sexuality is when you don't even know what sexuality is when you're a young kid."* Abdi echoed this concern when he stated that *"kids will be introduced to sex before actually, um, experiencing any real interaction or connection with a woman or a guy, whatever."* If kids learn about sex through porn before they encounter sex themselves, and if this is considered problematic, then this is because the sex that is represented in porn is widely constructed as not the 'real' or the 'right' kind of sex. And, if this is what young people think sex is, then it is assumed that they will then try to have this 'wrong' or 'unreal' sex in their own lives. Indeed, this concern that pornography depicts unrealistic sexual scenarios and bodies that will warp young people's future sexual expectations and behaviours is at the heart of much of the effects-based pornography research (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Flood, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Ybarra et al., 2011).

Of course, concerns about porn's potential to 'warp' young people's sexual imaginations and therefore their future sexual behaviours are almost exclusively centred around young men, both within the effects-based research tradition and, subsequently, within the larger media narrative that has followed. This overemphasis on young men's use of porn assumes an essentialized male sexuality that is constructed as aggressive, unrelenting and out-of-control, while ignoring or minimizing the possibility of an active female sexuality that might include porn--and that might also be affected by it. The ubiquity of these kinds of heavily gendered discourses around porn's potential to warp young minds is evident to the extent that they were taken up across all focus groups, albeit in different ways depending on the gender of the group/individual doing the speaking. Echoing the hegemonic discourses around young people and porn, those participants who identified as female/genderqueer/trans* generally took up the issue of pornography's representations of unrealistic sexual scenarios with regards to how they affect 'others,' while those participants who identified as male were more likely to problematize their own engagement with porn as affecting their understanding and expectations of what sex should and will be like.

An example of how female/genderqueer/trans* participants took up the issue of porn's unrealistic representations of sex and the potential consequences of those representations can be seen in this excerpt from Alisha:

> There's always the number one thing that I see constantly, which is a skewed sexual view. […] they've got like these romanticized fantasies that this is how it's gonna happen, or, you know...a plumber walks in, a plumber walks in and you have sex with someone, that's the thing, or like you tip the pizza guy and it's like, 'oh well blah blah blah blah blah' and like it degrades into porn. If that, if it gets to even a seed of doubt where people start to think that that can become the thing, you're going down a very very extremely dark alleyway, 'cause there are certain people that if things don't work out the way, you can't really judge their reaction. You're leaving too much potential for bad things to happen because of the way media and porn forms their views at a younger age where they're more impressionable and then when it's later on in the years it's difficult for the

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person who has these views to really differentiate between right and wrong, because they're ultimately thinking that their way of thinking is right.

Alisha was describing the possibility that those who watch porn might have trouble differentiating between real and fake, right and wrong as a result of their exposure to what Stephen Marcus (1966) called the 'pornotopia' of mainstream porn – an imaginative space where every encounter leads to uncomplicated sexual relations. According to Alisha, the pornotopia creates an expectation that sex will inevitably occur, and this expectation can create the potential for harm in real world interactions if "things don't work out that way." Here, her concern is of a generalized nature – that pornography distorts the entire field of sexual relations, priming young people to think that sex is something they are owed.

Elena took the issue of distortion to a more specific level, when she discussed her 'guy friends' and how their expectations of women had been distorted by their engagement with certain representations prevalent in pornography:

> In my experience, I don't know, like I have a lot of guy friends and they all started watching porn early on and um, they kind of have this expectation for women to act certain ways if they're having sex with them and like...you know, we had this discussion many times and it's like 'No, whatever you see on there it's not how it is in real life most of the time.' So, like...you can watch it, that's fine, I feel like that's a normal part of growing up now since it's available and everyone's curious, everyone's gonna go watch it, but don't expect that everything else is gonna turn out like that and have so many expectations.

Zoey raised this concern about the distorting effect of pornography on young people's expectations of sex again in a later comment, in her response to a question regarding what kind of advice she would give to a young person thinking of watching porn for the first time. Zoey described a hypothetical young girl (one she has 'read about') and how this young girl was scared by some porn she encountered, which Zoey believed offered a distorted picture of sexual intimacy:

I was just reading this story about a young girl who had watched porn for her first time and, like, she like, started crying because it was like, she thought that was what love is or whatever…and then she was so scared that that's what she was going to have to do for the rest of her life...I'd just be, like, okay don't be surprised if you see this but it's fake, 'cause a lot of people think it's real.

While much of the discussion about unrealistic expectations in all focus groups did centre heterosexual pornography, in the following exchange, Remy, who identified as trans/non-binary, pointed out that unrealistic expectations occur in relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual porn as well:

Remy: Just generally in the heteronormative section there's a lot of unrealistic expectations in general but even more so if you go in the gay, lesbian, bi… Anything else.
Alanna: And unrealistic expectations in what sense?
Remy: It's basically just fetishized, right? It's not seen as an actual relationship as you could have with, with your plumber that walked in instead it's--you exist only for, in general, the straight man's pleasure.

Here Remy was lamenting that mainstream lesbian porn does not even adhere to the cursory logic of the 'pornotopia' whereby seemingly everyday interactions become sexualized. Instead, according to Remy, mainstream lesbian porn fetishizes the notion of lesbianism itself, producing lesbian sexuality through a masculine-heterosexual imaginary that erases the reality of lesbianism as an 'actual' way of being or relating (Diamond, 2005).

The distortion in porn is one that is seen to bend all representations of sexuality towards 'the straight man's pleasure.' This notion of pornography as created for the (imagined) desires of straight men is inherent not only to the excerpts discussed above but reflected more pointedly in the discussion within the female and mixed-gender focus groups. For example, Zoey suggested that: "When I think of porn, I feel like it's catered to males." Later in the same conversation, Chantel expanded on this idea:

> I think it's something, when I hear "porn" I think of porn videos, I think of it as something to please men-- Like I don't associate it usually with women, but I see it as a distribution tool to please the male-- 'Cause you know when you see certain porn scenes, um, I don't know, I don't see that, "oh that's pleasing, that's gonna please a female viewer"--I see that through the male gaze, I guess.

That porn is constructed as a genre aimed at men and that the common-sense discourses of harm that circulate around porn use tend to centre young men, means that young women and trans* folk don't necessarily see themselves as either the targets of porn or as directly 'warped' by its representations of unrealistic sex. In the excerpts above, Alisha, Elena, Zoey and Remy discussed their concerns in relation to unspecified others ('certain people', 'a lot of my guy friends', 'a young girl', 'you'), while seemingly constructing themselves as able to see right through those same unrealistic representations. In that sense, these four participants could be seen to be orienting themselves in the expected way towards the representations in porn, constructing it as potentially damaging to the minds of the (other) young people—especially the young men--who are assumed to be watching it, while also constructing themselves as smart, savvy and critical viewers.

However, while none of the female/trans* participants discuss themselves as 'warped' by the porn they watch, each of these excerpts do point to very real anxieties these young people might have in regards to porn and its impact on sexual and social relating more generally. For instance, Alisha's concern that the 'pornotopia' constructs a world where every interaction can "degrade" into sex (and even that such sex might be 'degraded' itself) suggests anxieties around issues of consent and of what might be expected of her in any given encounter. If the other young people she encounters are primed to think that sex is inevitable or is something they are owed, what dangers does she then face in her relations with those others? Will they take 'no' for an answer? Is 'no' even an option? Can 'porny' sex ever be

anything but degraded? And on the other hand, what consequences will she face sexually and socially for rejecting the logic of the 'pornotopia'?

Elena and Zoe's respective excerpts similarly point to the vulnerability women face in their sexual relations with men, which they see as exacerbated by the representations of heterosexual sex in porn. Elena recalled chastising her male friends for thinking that women will "act certain ways" based on what they have seen in porn. What these "certain ways" are was not made clear. Perhaps she was referring to certain sexual acts – anal sex, double penetration, group sex – that may be common in pornography but that are less common in the sexual repertoires of young (presumably heterosexual) people. Perhaps she was referring to the lack of male-on-female foreplay in mainstream porn, or the ways in which women are often shown deriving immense sexual pleasure from performing oral sex on men. Perhaps she was referring to the prevalence of sexualized male violence against women in mainstream porn, such as slapping, hair-pulling and face-pushing, as well as the use of aggressive, misogynistic language such as "bitch," "slut" and "cunt." While it is not clear what kinds of acts and behaviours she found problematic in her friends' sexual relations with imagined 'other' women, it is not a stretch to speculate that Elena was also similarly concerned about the unrealistic or undesirable expectations and behaviour of her own potential sexual partners, for whom her male friends might act as a proxy. These same kinds of concerns were also evident in Zoe's tale of the young girl she 'read about' who broke down in tears after viewing mainstream porn, thinking that this often violent, misogynistic vision of heterosexual sex is what all sex, and hence all love, must look like. In her imagined conversation with this young girl, Zoey reassures her that porn is fake and that it does not represent the reality of sex and love—a reassurance that is also likely meant to placate her own fears about what her own future sexual and romantic experiences with men will entail.

The anxieties expressed by Alisha, Elena and Zoey in their accounts of the potential harm that can result from the representations in porn, are brought pointedly home in the following narrative from Bella. Here, Bella made important connections between the racialized representations of Black women's hyper-sexuality prevalent in pornography (Hill Collins, 1997; Mayall and Russell, 1993; Miller-Young, 2010; 2013) and how she had been treated by certain 'white males' in her life:

> As a woman, especially of whatever colour, I have found that a lot of white males have come to me due to, I can tell by from them watching porn-- just by them saying certain things and wanting certain requests, like I've gotten requests where this guy wanted to try anal and I found out from a friend that he wanted to try it because he'd been watching a lot of "ebony" porn and finding black girls very attractive and they're very sexy and all that kind of stuff and he just wanted to try it on me because where I was at the time, like, where I lived there's...the population is majority...white dominated area and, like, I'm a visible minority--like one of the only black people in my school and he just wanted to get out his...whatever feelings he wanted on me, because he wanted--he thought that I would be like that.

Bella seemed upset and even embarrassed (as evidenced by her somewhat rambling preamble) to admit that she had experienced being reduced to one body part—her ass—as a result of the highly fetishized imagery prevalent in "ebony" porn – a fetish rooted in the history of slavery and the over-sexualized and exaggerated image of the Hottentot Venus (Hill-Collins, 1997). She tried to recuperate some of her embarrassment by suggesting that these young men who approach her find "black girls very attractive" and "very sexy," but this only serves to amplify the racial and frankly violent undertones of her story (what does it mean when she says, "he just wanted to get out his…whatever feelings he wanted on me"? This is a disturbing image indeed).

Bella's story is a reminder that the representations prevalent in porn can cause real harm when they are brought into embodied encounters, particularly to the extent that these representations and these encounters tend to reproduce harmful power dynamics, such as

racism and misogyny, that are already in circulation in society. Indeed, I want to speculate that all of the excerpts discussed thus far point to young women's/trans* people's anxieties around their positioning in relation to men (and white men in particular for Bella) in a patriarchal society that continues to construct all sex and desire as (a very normative vision of) heterosexual male sex and desire. These concerns are reflected more explicitly in Remy's discussion of the ways that mainstream porn fetishizes lesbian sexuality through a male lens that erases the possibility of a 'real' lesbianism that doesn't exist just for men's pleasure. Under conditions of patriarchy, women and trans*/queer folk often lack the power to construct and enact their own positive vision of sexuality, pleasure and desire, and indeed heterosexual sex is constructed, even by these young, seemingly progressive women, as something that is done to women and not as something that women do. Part of the anxiety expressed by Alisha, Elena, Zoe, Bella and Remy then, can be traced to young women's/trans* folks' less powerful social positioning and the consequences of that inferior status. If men get to decide what heterosexual (or even lesbian sex) looks like, and if porn is fetishizing an undesirable or even racist vision of that sex, and if women must perform the sex that men want, then these young women are facing a painful, violent and scary sexual future that they may feel helpless to prevent or defend against. And for Remy, if heterosexual men get to decide what lesbian/queer expressions of sexuality look like, then the work for people like Remy to construct and live a different kind of sexuality is an uphill battle that may be equal parts difficult and dangerous to climb.

While female and trans* participants problematized the unrealistic representations of sex prevalent in porn for their potential to affect how they will be viewed and treated by others, participants in the all-male focus group were more likely to discuss porn's representations as impacting their own sexual expectations and experiences. For example, in

the excerpt below, Omar discussed how pornography had shaped what he views as 'normal' during sex:

> Omar: I, I have experienced some, um a situation where I am, I kind of was expecting certain things, and, um, she was uncomfortable with it and to me--
> Alanna: Based on what you'd seen in porn?
> Omar: --what I'd seen. And I thought that it was a normal, a normal act, you could say. So I think, so possibly in my mind based on what you were talking about yesterday with the girls, it may have changed my views on what I consider normal, or just a part of, you know...
> Alanna: Like sexual relations?
> Omar: Yeah.

Omar is living proof of the female participants'—and society's--concerns about how porn might affect young men's expectations in real-life sexual encounters. However, whatever it was that Omar was expecting to happen, it appears that he was rebuffed by his partner, or was at least made aware of her discomfort and presumably changed his behaviour, realizing that his expectations of sex were rooted in the hyperreal sexual world of the pornotopia. And in this excerpt, he can be seen to be occupying the position of the self-aware, 'woke' young man who knows that porn is bad and that he was wrong for thinking it was 'normal.' In admitting to his transgression, Omar was therefore able to maintain a properly critical and self-aware orientation towards his engagement with porn in the space of the focus group. But his utterance here does point to anxieties he might have in relation to his understanding (or lack thereof) of what 'good' hegemonic masculine sexuality should be. His anxieties seem to be of a counterpoint to those of the female participants: if porn is not 'real' sex, then what does 'real' sex look like? And how can a young man pursue his sexual desire in a way that isn't violent or coercive; that is, how can Omar avoid being the sexed-up, disrespectful and predatory young man he has been told, repeatedly, that he already is?

While the young men and young women/trans* folk in the focus groups approached the issue of porn's depiction of what constitutes 'desirable' sex from different angles--

reflecting the different kinds of concerns plaguing those occupying different subject positions

in our society--participants did seem to agree on one thing unanimously: porn regularly

depicts and celebrates unrealistic or exaggerated bodies and sexual abilities. These concerns

were evident, for example, in this rather funny exchange between Alisha, Kim and Nina:

> Alanna: Does anyone have any thoughts about, like, the impact--I don't
> know, about porn actors or bodies and stuff like that and whether that is
> problematic or whether it's--
> Alisha: Fake tits for days.
> Kim: I think big dicks is a problem though, that's like a...
> Alisha: Yeah.
> Kim: It's over, like look it--there's no average, I don't think you ever see
> average [laughs]...It's literally, like, the biggest--
> Alisha: No, no, it's always exaggerated--it's, yeah...Which doesn't set
> realistic expectations at all, ever, and like--
> Nina: For either/or, women or men.
> Alisha: It's true.
> Nina: 'Cause men are like, 'oh I don't measure up' and the girls are like,
> 'Ugh, what's that?' [makes a gesture indicating a small penis with her
> fingers].

Omar, too, proved cognizant of the ways in which porn normalizes certain kinds of bodies

and body parts, when he said, "I think with the porn industry, it's um, it has created some

unrealistic standards. Um, especially when it comes to like the size of the male's appendage…

it changes your thoughts on what is normal or not." Not only are the tits 'fake' and the dicks

'big,' but the capabilities of the bodies involved in porn are also seen to be unrealistic. As

Kim playfully asked, in relation to the sex in the 'pornotopia' that never seems to end: *"Who*

lasts like an hour long?" For Zoey, the issue was more serious, as she worried that the

hyperreal bodies of pornography were causing young women to have body image issues:

> Zoey: Yeah, I think just in like eating disorders and like young women
> looking at that, I feel like it does affect the woman individually, like outside
> of -- a relationship, like body image and like, you know, plastic surgery has,
> like, gone up and things like that.
> Alanna: Mmm-hmm. But so would you, like, I mean it's affecting their body
> image?
> Zoey: In like that they want to look like that porn ideal.

Such concerns around the media's impact on young people's body image are nothing new; what is perhaps new are the particular parts of the body that porn fixates on and that young people are growing newly anxious about. The excerpts above point to participants' concerns around porn's impact on what a 'normal' naked body should look like and on what a 'normal' sexual body should be able to do. Both male and female participants hint at anxieties around feelings of sexual inadequacy and concerns around desirability should they not themselves live up to the porn ideal, while simultaneously taking up the common-sense discourse that posits all media—and in this case porn--as unduly influencing young people's self-image and self-esteem.

Beyond porn's impact on young people's perception of both sex and bodies, several of the participants discussed how the entire genre of pornography is making it difficult or impossible for young people to enjoy 'real' sex at all, a theme that is growing increasingly prevalent in both the research (Stulhofer et al., 2010) and in the media, for example in this recent story by *The Telegraph* titled "Pornosexuals: Why are so many young people choosing porn over sex?" (Olivarius, 2017). Adriana discussed the issue this way:

> There's a lot of guys and girls that I know that, um, they have a very hard time getting off from just human contact --because they're just so desensitized to constantly masturbating with, um, watching porn. They can't really...they just don't have the stimulation themselves without any visual aid. Um and somebody else isn't enough for them. So I think when you get to that point, it's, it's not that watching porn is wrong, it's just taking it to that extreme. Um, where you kind of just have to take a step back. But, I know a lot of, I know a lot of guys especially, 'cause I guess for them it shows a little bit more if they can't really get off.

A similar sentiment was echoed by Omar, though in slightly more personal terms, when he said, "There's a lot more variety out there for you to have access to, and that's one of the reasons why a person may not feel the same, may feel less aroused or just less in the moment--with a physical person." However, it was Abdi who (bravely) discussed what he saw to be the relationship between his engagement with pornography and his own (in)ability to get

aroused with a partner:

> It does, I would say. I...um, it affects how you feel with that partner. So if you're, you're watching porn, you're used to porn and you're used to getting off by yourself, or whatever-- Once you're with a woman it doesn't--it doesn't feel the way it looks. It's different. And it's just, the whole, um, I don't know, it just feels different and you, you might not be as interested or as aroused when you're with a woman…you can't even get hard.

These excerpts do suggest that young people are struggling to square the representations in pornography with their own lived sexual experiences, which in many ways can never measure up to the hyperreal world of the 'pornotopia.' The kinds of sex being had and the kinds of bodies performing that sex do not reflect the majority of sex and bodies that occur in real life, and it appears that this realization can be a let-down—quite literally—for some of the young men in this study, and at the very least a disappointment for some of the young women. The anxieties provoked in this section point again to concerns around desire and desirability in the face of mediated representations that seem to reflect a particular sexual ideal. These anxieties are split along gendered lines, with the image of the flaccid penis as the pivot point. For young women such as Adriana, her excerpt points to concerns around the appearance of a flaccid penis in a sexual encounter; what would this mean as a reflection of her own desirability in relation to the bodies and abilities of porn performers? (Interestingly, none of the female-identified participants suggested that they themselves struggle to get aroused as a function of their engagement with porn. Perhaps this points to the ways in which male erection and male orgasm continue to be centred as the point and purpose of heterosexual "sex"). And for young men such as Abdi and Omar, how does the appearance of the flaccid penis in the moment of the real-world sexual encounter point to a failure of their masculinity, particularly to the extent that young men are constructed through gendered discourse as always already ready to go?

What is clear from the excerpts above is that participants were often quick to take up

the 'right' orientation towards porn's representations, problematizing them as unrealistic, regressive and at-times violent, and constructing young viewers as impressionable and naïve, while simultaneously (and ironically) constructing themselves (also young!) as savvy, critical and self-aware when faced with those same representations. At the same time, their critiques of porn's representations and the stories they told about imagined young people's relationship to those representations, or even about their own relationship to those representations (particularly for the male-identified participants) do point to the real anxieties they might have and real harms they may have experienced as a function of their particular positioning in our social world, whether as a result of their inferior status under conditions of (white) hetero-patriarchy (female and trans* participants); as a result of their complex relationship to hegemonic masculinity (male participants); or as a result of their feelings of inadequacy when confronted with the unrealistic bodies and abilities of porn performers (all participants). These issues and anxieties may have been provoked by discussions centred around the representations in porn, but they also point to the complexities of the larger social world (of which these representations are but one part) that young people are navigating daily. Implicit in these problematizations of the representations in porn, then, is that while young people are watching and engaging with porn and are clearly making something out of the images on offer, they also desire something more from those representations; that they be more respectful of their bodies, identifications and vulnerabilities, enabling them to feel beautiful, desirable, safe and recognized in turn.

2. Theme 2: Pornography leads to extreme or risky desires/behaviours

Connected to the first theme discussed above is the notion that, due to it's 'harmful' representations, porn acts as a kind of gateway object that has the power to engender a

tendency towards more 'extreme,' 'risky' or even 'deviant' desires or behaviours in viewers. Across all focus group, participants regularly took up these kinds of discourses, often through the use of developmental and mental health frameworks that construct young people as particularly malleable and their use of porn as akin to other forms of addiction; two frameworks that have dominated the research and therefore the narratives in circulation around young people, pornography and sexual behaviour (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Carroll et al., 2008; Johansson & Hammaren 2007; Morrison et al., 2004). However, as discussed in the review of the literature, what constitutes sexual 'risks' are often those behaviours that 'deviate' from normative, heterosexual, monogamous sex, and notions of risk or deviance are therefore always tied up with moralizing discourses around what constitutes the 'right' kind of sex and desire in the first place (Rubin, 1984). This merging of the moral and the scientific around issues of porn and deviance makes it very difficult to talk about porn otherwise; and indeed, although none of the participants (save for Abdi, as will be discussed below) claimed any first-hand knowledge or experience with this issue, they often spoke with authority about porn's addictive and damaging qualities, taking them for granted as a fact.

For example, citing "studies," Zoey stated quite confidently that "people would say that watching porn helps people with fetishes, but it actually makes fetishes stronger so that's not true." She continued by suggesting that this effect of porn is particularly true for young people because of "the dopamine it releases...when you watch it at a young age you're more susceptible to get addicted to it." Zoey later described the sources she was drawing upon in her thinking, saying "I wasn't against porn til, like, first year university there was like a talk called '*The Porn Effect?*'" (Fradd, 2013). This talk then sparked her interest to watch other talks and documentaries on this subject, including *After Porn Ends* (Weiss & Wagoner, 2012), *Hot Girls Wanted* (Jones, Bauer, Gradus, Huckabee & Bauer, Gradus, 2015) and several "TED Talks", which is where she said "I got all the statistics I've been saying, like the

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research." Importantly, the first source she mentioned and one she returned to again and again, *The Porn Effect?*, was a lecture put on by Matt Fradd, a former porn industry insider who describes his current work as "dedicated to exposing the reality behind the fantasy of porn and offering education and advice to men, women, and married couples from a Catholic perspective" (Fradd, 2013). The religious and moral basis for his arguments, and hence for Zoey's arguments, are obscured, however, through the guise of 'studies' and 'statistics,' so that these arguments become conferred with the objective status of scientific "truth." In the excerpts above it is evident that Zoey wished to align herself with this 'truth,' to situate herself as aware, educated and therefore rightly critical of what she saw as the givenness of porn's ability to capture the minds of young people and ultimately lead them astray.

This taken-for-granted notion that porn makes fetishes stronger, leading to more and more deviant behaviour over time was also raised in the all-male focus group, particularly in this excerpt in which Jay, Abdi, Omar and myself discussed the issue of public masturbation, which participants directly attributed to the prevalence of fetish pornography:

> Jay: I think maybe people, they just...it's kind of like novelty, right? So once you see one type of porn, you want to get something more intense.
> Alanna: Yeah.
> Abdi: Yeah.
> Jay: And then I guess that's maybe where fetishes develop or, for example, the public--public masturbators, right?
> Alanna: Mmm-hmm.
> Jay: So maybe they'll get off doing things alone?
> Alanna: Yeah.
> Jay: So, in order to escalate their, um, escalate their arousal?
> Alanna: Mmm-hmm.
> Jay: They have to go to do some more extreme stuff.
> Alanna: They...yeah. But I mean, to be fair, there's been public masturbators long before there was pornography (laughing).
> Jay: Yeah, so I don't know if that's the result of porn.
> Omar: Yeah.
> Alanna: Yeah.
> Abdi: I didn't know that.

That pornography is constructed by these young men as the point of origin for sexually

criminal behaviour such as public masturbation points to the affective power of the addiction-deviance discourse that circulates around porn. Indeed, these young men couldn't seem to imagine that non-normative sexuality, sexual desire or sexual practices existed outside of or existed prior to, the proliferation of porn. However, while the male participants in the excerpt above echoed the problematic, yet common-sense discourse around porn and sexual deviance that constructs porn as the *cause* of sexual deviance (and that remains uncritical of the concept of 'deviance' itself), their concerns on this issue do point to likely anxieties they might have experienced with regards to their own porn use – namely, the possibility of their own becoming addicted/becoming deviant. This concern was explicitly discussed by Abdi, who did offer his own personal narrative of needing more extreme porn to get aroused:

> Abdi: You watch something, you're, you watch like for awhile and, and now after a while it just doesn't really arouse you--
> Alanna: Have the same effect?
> Abdi: --arouse you any more. So you go into more hardcore. You go into more extreme things to get that rush. And you just keep going and going.

Here Abdi was relating an effect of his porn habits on his desires and used the language of addiction (getting 'that rush') in doing so. However, at no point did he suggest that watching more and more extreme porn had instigated or was instigating within him a desire to act in more 'deviant' or extreme ways towards women in general or sexual partners in particular. Rather, as discussed in the section above, Abdi's issue was one of finding it difficult to stay aroused in his encounters with 'real' women, which he attributed to his relationship to porn. And while I don't wish to discount Abdi's interpretation of his own issues/behaviour, he also discussed throughout the focus groups his trepidation around women in general, as is evident for example in this (somewhat convoluted) statement:

> Maybe if I didn't have porn I would actually go out there and talk to women or, you know, do--go through the, the, you know, it's hard…it's more challenging, it's a, you know, but at least, you're maybe getting the real, um, more natural way whereas...it's easier to just go online and get off.

Abdi struggled to even voice his feelings around his difficulties approaching women

and why for him it was sometimes just easier to watch porn instead, nor did he explore

in the space of the focus group why this might be so, beyond assuming that porn was

the culprit. However, a different kind of clue did come at a later moment, when Abdi

discussed his upbringing in the Middle East, where, he said, "the culture is kind of

different, it's much more conservative, you don't get to interact with women."

While Abdi was quick to blame porn for his issues with 'real' women, it is not a

stretch to suggest that cultural factors, such as his historical lack of interaction with women

(and potentially the socially-constructed discourses around women that fuelled that lack of

interaction) might also have been at play. Regardless of what was causing Abdi's issues, what

is important to note is that he was not harming anybody else (though he might himself be

experiencing harmful feelings of pain and shame) as a result of his porn use, even if he was

watching more and more 'extreme' things. Instead his anxieties seemed to be less with

whether he was a deviant person and, again, with whether porn was interfering with his

ability to enact a hegemonic Western vision of masculinity that constructs men as active and

aggressive in their pursuit of women. Abdi's concerns act as a somewhat ironic

counterbalance to Zoey's emphatic construction of porn as addictive and likely to lead to

more deviant sexual behaviour in young men, a concern which, again, seems linked to

anxieties around how she will be treated, or be expected to act, in her future sexual

encounters. That these two participants, and participants across all focus groups, regularly

turned to common-sense discourses rooted in the language of 'science' to situate porn as the

cause of all kinds of socially harmful behaviours (while not interrogating how those harmful

behaviours might be connected to larger structures of power and inequality) is problematic in

and of itself and will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

While the concerns around young men and porn centre the potential for them to become addicted to it, concerns around porn's supposed deviating effects on young women's behaviour are, unsurprisingly, of a different nature. While no participant in the focus groups suggested that young women might become public masturbators as the result of porn, some participants did suggest that the accessibility of pornography had resulted in the normalization of a "porno chic" aesthetic (McNair, 2013) that might lower young people's (especially young women's) inhibitions around participating in porn or emulating its representational style. For example, Ken said, *"I think if…teens have access to pornography they might start making, making pornography of their selves early on--and that might ruin their lives in the future."* For Zhang the issue was one of young girls posting their own sexy or semi-nude images on social media, which she considered to be an unsafe practice:

> I feel like… young girls…, I feel like once they watch porn…like their brain is not fully developed yet into that adult stage yet, so some of them will be like watching porn and stuff and will be posting their own body on the website…they feel like… 'oh yeah, I should be like--I should be like that person on that pornography website'… so eventually they're gonna post like their own body image on…like social media, like Facebook, Instagram, and I feel like that's not safe for, like, young girls.

Much like Zoey, Zhang was referencing scientific discourses around adolescent brains as not fully formed, and young people as therefore more likely to be tricked or coerced into making poor decisions such as posting their nearly-naked bodies online. For Ken and Zhang, young women posting their bodies on social media was seen as inherently problematic, a line of thinking that points to the complex relationship we have to youth sexuality, and young women's sexuality in particular. Here they were taking up the common-sense discourse of young people and especially young women as naturally innocent and pure, and porn as a force that therefore influences them to sexualize themselves in ways they would ostensibly not otherwise seek to do. At the same time, Zhang and Ken were pointing to very real concerns around the ways images of young women's bodies get circulated online as a mode

of harassment or extortion, as in the recent case of Amanda Todd, a B.C teenager who was cyberbullied with pictures of her bare breasts and who eventually committed suicide as a result. Their admonitions did, however, target the young women who might be posting images, while neglecting the misogyny and illegality of those who circulate those images in attempts to 'ruin lives.'

In contrast to Ken and Zhang's concerns around young women's potential victimization as a result of their engagement with porn's aesthetics, Bella adopted a more cynical and misogynistic tone, stating that "some people are using the whole 'express yourself,' you know, be comfortable in your skin, as a way to use...They're kind of abusing what 'express yourself; is, they're just using it for their own...getting attention." In her dismissal of these young women as attention-seeking and "abusing" themselves, Bella reflected an internalization of a discourse that posits young women's attention-seeking and self-sexualization as necessarily negative. This can perhaps be understood in relation to a narrative she told about her twin brother's thoughts on women in porn:

> Yeah it's a double standard, but, I think--talking with my brother, like, we've kind of had this conversation where it was like, if he saw any of us in that kind of limelight, he'd be weirded out...He doesn't want to view me in such an objectifying way, he admits that when he looks at women that way, he doesn't want to have any personal relationship it's just more of a thing of a guy to, like…he doesn't want me to be in that limelight…he wants a person, a woman to be respected and he wants to see them grow on top.

While Bella admitted that it's a double-standard, she didn't really problematize her brother's use of the common virgin-whore dichotomy that suggests that women can either be sexual, or respectable, but not both. Interestingly, it was Zoey who took a stand against this double-standard, proclaiming it "sexist." In fact, Zoey had encountered this double-standard first-hand, as she related in this narrative account of a time when she was considering going into the porn industry herself:

I remember I was telling one of my friends, 'Oh I'm thinking of being a cam girl,' and he was a guy and was like, 'Oh that's disgusting.' And I'm like, 'Okay, you're gonna jack off to these girls, but then when you know one personally it's disgusting?' Like, it was a double standard...So I think I'd like boys to know that girls can like, show their bodies and be smart and like get a degree, like, we're multidimensional.

Although Zoey was critical of the effects of porn on its viewers, she was also critical of characterizations of those who participate in the porn industry as disgusting, and particularly of young women such as herself as somehow worth less if they make money off their bodies. These kinds of conversations that seek to problematize young women's adoption of a porno-chic aesthetic, or even their participation in the porn industry, therefore point to anxieties young people grapple with around issues of sexuality, respectability and gender, issues that are themselves rooted in a larger patriarchal social context that both demands and punishes young women's open displays of sexuality.

In looking at the utterances discussed in this section, it is clear that young people are heavily influenced by research studies and media narratives that draw on addiction/mental health discourses in discussing the potential deviating effects of porn. Of course, as with all issues relating to sexuality, what is considered 'deviant' differs depending on the gender being discussed, with participants constructing young men as more likely to act out in undesirable ways and young women as more likely to over-sexualize themselves as a result of their engagements with porn. These emphases reproduce normative understandings of male and female sexuality that fail to account for the nuances of sexuality and desire, and that don't necessarily reflect the reality of young people's lived experiences, as is evident in the narratives from Abdi and Zoey, each of whom trouble the notion that they are rendered deviant through their different experiences with porn. What is, however, evident within all of these conversations is that young people are eager to talk about health, about deviance, about what makes someone a good or respectful or respectable person and about what can derail

someone from the 'right' or 'good' path. And in these discussions, we can see evidence of young people's "thick desires" – their desires for equity and justice between the genders; their desires for more resources and supports for their mental and physical health; their desires for financial resources and more economic stability. These are desires that extend far beyond the object of porn.

3. Theme 3: Pornography is Exploitative

While much of the discussion in the focus groups centred participants' own lives and experiences, or the lives and experiences of those they know (or even of hypothetical 'other' young people), participants also expressed concerns around the practices of the porn industry and the exploitation of porn performers. These concerns again divided along gendered lines, with female participants expressing much more concern around the treatment of porn performers, both male and female, while male participants rarely touched on this issue, or did so with much less certainty.

For the young women in my study, the discussion around exploitation in the porn industry was highly charged. As discussed earlier in this chapter, a lot of porn is indeed misogynistic in its representations of sex, and for those young women who watch porn, it is possible that they see something of themselves or their own potential future mistreatment in these kinds of images and are keen to problematize the production of those images as a result. As well, as porn has gained a more prominent place in mainstream society, the industry and its practices have come under much more scrutiny, resulting in a slew of sleek, high-quality documentaries and media texts such as those cited by Zoey, designed to appeal to the sensibilities of media-savvy young people. These documentaries came up again and again amongst female participants, suggesting their value as a pedagogical tool for these young women (as well as their role as a potentially 'safe' avenue through which young people can

get a peek at the inner-workings of the normally 'taboo' world of porn). However, these texts do overwhelmingly take up a critical position with regards to the porn industry, highlighting its exploitative practices and reinforcing the common-sense narrative that equates sex work (particularly for women) with victimization, pain and shame, and, citing these documentaries, female participants regularly and unproblematically took up these kinds of discourses. For example, in response to the ice-breaker question, "What is Porn?" Emily said:

> When I used to think of porn it was just like this thing that people do, did, to make money and it made them a lot of money because they reveal their bodies and stuff and like now I see porn as like something, like I will automatically associate it with pain-- because of like the documentaries I've watched on it…

Bella also touched on issues of exploitation and suggested that her fellow focus group members, and society more generally, tends to overemphasize female exploitation in porn at the expense of the reality of male exploitation too:

> Everyone seems to be saying, you know, "women exploited, blah, blah, blah," you know, we're all in defense of women, we're all women, but I think we also need to realize that men are affected by this as well. The porn people who are men who are being exploited themselves, it may just seem like women are being exploited, you know, or being degraded, but really men are the same, just in a different way. I was watching a documentary of this one porn star guy where his, he can't get erections properly. His sexuality is, it's all over the place, because he doesn't know if he's gay or straight anymore, 'cause he's done both for pay, he's gay for pay but now he's not sure if he's gay for whatever, right?

These young women are certainly not wrong to suggest that the pornography industry can be exploitative, and that participating in the often-unregulated world of porn can lead to mental, physical and emotional trauma for performers, such as those featured in *Hot Girls Wanted* (Jones, Bauer, Gradus, Huckabee & Bauer, Gradus, 2015) who feel coerced into doing things they don't want to do. However, their reliance on documentaries and other texts that deliberately take a very alarmist approach to the issue of pornography— while functioning to situate them on the 'right' side of this issue in equating porn with pain— negates the possibility of performers' involvement in the porn industry in ways that might be

more complex than the story of victimization and regret told above. This is not to say that all

participants always took up this position in relation to women's involvement in porn. For

instance, Daria pushed back at the notion expressed by the majority of female participants in

her focus group that porn is necessarily exploitative with this anecdote about a friend:

> I think, like, knowing someone in the "industry" [uses air quotes]...if you
> want to classify it that way, um...some people can do it because they like it
> and because it makes them happy and also it brings them money, so it's like-
> -she's not poor, like, she's fine, she's just, she's very comfortable with her
> body so she's okay to show it off to people.

Daria took a stance towards porn rooted in sexual empowerment discourses that seek

to undo associations between open displays of (female) sexuality and pain, exploitation,

victimhood or moral impurity. She suggested another way to think about porn—as a form of

labour and a potentially enjoyable one at that—rather than as something performers are

necessarily forced or coerced into. This consideration of porn as labour is at the heart of the

emerging category of 'feminist porn,' a category which, interestingly, the majority of

participants had never heard of/could not even conceive of, as shown in this exchange:

> Alanna: Has anyone heard of or watched or engaged with feminist porn at
> all?
> Kim: Like submissive? Like where the girls are like the ones who are…
> [Alanna starts to provide description of feminist porn]
> Nina: Is it female-friendly? 'Cause I think I've seen that tab on porn.
> Alanna: Yeah, female-friendly can, can like certainly be part of it, yeah. But
> it's not necessarily just like romantic story-lines. Feminist porn, it can still
> be very hard-core, um, but it's just trying to create it with a different sort of
> like sensibility in mind, in terms of who's the viewer. It also tends to really
> focus on like the ethics of production…

Here, Kim and Nina were focusing on the representations in porn as evidence of its feminist

credibility, equating 'feminist' with either 'female-oriented' (as in 'soft-core') or with women

acting as the 'doms' in a BDSM relationship. While feminist porn could certainly include

both these categories, it is interesting to note that these participants did not consider the

means or modes of porn's production as integral to its categorization as feminist, showing the

disconnect that continues to exist between feminism's aims of social justice and the way feminism is represented through discourse as about advancing either an essentialized vision of femininity, or for Kim, about reversing the hierarchy so that women actually come to dominate men.

While Daria and myself tried to offer an alternative way to think about the porn industry and those who participate in it, most of the discussion amongst female participants around the porn industry did return to the idea that performing in porn is an unhappy endeavour that will lead to an unhappy life, perhaps reflecting anxieties that these young women have around the power men have over women's bodies more generally – a power reproduced in the male-dominated porn industry, but one that certainly doesn't originate there. In contrast to the female participants, however, male participants only occasionally touched on the inner-workings of the porn industry and seemed much less certain as to whether it was exploitative of performers or not. For instance, Jay related his knowledge of how porn performers prepare their bodies for the rigours of performative sex this way:

> I know that um, if, for example, for anal sex? They have to fast, they have to use, um, dia---no, what are those called? Um, laxatives! In order to clear their bowels out. I don't think it's very comfortable for them. Um, but it's their choice, so.

While he did consider the discomfort that some performers undergo to, in this case, prepare for having anal sex on-camera, in the end he landed on the conclusion that it is ultimately the performer's choice to participate, so any pain or discomfort they experience is on them. For Omar, the category of 'porn' itself included only that which is consensually undertaken, as shown in this exchange:

> Alanna: What comes to mind when you hear the word 'porn'?
> Omar: Uh, 'consensual.'
> Alanna: Consensual? Okay…So what do you mean by consensual?
> Omar: I mean that the parties involved, um, they know…that they can stop at any time type of thing. So it should not be forced or things like that…to that effect.

Alanna: Okay. So what would that not include then, if 'consensual' is part of your definition of porn.
Omar: Um...well like, as I said, like force. Um, like you know, rape and things like that.

Whether Omar took up this position because he truly believed it, or whether he thought it was the right thing to say (to me, a female researcher) given the ongoing discussion around consent currently in circulation in our society (particularly as it pertains to college-aged men such as himself), or whether he made this statement for any other number of complicated reasons is impossible to know. But this answer—and Jay's answer above—points to a desire amongst these male participants to construe porn as that which is always engaged in knowledgeably and consensually, leaving little space for the more subtle kinds of coercion and exploitation that don't necessarily appear onscreen but that we know exist in the porn industry (and in sexual relations more generally). This tendency amongst male participants could stem partially from ignorance – unlike the female participants, rarely did male participants indicate that they were educating themselves on this topic through engagement with media texts such as documentaries. It could also stem from an attempt to allay anxieties around their own porn use and about whether or not that use implicates them in the exploitation of, and violence against, porn performers. After all, if these women *choose* to engage in painful or uncomfortable sexual practices of their own volition, then porn that includes those practices is entirely consensual, and Jay and Omar are therefore in the clear.

What is evident from the discussion above is that participants were eager to discuss the porn industry and its relation to exploitation, pain and harm. However, the ways these issues were addressed varied widely by gender, with female participants much more likely to take up the position that porn is inherently exploitative and that porn performers' involvement in this industry can lead to lasting damage, while male participants were more likely to defend against the possibility that porn might be excessively harmful to porn

performers through positioning any pain incurred as a result of participation in porn as just a part of the job. While the reasons for this discrepancy are likely rooted in the power imbalance that persists between the genders, I would argue that neither of these positions offer a particularly nuanced understanding of the porn industry, of issues of exploitation or of labour issues more generally, situating the relationship between porn performance and harm as all-or-nothing. However, while the reiteration of these kinds of discourses point to a limitation in these young people's thinking around porn—and a limitation in the social discourse around porn more generally—their interest in investigating and understanding the pornography industry *as industry* certainly points to the value of porn as an object of inquiry that can teach us a lot about what it means to go to work. This is but one of the many pedagogical strands opened by discussions of porn that I will now consider in more depth in the section below.

4. Pornography, Anxiety and Pedagogy

If we were to take participants' problematizations of porn at face value as the sum of what is wrong with porn, and of what is wrong with young people watching porn, we might conclude that what is pedagogically required is the development of a more robust media literacy education that includes critiques of porn. For, as the themes and excerpts above show, much of what young people find problematic in porn are the kinds of representations on offer and the possibility that those representations are directly impacting the seemingly uncritical young people watching them. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, attending only to the representations prevalent in porn to determine if they are 'good' or 'bad,' 'real' or 'fake,' runs the risk of further normalizing certain dominant identities and practices, while obscuring the larger conditions under which those representations and norms come to circulate. From a pedagogical standpoint then, as Kath Albury (2014) has argued, we must

look beyond the media literacy approach, as it is doubtful that "simply adding a critique of porn to an existing sex and relationships education programme will address broader cultural inequities" (p. 174). Instead, as my thematic analysis shows, porn can act as a catalyst for the kinds of important discussions around those broader cultural inequities that educators should be having; discussions that go far beyond the rather mundane observation that the 'dicks and tits' in porn are larger than average, or that most lesbianism 'doesn't look like *that*' (although these can be great places to start!). And, in attending to the issues raised by porn as also reflecting young people's anxieties around sexual and social relating in general, we can begin to see porn as an ideal entry-point into thinking and educating towards our students' "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014). For Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland, "thick desire" seeks to "interrupt visions of sexual desire that insisted on only locating desire in hearts, minds, and genitals" (p. 16), and instead to looks to "situate desire as…a window through which we might begin to notice the extensive web of factors in a person's life, family, community, and nation" (p. 12). This is to say that when we consider young people as psychosocial subjects, we can see how their experiences with and thinking on porn are rooted in their own subject positions, which are themselves shaped, constrained and haunted by larger social, economic and political forces and histories. What their anxieties around porn point to, then, what we can perhaps assume they 'desire,' is the flourishing of more just, more caring conditions under which their decisions can be made and their lives lived. With that in mind, I want to now conclude with a consideration of a few examples of the kinds of questions an ethical erotics approach that draws on porn as a pedagogical object might include, based on the kinds of themes and related anxieties that emerged in my focus group discussions.

Firstly, participants' discussions around the representations in porn and their concerns about how these representations might impact young people's behaviour, offer myriad entry-

points into thinking with our students about representation more generally. We might ask our students: who decides what kinds of representations circulate as desirable, whether in porn or elsewhere, what are the history of those representations, and how do those representations tend to reproduce unequal power relations? What harm is wrought to you, your community and your society by the reproduction of these representations and relations both onscreen and in 'real life'? What would representations that feel authentic to you look like? What other kinds of stories can/are being told about sex, identity, gender, bodies and desire? These kinds of conversations would require an investigation into the workings of patriarchy, the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and the vaunted status of white, middle-class cis-heterosexuality. They might explore questions of political economy and the media but could also include a consideration of those counter-representations that challenge the status quo. These are but some of the lines of flight that I see as potentially emerging from the 'common-sense' discussions around the problems of porn's representations.

In terms of the second theme, which explored anxieties around porn, deviance and addiction, we could ask students to consider their notions of 'deviance' in more depth, and to ask questions such as: What constitutes 'deviance' and who gets to decide what 'good' and 'bad', 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' sexual and social behaviour looks like? How is the concept of deviance differently gendered, racialized, sexualized, classed? What are the histories of these conceptions of deviance and what are the effects of these conceptions on the lives of young people? And when it comes to deeply-embedded beliefs that seeing leads to doing, particularly with regard to 'deviant' objects such as porn, how do discourses of young people as malleable and easily-influenced help us understand the ways young people are treated (and differently so) in various social institutions, including and especially in schools? These kinds of questions would require us to think with our students about the social construction of deviance, innocence, childhood and health and about how these concepts intersect differently

with different subjects to produce the conditions under which their seemingly individual experiences unfold.

As for the third theme, which focused on exploitation in the porn industry, we might use our students' anxieties around work, sex and worth to ask them to consider labour and exploitation more generally. What does it mean to labour? What are the conditions that have historically structured the lack of regulation and the reality of exploitation in many industries—including the porn industry? What is it about porn that people find particularly exploitative, and why is there such a strong equation between sexual purity and worth in our society? Can porn ever be ethical? How can you support ethical work in general? And if we're thinking about ethical porn, we must also think about ethical sex too. What, therefore, does consent look like and what social conditions enable and constrain consensual sex to be practiced? As Jen Gilbert (2018) argues, simply teaching consent as a matter of someone saying "yes" to sex ignores the reality of the complex, often ambiguous and sometimes unequal conditions under which much sex is negotiated. Considering these conditions in more depth might enable our students to move towards more ethical, more caring and hopefully more pleasurable sex, as well as towards more considered and more ethical relations with others in general. These are the kinds of goals that must be at the heart of an ethical erotics approach to education; an education that does not seek to remove the topic of 'sex' from the wider social context in which people have 'sex' or are 'sexed' or send 'sexts.'

The questions and points of discussion outlined above are but a few that might be generated out of the many, many topics that emerged from young people's problematizations of porn within my focus groups. This is because porn is a nebulous object that can be many things all at once: a genre, a system of representation, a work environment, a sexual relation, a technology, a pedagogy, a crime, a fantasy, a release, and so on and so on. Mainstream media and pornography research tend to focus on the negative and harmful aspects of each of

these categories, and while I don't wish to discount the very real harms that can result from porn's practices and representations, or from the normalization of those practices and representations, I do want to suggest that when we listen to what young people are actually saying about porn, their concerns about its harms are less about the object itself than they are about how to live equitable, ethical and pleasurable lives. And to that end, porn is an incredibly valuable object that absolutely should be included in pedagogies seeking to challenge and even dismantle the power structures that reproduce everyday oppressions.

However, as the next chapter will show, porn as a problem, and porn as an object that points to other problems, is not the end of the story when it comes to how young people engage with it; for porn is also about pleasure, about desire, about fluids and fucking and fun. And these are issues that young people are *also* concerned about, and interested in, and seeking education on, and they are also the very things that young people do not and have not gotten from their oft-joyless (and sexless!) sex education experiences. I will therefore take up focus group participants' discussion on the potential benefits of porn in order to ask: What can sex education learn from porn? How does porn offer young people opportunities to engage in representations, pedagogies and relations that are not available anywhere else? And what can we learn from participants' ultimately ambivalent relationship to the object of porn that might help us think about sex education, and education in general, a little bit differently?

CHAPTER 5

Pornography, Pleasure and the Pedagogical Value of Ambivalence

In Chapter 4 I examined the ways participants problematized porn as a starting point from which to investigate the discourses in circulation around porn, as well as to better understand how young people's use of those discourses often reflect their anxieties around sexual and social relating more generally. In this chapter, however, I want to consider the *other* ways in which participants talk about porn, as an object that also has immense pedagogical, sexual and social value in their lives. I will consider participants' discussions of porn's potential benefits and their narratives of their positive experiences with porn in relation to their characterizations of their sex education experiences as generally lacking, to think about what we might be able to learn about youth sexuality and education from young people's lived engagements with porn. I will also consider participants' positive porn stories in contrast to their tendency to problematize porn as evidence of a deep ambivalence most of them seem to hold towards the object of pornography. This ambivalence runs counter to current approaches to sex education that are rooted in principles of risk prevention, but is, I argue, essential to the development of an ethical erotics curriculum committed to enabling more ethical, more caring relations amongst young people.

This chapter will begin with a narrative thematic analysis of the four main themes of porn's potential benefits that emerged across the focus groups. As in Chapter 4, these themes blend and merge into one another and include: 1) Porn as sex education; 2) Porn as exploration; 3) Porn as stress relief; and, 4) Porn as a form of relating. While these themes were present across all focus groups, they again emerged differently in relation to gender. Interestingly, and in direct contrast to the discussions around porn's problematics, male-identified participants were much less likely to share personal anecdotes or express their open

enjoyment of porn than were female participants. Indeed, many of the young women in this study seemed happy to share details of their porn experiences and porn habits, while the young men, as well as the several trans*/genderqueer participants in this study, seemed more reluctant to do so.

This discrepancy suggests several things. Firstly, under conditions of heterosexual patriarchy, the consequences for admitting to non-normative interests or desires is greater for young men than it is for young women, who are often characterized as more naturally 'fluid' in their desires (Diamond, 2000; Peplau & Garnets, 2000; Radtke & Kuhle, 2013). Male participants therefore have more to lose by revealing personal details about their porn use -- an idea which will be explored in in more depth through a case study in Chapter 6. As well, the young men in my study seemed to have internalized the dominant discourses of their porn use as inherently problematic and therefore appeared reluctant to express unqualified enjoyment or other positive feelings about porn. In contrast, many of the female participants—who are generally not the targets of discourses that problematize porn viewership (though they are the targets of discourses that problematize porn *involvement*)-- seemed influenced by emerging discourses of sex positivity and female empowerment that encourage and even celebrates their porn use. As for trans* and genderqueer participants, as noted in Chapter 2, they seemed reluctant to share many personal details at all, likely as a reflection of their uncertainty around making themselves vulnerable with so many strangers present.

Despite the variation in participants' willingness to discuss personal porn experiences, what was common across all focus groups was a sense that porn often filled in the gaps of a society—and a pedagogy—that remains uncomfortable with addressing pleasure, sex, bodies, and desires. To that end, the thematic analysis in this chapter will also consider participants' thoughts on sex education as well their narratives of their own sex education experiences, to

better understand the pedagogical possibilities of porn for ethical erotics educators seeking to acknowledge and teach towards young people as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008).

In looking at participants' positive porn stories and experiences, what is striking is that many of these same participants also problematized porn as being exceptionally harmful. Indeed, participants sometimes moved back and forth between discourses of harm and experiences of pleasure or joy within the same statement, suggesting that many young people ultimately hold a deeply ambivalent relationship to pornography; a finding that is common to other qualitative studies on pornography viewership as well (Johansson & Hammarén, 2007; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; McKee et al., 2008; Parvez, 2006). I will suggest that this ambivalence is a function of the discrepancy between porn's circulation as an "unhappy object" (Ahmed, 2010) and individual experiences of pleasure, joy, education, friendship and discovery experienced by participants in relation to porn. While ambivalence is often constructed as running counter to the principles of what constitutes a 'good' education--in that education is supposed to be about providing facts and producing certainty--I will conclude this chapter by considering the value of ambivalence for ethical erotics educators seeking to move our pedagogies beyond the limitations of binary thinking towards more generous and compassionate relations of all kinds.

1. Theme 1: Porn as Education

Many qualitative studies have pointed to pornography's pedagogical value for young people seeking further knowledge and information about sex (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Allen, 2004; 2005; Bale, 2011; Hare et al., 2014; 2015; Measor, 2005; Smith, 2012). A similar theme also emerged within the focus groups and was often discussed by participants in contrast to their formal and informal sex education experiences, which they characterized as repressive, lacking in depth, or as overly emphasizing STI prevention techniques and the

biological aspects of reproduction at the expense of more nuanced and more expansive understandings of sex. For example, in response to my question of whether their schools had ever talked to them about porn, Bella had this to say:

> I never learned anything about porn…or anything about sex, it was just, like, how to prevent certain things that come from sex, like, you know, STIs, babies, things like that, but they didn't tell you about the effects of sex, they didn't tell you about how to have sex, they--the most thing they just showed you was how to put on a condom, that was it.

Emily concurred:

> Like there wasn't much done in my elementary school, high school, they talked about periods, and then it was how to put on a condom. And that's kind of like where it ended. And it's sad 'cause they, they miss so many topics, like I don't mean just porn, but some things, like, outside of that, that have to do with sexual experience.

Adriana also lamented the inadequacy of her sex education, which she experienced through the prism of Catholic School:

> Um, in elementary school, 'Fully Alive,' is what it was called…and it basically said 'Don't do it, unless you're married and plan on being fruitful and multiplying,' and the other one was more based off of what STIs you could get, STDs and just like your reproductive organs. But not once did it say the good part of it, of having sex with somebody that you like, it doesn't...like not even promoting sex, but even just it, that it feels good, like they almost scare us out of it without telling us why so many people still do it.

As these excerpts show, many young people's experiences of sex education in the Ontario public and Catholic school systems are characterized by a sense of failure, inadequacy, or even of being actively misdirected or misinformed by educators seeking to "scare" them away from sex. However, it was not just participants' in-school sex education experiences that left them feeling confused or at a loss. Several participants also related difficult experiences talking about sex with their parents. Abdi recalled an awkward conversation with his father:

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> Abdi: I remember asking, uh, my dad I think, once, 'What's sex?' or
> something. It was, you know, just a terrible…[shakes his head].
> Jay: He avoided the question?
> Abdi: It, it's just...I don't know why I even did it! I just did it to see what he
> would say.
> Alanna: Like, what was the question, like 'What is sex?'
> Abdi: Uh, what are, like yeah, 'What is sex?'
> Jay: What would it look like?
> Alanna: Or how do you do it?
> Abdi: Yeah, how do you do it. Um...um...oh, uh, you know, I woke up and I
> see all this stuff [gestures down to his lap and everyone laughs], and what's
> going on. He was like, 'Oh yeah, you know, well this is just, uh'...it was so
> uncomfortable for him. And so, where you gonna go, you're gonna have
> to...you're not getting it in school, you're not getting it at home.

While for Abdi it was his father's discomfort with the topic that shut their conversation down, for Zhang, her parents seemed to actively discourage her interest in learning about sex:

> I remember like when I was like really young, when I was in grade six or
> whatever, and like I kind of got familiar with what sex or porn is and then I
> told my mom about it, 'cause I was still little right, I was, I was a curious
> child…and then my parents were like trying to avoid it. Like avoid talking
> about it and saying like 'Oh yeah, this is not the right thing for you to learn,'
> or like, 'You'll learn it like later in life, you're too young to know it right
> now.' So like they're always avoiding this subject, because they think that
> this kind of subject, like pornography and sex is like really inappropriate.

For Alisha, her parents' repressive approach to talking about sex has continued into her adult life. Discussing her current presence in the Porn and Sex Ed focus group, she claimed that, as a Catholic, "my mother would try to set me on fire if she knew I were here." Parental discomfort in talking about sex, combined with religious or cultural taboos around open displays of, or even interest in, sexuality, creates an environment wherein many young people would seem to need schools to support their learning about sex. However, as the excerpts above show, schools also continue to fail students in addressing questions that go beyond prevention and biology. In the absence of a useful or meaningful home or school-based sex education, many participants therefore stated that porn was the best place they

could go to get answers to their questions about sex. As Remy suggested, "Porn was a way you could vaguely learn what was going on." Omar agreed, stating, "For me, like in terms of knowledge and all that stuff, I get that from, you know, from porn. I mean, school just teaches you the basics--like certain contraceptives and that's pretty much it."

So what kinds of questions not covered by "basic" sex education did my participants seek to answer via porn? In the following exchange within the all-male focus group, Tim, Omar, and Abdi discussed the value of porn in helping young people make sense of certain sexual terms and practices they might have heard about:

> Tim: I was thinking if maybe you just hear a word, for example, like the '69 position' and you don't really know what it is, you can just google porn videos to actually see what it, what it actually is.
> Alanna: Yeah. So it can have like an educational effect, potentially? [Abdi shakes his head slowly, unsure]. No? But, but for--'cause where, where would you go with a question of like, 'what is a 69?' Right? Maybe, maybe your friends, yeah, maybe not?
> Omar: True, I mean...chances are they won't even know, they'll just make something up [laughs]
> Alanna: Right? Yeah.
> Omar: But, uh, yeah, no, that's true, it allows you to seek out answers, I mean I know there's a lot of terms out there…there are lots that I don't even know and that's something--you know, that's where you use Google to find what it is. It can be a learning aspect and maybe even apply it to everyday life [laughing as he finishes that sentence. Alanna starts laughing too].
> Abdi: From porn to real life.
> Alanna: To everyday life!
> Omar: To everyday life!

For these young men, porn can have a "learning aspect" in helping them understand the field of discourse around sex, but also, I would speculate, save them the embarrassment of having to ask their friends about sex and thereby 'out' themselves as inexperienced or unknowledgeable. And while none of the male participants went into specifics about what kinds of things they themselves had personally looked at in porn, Omar did hint that he had applied something of what he had seen in porn to "everyday life." Of course, whether it was

this very same something that was rejected by his partner (as seen in his discussion of unrealistic expectations and porn in Chapter 4) is impossible to say. For Omar never talked in much detail about his own porn experiences, keeping the discussion mostly at the level of the impersonal or the hypothetical; a tendency that was shared by other male participants. Contrary to the popularized image of young men as unabashed sex fiends who would ostensibly share their porn stories with glee, I found the young men, at least in the one all-male focus group I conducted, to be rather reticent about their own porn use. Whether this was because they were averse to sharing their preferences with unknown others for fear of failing to reproduce acceptable heterosexual masculinity, or because they felt that they could not unproblematically do so given the ubiquity of negative discourses around their porn use--or a combination of both--is difficult to say. But what is notable is that their reticence stood in stark contrast to young (cis) women's tendency to share their porn experiences and preferences in detail and often without reservation. This was a surprise indeed.

The discrepancy in how male and female participants talked about their use of porn in their own sex education was visible in several ways. For example, while none of the female participants discussed using porn to learn about particular sexual terms or practices, they did speak of the value of porn in helping them understand more about bodies and how bodies have sex, as seen, for example, in this exchange between Alisha, Kim and Zhang:

> Alisha: My initial knowledge about guys and like how their bodies work...
> Zhang: Yeah.
> Alisha: It was gay sex, it was just totally gay porn, because like, I didn't realize like where the prostate was, or like how--just the guy anatomy as a whole. And gay porn was where I first started to learn, I'm like, 'Oh, this works a little bit differently'--
> Kim: Mmm-hmm.
> Alisha: And then I started doing research into, like, gay sex, lesbian sex--actually, just sex in general. Like it, it shows you, like...
> Kim: Variations in vaginas--
> Alisha: Yeah!
> Kim: And variations in body types.

> Alisha: The fact that all bodies are not the--it sounds like the stupidest thing
> to say, but porn is actually the thing that told--
> Kim: Yeah.
> Zhang: Yeah.
> Alisha: --all bodies are not the same!

This idea that porn can teach young people a positive message about the natural variation in bodies runs counter to the discussion in Chapter 4 about how porn also tends to normalize a certain kind of body – thin, able-bodied, white, with big tits or a big dick – as desirable. But the reality is that the entire online world of porn does offer every kind of body as sexual, especially if you look beyond mainstream porn, as Alisha suggested she had done. In that sense, in the absence of a sex education that addresses the lived and engaged sexual body, (relying instead on "cartoonized" depictions of inert bodies (Janssen, 2006)), porn is one of the only places young people can go to look at bodies without censure, to answer their questions about anatomy, and to see different kinds of bodies being sexual.

Not only did female participants relate experiences of using porn to learn about bodies, but Zhang suggested that porn also helped her learn about how sex might occur:

> Zhang: I think what I learned was like the sex poses, like how, from
> beginning to end, that's what I learned from it. Yeah...
> Alanna: Mmm-hmm. Like different positions?
> Zhang: Positions--
> Alisha: Yeah.
> Zhang: --the process from beginning to end and that thing, yeah.

That a young person might seek out porn to understand what kinds of things potentially happen during sex, or to see how sex proceeds "from beginning to end," serves as a challenge to the assumption that sex is a natural, biological process that unfolds of its own momentum. Instead, Zhang pointed to the ways in which sex is a cultural construct, embedded in particular understandings of what different bodies can/should do, to whom, in what order and to what end, as well as to the ways in which mainstream porn serves the function of

reproducing and recirculating those norms and expectations. For instance, in the all-female focus group, several participants discussed their use of porn to learn about and improve their sexual techniques, but in doing so, seemed to centre male pleasure as the point and purpose of sex. Bella suggested that she looks at porn to understand what she should do in her sexual encounters with men, asking, "Once I have a sexual encounter with a guy, how am I able to please him? What signs should I look for in his face or his body language, you know?" Similarly, Zoey shared,

> Personally, I watch porn just, like, to look at, like, what should I do, like how to please a man, like, how to give a blow job. 'Cause, like, when you're young you don't know how to do those things and you don't want to suck your first time [everyone laughs]. So I watched that so I could learn.

Elena too pointed to the pedagogical value of porn in helping young women such as herself learn what they are supposed to do during heterosexual sex:

> I used to watch a lot of porn with my best friend, just because, like when we were like younger, we were curious and wanted to be like, 'Oh, you know, what kind of moves do girls do?' Like, it always seemed like girls are like 'taking it' I guess, and then the guy's like doing stuff or whatever… So, we wanted to just see like what different things women can do and, yeah. Sort of informative I guess.

While the language of 'pleasing a man,' or 'taking it' from a male partner does seem problematic in that it appears to reproduce sexist or misogynist sexual relations that centre male pleasure and desire as the point and purpose of sex, if we see these young women not only as empty vessels into which the harmful messaging of porn is being poured, but as "legitimate sexual subjects" (Allen, 2008) who have the agency to seek out what it is they wish to know, then the education they are receiving from porn looks somewhat different. While they are at times learning about how society sees the role of women in sex as one of subservience – a role that is reproduced within, but that certainly does not originate from porn—they are also seeking out information on the mechanics and techniques of sex that will

possibly help them please a partner; an experience which can itself be a source of pride, pleasure and power. And so, while the education being provided by porn may be problematic, porn currently remains one of the only places young people can go for the kinds of information—about sexual terms and concepts, about bodies, about practices, about technique--they both require and desire for their sexual lives.

2. Theme 2: Porn as Exploration

While mainstream porn does centre heterosexuality and male action/female subservience, the world of online pornography extends beyond this normative construction – itself rooted in patriarchal relations that existed long before pornography came along – to include any and every sexual relation, desire and practice imaginable. Several qualitative studies have pointed to porn as providing an opportunity for young people to experiment with and explore their sexuality in a safe, anonymous and non-judgmental environment (Barker, 2014; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Kubicek et al., 2010). This finding was echoed by my focus group participants, who discussed the value of pornography both as a general resource for young people seeking to explore their sexuality, and as an object that has been crucial to their own personal understandings of their sexuality and enjoyment of their sexual lives. To the first point, Nina discussed porn as a safe place curious young people can access, particularly within our somewhat repressed contemporary sexual culture:

> I think a lot of people get to explore, um, who they are, like what they're interested in, like what their sexual orientation may be, how they feel about, um, just sex in general. And it's something that, like, they can, on your phone or on your tablet, in your own time, in the privacy, wherever you feel safe, you can kind of get answers to things that you can't just go ask someone, you can't be like 'Mom, this' you know what I mean? Um, so you can kind of explore…without feeling, I don't know, like people are judging you I guess?

On a more personal note, Tim also suggested that, had he had access to porn during puberty, he might have used it to help him understand his sexuality – particularly in the absence of these kinds of discussions in school:

> Tim: I remember like thinking at that age, I did have feelings at that time…and they definitely were not addressed. Um, and like I said, you know, if I was in grade six today, I have a smartphone, like you know...
> Alanna: You'd start looking stuff up?
> Tim: Yeah, I would start looking that up.

While Tim did not specify his "feelings," it is worth noting that he identified privately in his questionnaire as bi-curious, although he did not publicly express this identity in the space of the focus group (the figure of Tim and his struggles around not 'outing' himself will be discussed in further depth in Chapter 6). It is therefore likely that he was alluding to the value porn might have had for him in offering representations of sex that go beyond normative masculine heterosexuality. Indeed, one of the most commonly cited benefits of porn is that it allows queer and questioning young people to explore their desires and interests anonymously (Barker, 2014; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Kubicek et al., 2010). Alisha described her own experience with pornography this way:

> Being someone that's bisexual for example, I--I didn't have a lot of people to turn to when I realized that, and in a very sweet way, porn was one of those things where I'm like, it is, it's completely dramaticized and you know, sexualized, yes, but to a certain extent it's like, okay, I'm in an environment where I know a lot of people around me might not like the decisions I'm making, I can't really find answers, it's difficult to be a little bit different in a place I think, and...porn is kind of helpful in that sense because you have some basic questions, or like you're confused about like how your body's working... it's nice to have that outlet where you can kind of start to familiarize yourself with things that you don't necessarily get information about unless you're like actively searching, or like, coming to university for example, that's open-minded, but when you're in high school, things tend to be pretty closed off.

For Alisha, porn offered a space where she could explore and better understand her emerging bisexuality beyond the 'closed off,' heteronormative spaces of school and the family.

However, while porn is undoubtedly a valuable resource for queer youth seeking

representations of their identities, desires and practices, these representations are also

accessible to anyone surfing a porn site, thereby making the entire world of (non-

heterosexual, non-cis, non-monogamous) sexuality easily accessible. One interesting finding

was that several of the young women who had discussed their use of heterosexual

pornography to learn techniques to please their male partners pointed to the value of lesbian

pornography in helping them explore their own sexuality and desire in a way that male-

centred, heterosexual pornography did not:

> Zoey: I know a lot of women just, like, watch, like lesbian porn and they
> like have, like [gestures to Anita], you were just talking about the whole
> orgasm thing, and like I agree with that, that it's good to like explore your
> own sexuality and a lot of women don't like the whole, like dominant men,
> and they kind of--
> Anita: Yeah
> Zoey: --get turned off by that, so like, I feel like, lesbian porn is like a good
> outlet to like get off yourself…
> Anita: Yeah, every girl starts off with lesbian porn [several participants
> laugh]. It's like, less intimidating, I don't know [crosstalk as several
> participants laugh and agree].

This sentiment was echoed by Adriana who discussed her attraction to lesbian porn, and its

value in augmenting what she described as a phallocentric school sex education:

> High school education or elementary school education taught me what a
> penis was, and that was--and I didn't care, I didn't know anything about it,
> still couldn't tell you what half the parts are, but...you know, but, um,
> between Britney Spears songs and porn [Alanna laughs], that was as close
> as I got to knowing how to feel sexy...and like growing up I started to watch
> a lot of lesbian porn, and I thought that, 'Oh my god, if I like this more than,
> you know, just co-ed porn, I guess, then I was a lesbian.' And I didn't realize
> until many years later that a lot of females like watching that, it has nothing
> to do with your sexual preference.

That these young women who identify as heterosexual get off on lesbian porn suggests that

the relationship between sex, sexuality, gender and desire is more complex than hegemonic

understandings of sexuality allow. The role that porn might play in helping people

deconstruct the assumed relationships between bodies, genders and desires that circulate as normal and inevitable was perhaps best summed up by Karmah:

> Karmah: But [porn] gives you, I think, it, it, just kind of completes this idea that these roles that we see in real life that are just played out in front of us, just kind of go away...I know sometimes they are, like, um, stereotyped even further, and they're perpetuated through porn, but like, sometimes they're broken.
> Alanna: So sorry, which stereotypes, can you just...
> Karmah: Uh, like gender role stereotypes
> Alanna: Okay,
> Karmah: So like, things that we just assume are true, and just assume are, like--This is how things work, like, this is the female, this is the male, this is how gay--this is a gay man, this is a... these all kind of, sometimes, because of different fantasies and different wants that are put out in porn--like, they kind of just go out the window. And it's like this free world in a sense.

Here Karmah was suggesting that porn offers a 'free world' wherein bodies couple and uncouple in all different kinds of configurations. And in this space, the viewer is free to go where their desire and interest takes them, to click on whatever "resonates" with them (Paasonen, 2011), without the constraints of what they think they should want or desire based on their assumed sexuality or identifications. At the same time, the abundance of categories and clips available at the click of a finger ensures that viewers will come across representations that potentially challenge or disrupt their understanding of their own sexuality and of sexuality more generally, in terms of what different genders, sexualities and bodies can look like, act like, want or do. Again, in these excerpts we see that young, cis women were much more likely to share the kinds of porn they have sought out and the ways in which porn has helped them better comprehend, or has even disrupted, their own understandings of their sexuality. But regardless of gender, I would suggest that what emerges in this discussion is that porn offers a valuable counterpoint to the institutionalized hetero- and cis-normativity of the media, the family, religious organizations and especially the school, providing the kind of erotic education, explorative space – and the possibility for surprise -- that young people clearly desire.

3. Theme 3: Porn as a Release

Beyond the more esoteric possibilities of porn as providing a space for the exploration of one's sexuality or body or desires, porn was also cited by study participants as a vehicle through which to get off, find release, relieve boredom or just for entertainment, a finding echoed in Bale's (2011) in-depth interviews of respondents aged 16-19 in the UK. This theme (as perhaps reflecting a normative and acceptable story of porn use) was shared across all focus groups amongst all participants. For example, Omar suggested that watching porn helped him relieve the stress of schoolwork:

> Omar: For me it allows, it allows me to focus--
> Alanna: Yeah?
> Omar: --I could say, um...let's say when I'm studying and all that stuff, I
> feel, um, stressed or whatever?
> Alanna: Yeah.
> Omar: It allows me to, it allows--I do whatever, and it allows me to get back
> to my studying--
> Alanna: A little stress relief, yeah.
> Omar: --stress relief, yeah. So, I think that's a benefit.

Abdi, on the other hand, discussed porn as providing an outlet for sexual frustration for those growing up in societies that strictly regulate sexuality and desire, such as where he grew up in Saudi Arabia:

> I grew up in the Middle East for like the first thirteen years of my life, so, um,
> there, um, the culture is kind of different, it's much more, um, conservative--
> you don't get to interact with women, so a lot of people would have to wait
> [for sex] until they're married, especially women. Guys, I don't know, they
> might find a way here and there. But, women, it's you know, for most of them,
> they would have to wait until marriage and that's crazy, because, I mean, when
> are you gonna get married? There's all these, you know, urges and you're
> looking for a way to, to, you know, to find something but...it's just not
> possible, it's not possible. So you end up looking, um, for videos or whatever, I
> mean. […] 'Cause otherwise I think you just...just go crazy.

To the extent that porn makes it possible for sexual desires to be recognized and potentially acted upon through masturbation, Abdi suggested that it could be helpful for dealing with "urges" in societies that otherwise require them to be suppressed and could even keep people from "going crazy." What "going crazy" meant to Abdi is not clear, but his answer belied a

belief that watching porn could potentially thwart harmful sexual behaviour; a belief that is borne out to some degree by the research, which shows that as pornography has become more available, sex crime rates have actually decreased (Diamond, 2009; Ferguson & Hartley, 2009). And while Abdi did not name himself in this narrative, other accounts that he provided throughout the focus group suggested that porn and the masturbation it facilitates served this very purpose for him, helping him to relieve his stress and relax around women. Of course, this narrative does play into the construction of men as always barely suppressing violent sexual urges, but Abdi notably included women in his discussion, suggesting that in repressive cultures where women are restricted in their movements, it is they who stand to benefit the most from accessing pornography.

Beyond the potential for porn to assist in "stress relief" and ease sexual frustration, some participants discussed porn as a form of entertainment that might be used to relieve boredom. For instance, Adriana said,

> I used to use it as a buffer between studying, when I should have been studying for exams, I just procrastinated [laughs] I got bored and would just watch hours of porn until my parents would come home and I'd be like 'Oh I should probably start studying for my exam tomorrow,' you know? [laughing] But, um...and then I stopped for a while I guess once I actually became sexually active and then this summer I was super bored one day and I was like, 'you know what? Let me see what's new,' like I wanna see if there's any new moves out there, what people are up to.

While Adriana's narrative does seem to indicate that her use of porn at times distracts her from her school work—a concern that echoes the discourses of porn as addictive and as interfering with "normal" (read: non-sexual) youth life—in the end, Adriana ultimately suggested that she consumes porn like any other form of media, as a place to seek out novelty and kill time. Adriana's description of her casual relationship to porn indicates that watching porn is becoming part of a mundane repertoire of everyday media practices among young

people. For participants like Adriana, porn is just another genre or platform competing for eyeballs in an already saturated media environment.

That participants regularly used porn to relieve stress or boredom, to help them focus and prevent them from "going crazy" with sexual frustration challenges the common-sense understanding of porn as deeply addicting or damaging for young people. It also challenges the assumption that even if not harmful, young people's engagement with porn is always deeply meaningful and impactful. While porn is at times engaged with to explore the self in a deeper way, it is also just as likely to be used as a pleasurable activity that offers stress relief and a quick sexual release. This is something to keep in mind, for, as Alan McKee (2012) has argued, in attempting to draw deep conclusions about pornography as a health issue, or an aesthetic statement, or a political discourse, or an identificatory practice, sometimes we in academia forget that porn can also just be about getting off and having fun.

4. Theme 4: Porn as a Facilitator of Relations

The idea that porn can be viewed as just another form of mediated entertainment relates to the fourth and final theme I want to consider, which is the fascinating finding that some participants have engaged with porn in ways that seem to facilitate friendships or other relationships. The ubiquity of porn in the online spaces young people frequent appears to have diminished the taboos around watching porn, such that some participants reported talking about, watching or sharing porn with friends and lovers in a rather casual manner. This was particularly true of female-identified participants – in fact, none of the male participants explicitly discussed watching or sharing porn with friends. Again, this points to the much more relaxed attitude female participants seemed to take towards their own engagement with porn, in comparison to the at-times tense, uncertain and shame-filled tones of participants in the all-male focus groups.

In terms of watching pornography with friends, this was generally only mentioned off-hand as part of longer answers. For instance, in their discussion of the use of porn to learn about sexual techniques, Bella, Zoey and Elena all mentioned watching porn with friends. While they did not go into details about this practice or about what role this experience plays in their friendships, two other participants, Alisha and Nina, related experiences of sharing porn with friends and lovers as a source of bonding. For instance, Alisha shared,

> We'll be on Skype, it'll be like four in the morning, we'll both be on Skype and then we'll both be on different porn websites just linking back and forth videos-- Just trying to like out-screw each other and being like, 'This is worse', 'No, this is worse,' 'No, this is worse,' like—[…]we'll pick a topic and then we'll like, we'll just stream back and forth, not even to watch, but honestly we look at just the absurdity of it. Like how many things can you tell are fake in porn? That's like a game we'll play once a month. And then we'll just go back and forth, back and forth, and we'll see, like, how absurd you can actually get.

For Alisha, sharing porn clips is a kind of 'game' she plays with her friend that appears to have little to do with their actual sexual desires or interests in porn. Instead porn clips are chosen for their absurdity, suggesting an understanding of porn as a genre like any other that can be appreciated for the ways in which it plays with or adheres to that genre—or fails it miserably. Karmah, too, recognized this aspect of porn when she related, "I tend to sometimes see porn, and maybe this is just me trying to make humour out of it, as satire, in a way, because it's so...explicitly ridiculous." Much mainstream porn can therefore be understood as simultaneously a representation of sex and desire and as a send-up of sex and desire—indeed it is porn's ability to walk the fine line between the erotic and the entertaining, the serious and the satirical, that makes it so enjoyable for so many (McKee, 2012; Paasonen, 2011).

While Alisha and Karmah appreciated the absurdity of porn, Nina, on the other hand, related sharing porn clips with friends and partners not as a source of amusement

or as a reflection on the genre, but as a gift of an object that might turn one or both of them on:

> I'm heterosexual, so...like if I would see something that like I know that he'd [her boyfriend] be crazy about, I'd be like, 'Okay, just check out, check out the girl's ass in this one' or something. But then also one of my best friends in the world is gay and I watch a lot of, um, like solo male. And so I'll like link him and be like 'This guy is so effing hot' and he'll link me back and be like, 'Oh my god, check out this like really incestuous like father-son-coach like threesome' and like I'll watch it, whatever, But yeah, so we kind of link back each other. Like I know that I can get with him on that side and then link back and forth with my boyfriend, whatever.

Nina suggested that sharing clips of 'solo male' or 'gay' porn with her friend lets her "get with him on that side" – presumably, the side of their mutual desire for a certain kind of representation that she perhaps does not share with her boyfriend. And although she readily shared clips with her boyfriend as well, it is not clear whether she did so for their mutual sexual pleasure, or whether it was as a thoughtful gesture, akin to sharing an interesting article or funny meme that one is sure their lover will enjoy.

What is striking to me about these excerpts from Alisha and Nina is the notion that young people are increasingly open to sharing porn links with friends and lovers for entertainment purposes, to bond over shared sexual desires, or in a considerate recognition of another's individual pornographic tastes. This kind of casual and friendly porn sharing is not an aspect of contemporary porn engagement that has been addressed in the research. Indeed, pornography use is almost always assumed to be engaged in, and is therefore usually studied, as an individual pursuit. When it is addressed in a social context, it is usually in relation to people's use of it within sexual relationships and encounters (Attwood, 2005; Olmstead et al., 2013; Watson and Smith, 2012). That some of the female participants in my study were willing to share porn clips and therefore their porn interests and preferences with friends suggests that stigmas around porn use and stigmas around open displays of female sexuality and desire are decreasing, at least for certain women (cis, hetero/bisexual). Indeed, some of

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these young women seemed eager to take up and display the values of sex positivity and female empowerment in their focus group discussions, constructing themselves as modern, enlightened women who are actively engaged in exploring their sexuality and desires, oftentimes through porn. In this context, "sex" is no longer a dirty or shameful secret that everyone thinks about and nobody discusses, but a healthy part of life that is both pleasurable and fun.

What is clear from the thematic analysis above is that when participants begin to reflect on their own porn practices and experiences, something more complex than the common-sense discourse of inevitable harm emerges. Participants suggested that in the absence of a comprehensive sex education that takes young people seriously as sexual subjects, and in light of a repressive culture that continues to shame them for their interest in sex, porn becomes a valuable pedagogical resource they can use to learn about the field of sex in general, the biological, anatomical and pragmatic elements of sex, and to develop their sexual skills and techniques. Porn was also discussed as a space that participants, particularly young women, could go to explore their sexual interests and desires, as well as a space that may even challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about the relationship between sex, gender, sexual identity and desire. Unsurprisingly porn was also discussed as an object that could relieve stress or boredom or even repression through sexual release. Finally, porn was discussed by some female participants as an object that could facilitate new kinds of non-sexual relations – as an object of play and fun to be shared and bonded over with lovers and friends.

As an educator seeking to foster and construct an ethical erotics pedagogy that might include porn, I believe there is much to be gained from listening to, and taking seriously, young people's positive stories about, and experiences with, porn. Participants' discussions of

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what they gain from porn makes it clear that there are many gaps and omissions in the sex ed curricula in both the public and Catholic school systems in Ontario. Elements of pleasure, desire, identity, exploration, experimentation, bodies, mechanics and erotic relating – elements that are neglected in contemporary school curricula -- are indeed the very essence of porn and are what make porn so essential to many young people's lives. Listening to and acknowledging young people's desires for pleasurable sexual encounters is also key to understanding them and treating them as "legitimate sexual subjects." As Louisa Allen (2008) suggests, "the importance of being viewed as a sexual subject lies in the agency imbued in this subjectivity...this sense of empowerment is deemed essential for making positive sexual decisions" (p. 251). Feeling that one is entitled to a positive and pleasurable sexual life (and that others are as well) makes possible young people's enactment of an ethical erotics that can better ascertain when violence or coercion is taking place, and that can work towards mutual relations of joy and care as well.

Beyond the importance of listening to what young people say about the value of porn as an object in their lives, there is also pedagogical value to be found in examining the very nature of the focus group conversations themselves, in that they were often full of laughter, jokes, wordplay and banter, reflecting the reality that sex--and porn as the stylized representation of sex-- can be both fun and funny. This lighthearted approach to both porn and to conversations around porn stands in direct contrast to the doom and gloom approach that continues to circulate in contemporary sex education classrooms, which constructs sex as immensely serious and potentially dangerous. This tendency to regard sex and sex-related topics as dead-serious in school settings is so strong that participants regularly apologized for giggling in the space of the focus group—something which I reminded them was more than okay to do. Perhaps, then, we as educators might learn something from porn – namely, that we undermine our own work when we take ourselves and our topics too seriously. When we

fail to acknowledge—and laugh about--the silly, squishy and smutty elements of porn (and

sex) that also make it enjoyable, we render ourselves too uptight and too out-of-touch to

relate to the lived realities of the young people we are trying to reach.

However, in highlighting the value of a light touch when it comes to educating around

porn, I am not suggesting that conversations around porn will always be or should always be

happy. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, discussions around porn are often also fraught with

feelings of anxiety, and these feelings (and the larger social issues they are tied to), are

equally important for ethical erotics educators seeking to better understand the challenges

young people face in recognizing and realizing their "thick desires." Taken together, what

emerges from this and the previous chapter, then, is a portrait of young people as embroiled

in an ultimately ambivalent relationship with porn; an ambivalence that they do not always

recognize or acknowledge, but that is apparent in their utterances and attitude nonetheless.

What I wish to do now to end this chapter is to consider these ambivalent feelings--and their

philosophical and pedagogical value--in more depth, to show how porn's persistence as an

ambivalent object is what makes it valuable for educators seeking to move our students (and

our relations with our students) towards more complex and hopefully more ethical thinking

and relating in general.

5. Pornography, Ambivalence and Pedagogy

Ambivalence in relation to the object of pornography – particularly among women --

has been noted by other qualitative researchers. For example, in her interviews of 30 women

who watch porn, Parvez (2005) found that the majority of women "held profoundly

ambivalent attitudes toward pornography. On one hand, most of the women enjoyed and

valued porn films for entertainment, sexual arousal, and sexual education. On the other hand,

they also experienced occasional feelings of contradiction and discomfort, or emotional

distress" (p. 607). In their study of German students' attitudes towards their own porn consumption, Bohm et al. (2015) found that many young women also displayed an ambivalent attitude, finding pornographic depictions "sexually arousing, but at the same time they thought they were 'dreadful', 'tasteless', 'ridiculous', or 'degrading for the woman'" (p. 82). Finally, in her focus groups with consumers of feminist pornography, Liberman (2015) also noted that "participants maintain ambivalence toward continued viewing; they continue to consume mainstream media and mainstream pornography despite their critical orientations" (p. 178).

On the other hand, men's ambivalence is much less visible in the research, possibly because men are more likely to be studied en masse through quantitative research aimed at measuring porn's effects on their sexual and social behaviour as a whole (see Chapter 2), and this form of research often does a poor job of capturing complexity and nuance. However, when men do express ambivalence in qualitative research it is often in relation to the tensions they feel between their enjoyment of porn and concerns around its addictive qualities (Bohm et al., 2015), or in relation to social discourses that posit their porn use as inherently problematic (Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson, 2009).

Similar ambivalent feelings were reflected in my focus groups as well, generally along the same gendered lines noted in the research above. This ambivalence was often revealed over time, as participants provided seemingly contradictory or inconsistent viewpoints at different moments in the focus groups. For example, as seen in Chapter 4, Alisha initially discussed porn in relation to the dangers of the pornotopia in creating unrealistic expectations for young people, but then later pointed to the value of porn for her exploration of her own bisexuality and as a source of entertainment within her friendships. Zoey, too, came down strongly on porn as problematic in that it objectifies women, but then also discussed the value of porn in teaching her how to pleasure a male sexual partner. Zhang,

who expressed concerns about porn's negative influence on the online self-representation of young women, also revealed that she looked at porn to learn about her own body and to gain knowledge on how sex occurs in practice. Each of these young women reflect a general state of ambivalence around porn, suggesting throughout the course of their participation in the focus group a belief that porn can be harmful in terms of its social impact on young people, but still beneficial for their own individual sexual lives.

For male participants, their ambivalence towards porn was rooted less in considerations of its social impact, and more with how it might affect their own sexual desires, behaviours and capabilities. For instance, Omar discussed a time when he tried a sexual move he'd seen in porn that was unwanted by his partner and suggested that he felt some guilt or remorse around that, but then also repeatedly discussed porn's value as an educational and erotic space where he could learn about sex and relieve stress. Even Abdi, who appeared to have one of the most tortured relationships to porn of any participant, blaming porn directly for episodes of impotence, also reflected on porn's potential value in providing avenues for sexual release in individuals such as himself who often feel nervous around women. Indeed, ambivalent expressions were so ubiquitous amongst study participants that only one participant—Sara—adopted an unwavering stance staunchly against porn, leaving no space for considerations of porn's potential benefits. However, it should be noted that Sara was also the only participant in all focus groups to claim that she had never seen porn, and therefore while her beliefs should certainly not be discounted, all of her knowledge about porn appears to have come from secondary sources such as the anti-porn documentaries discussed in Chapter 4 and not from her own personal experiences with it (the figure of Sara will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6). For those participants who have watched porn, however, what can be said is that they each displayed a range of emotions and beliefs towards it that went far beyond unequivocal condemnation or praise.

So what is it, exactly, about porn, that produces such ambivalent feelings in people? To answer that question, it is necessary to consider how ambivalence has historically been understood as an ontological and epistemological problem. From a modernist philosophical standpoint, ambivalence is a state of indecision on the part of a rational, conscious subject. For example, Schramme (2014) suggests that "to be ambivalent arguably means, at least in one important sense, to be undecided about oneself…Ambivalence is a sign of some form of division of our will, and in that respect a division of our self" (p. 28). This definition assumes a fully conscious self who is merely in a temporary state of uncertainty about how they feel and therefore about how they should act. Ostensibly, this indecision can be resolved through the provision of more information or further education, thereby resulting in the suturing of the divided self and a return to the unity of the rational subject. This understanding of ambivalence has been challenged, however, by theories of psychoanalysis. As Smelser (1998) argues, "many of the dynamics of ambivalence occur beyond the range of consciousness and calculation. The psychological and behavioral reactions involved in ambivalence are likely to be immediate responses to emotions--principally anxiety--that escape personal reflection altogether" (p. 6). As psychosocial subjects we are in many ways opaque to ourselves, and we cannot and do not always know what will trigger the kind of defensive reaction that may cause us to experience and express ourselves as split, pulled between love and hate, attraction and repulsion.

The unconscious elements of ambivalence experienced by participants in relation to porn were certainly evident to the extent that most participants uncritically and unselfconsciously contradicted themselves at different moments throughout the focus groups. However, ambivalence was sometimes expressed within a single statement, as in this comment from Bella:

> When I think of porn, I think of something that is sexual and pleasurable,
> but yet, um, so demeaning. Um, I wouldn't say I look at porn super

negatively because some porn, like, scenes or whatever aren't, like that degrading, they're like actual, some people really do have those sexual experiences and they do like that, but there's the ones that are super degrading like throwing up on a person or, you know, peeing, all that kind of stuff, so, where it, like, comes off, where it makes porn seem super bad, so, for me it's kind of like a fifty-fifty, there's no, like defining line for me, I think porn is bad, I think porn is good.

Here Bella exemplified ambivalence, even eventually declaring herself "fifty-fifty" on porn as both good and bad. A different statement of ambivalence was made by Abdi, who was unsure whether the sexual release offered by porn was helping or harming him:

I don't know. I mean it's, it's definitely, uh, helped, um...not really helped, I don't know if that's a good thing [Alanna laughs]. I'm, you know, maybe if I didn't have porn I would actually go out there and talk to women or, you know, do--go through the, the, you know, it's hard-- it's more challenging, it's a, you know, but at least, you're maybe getting the real, um, more natural way whereas...it's easier to just go online and get off and once you're outside you don't even really, you're not that interested, you're, you're less interested, I would say. You're much more relaxed. But I don't know if that's good.

Similar to Bella's statement above, Abdi's ambivalence manifested itself in a series of half-thoughts, stuttering steps forward and retreats backward, qualifications, and ultimately a conclusion that belied deep uncertainty. It is evident that for those participants, in those moments, ambivalence was not just a state of mind characterized by "inconsistent valuations of an object by the same subject" (Zielyk, p. 62), but was a feeling in the body, a feeling of good-bad that was extraordinarily difficult to express through the limited confines of language, particularly the language with which they were expected to talk about pornography.

To think about ambivalence as a bodily--and not just psychological--feeling of being pulled in two directions, it is helpful to return to Sara Ahmed's (2010) work on affect and happy/unhappy objects. Not only are concepts of "happiness" and "unhappiness" used to mobilize particular affective orientations towards specific objects or relations, but, she suggests, this desire to be oriented in the right way towards the right objects takes root in the body. In order to produce ourselves as "good" people, we "have to work on the body such

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that the body's immediate reactions, how we sense the world and make sense of that world, take us in the 'right' direction" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 34). But what happens when our bodies are affected in a good way, or at least in a pleasurable way, by an "unhappy" object such as porn? Considering the ubiquity of the problematizing discourses that circulate around porn, young people's orientation toward pornography renders their bodily experiences of pleasure as necessarily problematic -- as that which will ultimately lead them to unhappiness. In short, they are oriented in the wrong way towards the wrong object. Within the space of the focus group, participants therefore appeared to struggle to orient themselves in the "right" way towards the object of pornography, providing endless qualifications and clarifications around their enjoyment of and pleasure from pornography, continuously resituating it as "unhappy" and themselves as therefore still "good," often within the same convoluted statement.

For instance, in the excerpt above Bella initially suggested that she doesn't necessarily look at porn "super negatively" because she doesn't think all porn scenes are "that degrading." However, she then interrupted this line of thinking with her own qualification that "there's the ones that are super degrading, like throwing up on a person" that "makes porn seem super bad." In a single statement, she simultaneously took on both her own position of porn as not that bad, and the socially-sanctioned position that problematizes porn, in order to perhaps render herself 'good' in both her own and others' eyes. Abdi's ambivalent statement was more in relation to his own relationship with porn, wherein he suggested that porn had "definitely…helped" in his comfort with interacting with women, but then immediately dismissed his own statement, saying that it had "not really helped, I don't know if that's a good thing." Again we see that Abdi was torn between his sense that porn lets him find release and relax, and his sense that this is not how he should feel and that instead he should be seeking "the real…more natural way" of interacting with women. Abdi was literally unable to voice his thoughts in a coherent way, so strong was his desire to offer up an

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acceptable vision of himself even if it didn't necessarily jibe with the reality of his lived experiences.

While ambivalence was most acutely visible in the psychological and bodily responses of individuals such as Bella, Abdi, Zoey, Alisha, Omar and Zhang, whether in the form of a single convoluted statement or through the expression of contradictory statements over time, it is important to note that ambivalence was also evident in the social space of discourse amongst focus group participants as a whole, suggesting that our emotions and beliefs are socially-situated and contextual even as they are felt to be individually experienced. As the focus groups unfolded, the tone and the focus of the discussion changed, and participants' perspectives on porn often changed too. As previously discussed, participants seemed to have arrived primed to problematize pornography, often answering my introductory and ice-breaker questions with statements highlighting porn's harms and its status as an unhappy object. However, as the focus groups progressed, and participants became more comfortable with one another and the format, they started to share personal anecdotes of porn's role as a happy object in their lives, prompting other participants to share similar anecdotes; a pattern which helps account for the high incidence of contradictory or ambivalent statements throughout the course of the focus groups. It seems that as young people collectively wrestle with competing discourses around porn--the normative discourses that situate it as inherently problematic and the newly emerging discourses of sex positivity that embrace it as normal and fun—the possibility of "happiness" appears in disparate orientations, both in the rejection of porn's exploitation/objectification and in the embrace of an open and proud sexuality that might include pornography. Ambivalence and pornography, it seems, are inextricably bound together.

If we accept that encounters with pornography are characterized by ambivalence, the question then becomes: what should we, as educators, do with that ambivalence? Although

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ambivalence is "an inherent characteristic of language as well as of social relations and interaction" (Mansson and Langmann, p. 16), in modernist philosophical understandings of the unified subject, "ambivalence can only be viewed as the antithesis of a rational, just and well-ordered society, and is therefore experienced as something threatening, like chaos or the madness of an irrational mind" (Mansson & Langmann, p. 16). For example, Schramme (2014), argues that "ambivalence undermines autonomy by undermining the possibility of identification" and is therefore "a sign of failure" that may "lead to failures to act and, in extreme cases, to alienation from oneself" (p. 30). Here ambivalence is constructed as a state of stasis that emerges from the inability of a subject to make a positive and complete identification with a particular belief or perspective, making them unable or unfit to participate in a liberal democratic order that requires certainty.

This understanding of ambivalence as a failure to unify the self under one belief is also at the heart of traditional, modernist approaches to education. Mansson and Langmann (2011) suggest that "there has been a development of a whole range of educational strategies, such as democratic deliberation, rational conversation and efforts to establish mutual consensus in order to keep ambivalence safely out of education" (p. 16). As Fields (2013) notes, within education "ambivalence is difficult to tolerate. Our impulse is to resolve the contradiction, to achieve a consistency across our emotional states, to come down on the side of attraction or repulsion, love or hate" (p. 497).

The desire to keep ambivalence at bay is particularly evident in the field of sexual health education. Both comprehensive and abstinence-only approaches to sex education seek to rectify uncertainty and ambivalence through the provision of "correct" information that ostensibly directs young people's sexual health beliefs and decision-making toward desired, "happy" outcomes in uncomplicated ways (Lesko, 2010). This desire to shut down ambivalence in our students is not only impossible, to the extent that ambivalence emerges

through complex relations between the self and the social that are never fixed, but also problematic because, as Gilbert (2010) argues, "ambivalence is…a constituent feature of pedagogical relations" (p. 235). Not knowing is at the heart of the impetus to learn and when educators embrace ambiguity and ambivalence in sexuality education rather than falling into the familiar, comforting rhetoric of risk-prevention they "allow instead for an expansive approach to learning and knowing that opens with and sustains questions" (Fields, Gilbert and Miller, 2015, p. 384).

If we accept ambivalence as a key component of learning, then I would argue that porn emerges as an ideal pedagogical object in that it occupies a deeply ambivalent position both socially and within the lives of many young people. As my focus group discussions show, thinking and talking about porn is a messy, complex affair, characterized by all manner of happy and unhappy orientations, good and bad feelings; orientations and feelings that emerged not only over the course of the discussion, but sometimes, all at once. And in opening the possibility for a person to feel everything all at once, the ambivalence produced through discussions of porn can be understood in terms of what Dina Georgis (2013) calls a "queer affect." For Georgis, "queer affects are our unrecognizable desires, in excess of what we think we want and think we care about, or in excess of the things we normally would find disgusting" (p. 15). As is evident in my focus groups, pornography and pornographic representations bring to the fore all those things we think we shouldn't want, or care about, or desire, and yet there they are, in the stutters and spaces between words, in the back and forth, in and out of normative discourse, in the continual reassertion of desired visions of the self as defense against the unknown queerness peaking out. In asking my focus group participants to think about and talk about pornography, I inadvertently asked them to, if not acknowledge, at least fleetingly feel, the queer affects of ambivalence circulating through them. And this is

important, for, as Georgis argues, "queer affect offers an opening to thinking, as that which unravels the self in relation to the self's known world" (p. 16).

This unravelling, though at times overwhelming, risky or frightening, is where we as educators can do some of our most interesting work. Bringing attention to the ambivalences present in the social discourse around porn, as well as in young people's discussions of and experiences with porn, might enable us to shed light for our students on the ways that they are always socially situated in larger contexts that to some extent shape the way they think and feel. But it also provides an opportunity for us to help our students consider themselves as, in many ways, unknowable, their identities and desires in flux rather than fixed, and their relationship to others as something that must necessarily be predicated on care and compassion, in recognition of the fact that when it comes to complicated issues like sex and sexuality, porn and pleasure, others are probably feeling ambivalently, and queerly, too. However, embracing ambivalence in our pedagogy also requires that we, as educators, de-centre ourselves in the classroom, in recognition of our own and our students' opaque, contextual and fluid subjectivities. This means letting go of our image of ourselves as all-knowing hero-educators come to save our students and learning instead to sit within and learn from encounters beset by ambivalence, ambiguity and even discomfort. It is two such difficult encounters and the ethical responses these moments generated—as well as my own role as educator/facilitator in these encounters—that will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Pornography, Group Encounters and Ethical Relating

The two previous chapters took a broad lens to my focus group discussions to reveal some of the various and complex ways in which young people talk about porn as bad, good, and often, both. I argued that gaining deeper insight into the kinds of ethical issues and anxieties that young people grapple with around porn, as well as attending to the pleasures and benefits they gain from their engagement with porn, is useful for educators seeking to develop an ethical erotics curriculum that goes beyond the limitations of traditional, comprehensive models of sex ed to make space for complexity, ambiguity, fluidity and ambivalence. However, while bringing our students into these kinds of discussions is an excellent starting point, if we truly care about helping our students engage in ethical relations with others, we must give them the opportunity to do so in ways that move beyond mere talk. This is to say that while discussing ethical issues with our students is certainly important, such discussions do not necessarily cultivate ethical relations *between* people. The move from knowledge about ethics to ethical relating is a tricky one, and, as Sharon Todd (2003) has argued, curricula that seek to mandate an ethical outlook in students are bound to fail. So how, then, can we begin to design a curriculum that helps students not only think and talk about ethical issues, but *become* more ethical? This chapter will attempt to engage with that question through providing an analysis of two small-scale encounters in my focus groups that, though brief, reflect moments of ethical relating between participants that point to the pedagogical possibilities of the pornography focus group, and of group encounters more generally.

Before considering how these two encounters reflected a kind of ethical relating, I will first consider what constitutes an ethical relation, and will suggest that ethics involves actively directing care and what Theresa Brennan (2004) calls "living attention" to the others we encounter. An ethics of care emerges, I will argue, out of a purposeful response to the reality of encountering real, embodied others who, as "defended subjects" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013), are rendered vulnerable in moments of relationality unfolding in space and time. It is this kind of ethical relating as a practical and immediate engagement with otherness that I will examine through the use of case-centred and dialogic/performative narrative analysis methodologies (Riessman, 2008). In particular I will focus on two encounters within the focus groups that I see as embodying both moments of emotional and embodied vulnerability on the part of some participants and ethical labour on the part of others.

Through this analysis I will argue that pornography--as something that is experienced and understood through intimate prisms of sex, gender, identity and desire--is particularly valuable as a pedagogical object that might produce the kinds of affectively-charged moments required for ethical relating to occur, and that this is particularly true within the context of a group encounter. At the same time, the vulnerability wrought by asking participants or students to think about and talk about pornography with others also brings with it intolerable risks that must be accounted for, attended to, and "contained" (Bion, 1962). I will therefore end this chapter with a consideration of what we--as educators committed to ethical erotics principles of both justice and care--can do to create the kinds of spaces and pedagogies that enable students to carefully and caringly engage in ethics as more than just a thought experiment, but as a lived relation to otherness that is never complete.

1. An Ethical Response to the Other

What, exactly, constitutes an ethical response? I want to suggest that ethics, as I see it having emerged within my focus groups, is rooted in practices of caring for the manifest vulnerability of others. This vulnerability emerges through relations between "defended subjects" (Jefferson & Hollway, 20113), a concept which "shows how subjects invest in discourses when these offer positions which provide protections against anxiety and therefore supports to identity" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p. 23). Importantly, "these defences are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p. 18), suggesting that intersubjectivity "follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency" (Butler, 2005, p. 20). When engaging with another, then, "the impressions that we have about each other are not derived simply from the 'real' relationship, but…what we say and do in the interaction will be mediated by internal fantasies which derive from our histories of significant relationships" (Jefferson & Hollway, 2013, p. 45). In this way, Low, Brushwood Rose & Salvio (2016) argue, "the theory of intersubjectivity offers us a way to recognize the play of the unconscious in listening and being listened to" (p. 19).

What notions of intersubjectivity suggest is that in the moment of the relation we are opened in myriad unpredictable and sometimes untenable ways, as old wounds and attachments resurface in the present through our relations with those around us. And through this 'play of the unconscious,' in which we are pulled back and forth between our often-unacknowledged desire for recognition and our need for defense, we are rendered incredibly vulnerable and exposed. This vulnerability is evident not only in the spoken utterances of the defended subject (indeed, spoken utterances often seek to disguise rather than reveal vulnerabilities as a method of sustaining the idealized self one imagines one must be in order to be loved), but is also present in the form of an affective charge that circulates throughout

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the room. For the vulnerable, exposed and unraveled self is a self mired in complex and often

inarticulable feelings of anxiety, pain, shame, fear, anger and pride that take on a tangible

quality such that they are *felt* by the others present. Brennan (2004) calls the process whereby

we come to literally feel the feelings of others, the "transmission of affect." She suggests it

occurs through processes of "entrainment," as bodies take in the affects of other bodies

through visual and aural attuning to the 'rhythms' of the other (how they move their bodies

and deliver their words), as well as through olfactory senses of smell that pick up on the

invisible hormonal and pheromonal messaging of those around us (Brennan, 2004, p. 70). Nel

Noddings (2013) describes this process in less biological, but no less vivid terms as an

"engrossment" with the other (p. 30). When faced with the affects of the other, she claims, "I

receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality"

(Noddings, 2013, p. 30) such that "I have been invaded by this other" (Noddings, 2013, p.

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As with theories of intersubjectivity, notions of 'entrainment' or 'engrossment'

challenge modernist understandings of individuals as separate entities with clearly

demarcated boundaries (of skin, bone, space and mind). As Brennan (2004) argues, "the

transmission of affect means that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is

no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'" (p. 6). And in being

affected by the others we encounter, I want to suggest that in the relation we become, even if

only for a moment, *of others*. As the affects of others move within us, we do not necessarily

know the source of their feelings, we can only respond to what their bodies, and therefore our

bodies, are telling us. In that sense, as Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues, "the body is not simply

a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with" (p. 120).

An ethical response to the vulnerability of the defended other in the intersubjective relation

therefore involves not only showing up for and listening to the other (though it certainly

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begins there), but also in responding in some way to the affective intensity of the vulnerable

other. Brennan (2004) suggests that such an ethics involves

> the refusal to pass on or transmit negative affects and the attempt to prevent
> the pain they cause others—to really prevent it, not just be seen to do so.
> That very refusal carries an admixture of love that, when it predominates in
> the psyche, is also more than kindness; it is seeing the other in a good light,
> giving them the good image, streaming one's full attentive energy toward
> another and another's concerns, rather than one's own (p. 124)

Noddings (2013) too describes caring in similar terms as the moment when "my motive

energy flows toward the other" (p. 33). What is being described here by Brennan and

Noddings and what I am seeking to explore in the case studies at the heart of this chapter is

that ethical relating in the interpersonal encounter requires activity, movement, *doing,* as in

the act of "streaming" or "flowing" energy towards another. Here ethics involves giving

something to the vulnerable other; a gift of some kind that works to move bodies and

subjectivities through painful affects towards spaces of safety and love. And in undertaking

this kind of work, I want to suggest that those 'doing' the labour of ethics are perhaps in

some way changed, made *more ethical* or at the very least more ethically-minded as they

move forward into the world. To think about what this vision of ethics as embodied labour

looks like in practice, in the next section I will draw on both case-centred and

dialogic/performative narrative analysis methodologies (Riessman, 2008) to examine two

particular moments in my focus groups that I see as reflecting both intersubjective and

affective vulnerability on the part of some participants and ethical responses on the part of

others.

2. Case Study: Daria, Sara and 'Disgust'

The first interaction I want to examine took place in Focus Group 1, which was

comprised of eight female-identified participants (see Chapter 3 for demographic data of

participants). This was my first time facilitating a focus group, as well as my first time field-testing my focus group questions, and needless to say, I was incredibly nervous. As participants began to arrive, sitting down in silence to complete their questionnaires, I fretted; What if no one wanted to talk? What if it was painfully awkward? Or worse, what if it was completely boring? However, once we started with the ice-breaker questions and delved into the conversation, participants began to open up, and it soon became a fun, somewhat raucous conversation, with most participants sharing eagerly. There were, however, several exchanges that were not entirely harmonious, and one that stands out took place between two participants: Daria and Sara.

At the time of the study, Daria was 19 years old and described herself in her questionnaire as Caucasian, female and hetero-romantic. She was recruited for this study through a table I had set up in a popular corridor in York University – she approached me to learn more about the study and we quickly became engaged in a conversation about porn and its influence on young people. She seemed very interested in the topic and identified herself as 'sex positive,' while also suggesting that porn was still very problematic. I told her that I would love to have her share these thoughts in the focus group and she agreed to participate. Considering my nervousness at facilitating the focus groups and my concerns that they would be painfully boring, I was excited to have Daria on-board, and indeed she was the first to arrive in the room for the focus group and participated eagerly throughout. Beyond her willingness to participate, Daria was also one of the more overtly political participants, touching on issues of transphobia, racism and slut-shaming, while also sharing some personal anecdotes about her own sexual and porn experiences. In her demographic survey she suggested that she watched porn about once a month and that her current feelings around porn could be described as "comfortable because [I'm] good with my own sexuality."

On the other hand, there was Sara. Sara was 25 years old at the time of the study and described herself in her questionnaire as Persian and Mongolian with 10% European (French), female and "straight but not narrow." She initially contacted me through Facebook, having seen a recruitment ad I had posted on her faculty's Facebook page. She indicated interest in the study, but also informed me that she had never seen porn. This seemed to me a problem and I informed her that the study was designed to gain insight into young people's porn experiences and that I would have to get back to her. After consultation with my supervisor (and out of fear that I would not have enough participants), I decided to let her join the group, thinking that she could at the very least offer a unique perspective, though I remained somewhat uncertain, concerned that if she proved judgmental of porn, she could have a silencing effect on others. Indeed, in her demographic survey she described her current feelings around porn this way: "I think it's an abuse to one's sexuality and it makes sex a disgusting act" while also claiming that "I didn't even know what sex was until I was 18." Together, both of these statements create a profile of someone that is perhaps sheltered and rather conservative. However, throughout the focus group she did try to maintain a positive and enlightened attitude, particularly around discussions of sex education, citing intervention as the best method for protecting young people from the dangers of sex; a discourse that, as I have shown, is considered "progressive" within mainstream educational circles. Still, as the conversation below indicates, her negative feelings around porn did, at times, come through.

The following interaction between Daria and Sara (and myself) took place early in the focus group following my initial set of ice-breaker questions, which asked: "What is porn? How do we know an object is porn and not something else?" In response, several participants began to debate the differences between porn and art, discussing the various porn platforms available. And then Sara raised her hand. I called on her; I was a bit nervous, but also curious to hear what she would say. My initial exchange with Sara went like this:

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Sara: For me, when I hear the word 'porn' I think, um, I imagine an exploitation of the body, male and female. Not just female, for me…and I also associate hard-core [pauses] … I'm getting kind of uncomfortable [laughs nervously] … hard-core BDSM with porn. And to me that's, personally, that's absolutely exploiting one's body.
Alanna: Okay, so do you see people exploiting themselves, or are they being exploited by other people?
Sara: Exploited by other people.
Alanna: Okay, and which other people?
Sara: Um, in the case of BDSM, it's the submissive that's being exploited… Like I know that they say that it's consensual and all that but I still think it's very degrading…Like uh, spitting and like those things, being dominating in a very disgusting way…

As Sara concluded her thoughts on what constitutes porn, Daria raised her hand to speak, a determined look on her face. The conversation continued, and it was several minutes before there was a pause, but Daria's hand remained high. When I called on her to speak, her voice cracked as she looked at Sara:

Daria: Um, I just wanted to respond to Sara?...Um, I think, when you brought up, like BDSM, you were like, "disgusting," um, I think that is—
Sara: I said, 'hard-core BDSM'
Daria: Hard-core BDSM, yeah, hard-core BDSM is 'disgusting.' I think…we should like be watching it and like, not kink-shaming for example…because maybe in, in like the video it might be uncomfortable to view for some people but like, for certain people that is like a lifestyle that they could enjoy, um there are certain kinks that people do enjoy in their life and maybe that's something that they're into, so...Just like slut-shaming is wrong and like, it's a woman's body and it's her identity and no one should ever say, like "no, you can't wear this" or like, "no, no, you got raped because you were wearing that, so, it's okay that you were harassed," like, it's kind of like, that stuff is also something that can be part of someone's life so, if you're uncomfortable with it or someone else is uncomfortable, like I don't know how to say this without being rude, but like, if you're not comfortable with it, don't really shame others for it in a sense, 'cause it can hurt some people if they like something and then like, it's like 'no that's very disgusting.'

Daria's speech stopped the conversation in its tracks, as it was clear that she was pretty upset and even angry with Sara. To get the conversation going again, I made a generalized statement about respecting each other's differences (my response will be

examined in more detail at the end of this chapter), and the focus group carried on, returning to discussions about exploitation and the porn industry. But bad feelings lingered.

If we take the notion of defended subjects as a starting point, we can begin to see what provoked this exchange, and can perhaps better understand why it was so affectively charged. My initial ice-breaker question was meant to elicit basic descriptors of what kinds of objects constitute porn, and to highlight for participants the range of objects, sometimes unexpected, that might constitute porn for others; however, the openness of this question also allowed participants an entryway into talking about what they really wanted to talk about, akin to Jefferson and Hollway's (2013) notion of "free association" (p. 37). For instance, without any prompting, Sara immediately made a generalized statement that equated all porn with hard-core BDSM and therefore with pain and exploitation. To sum up her point, she eventually landed on the highly-charged descriptors of hard-core porn as "degrading" and "disgusting."

There is a lot to unpack in this initial statement from Sara. First of all, Sara had never seen porn--a fact which she shared at the outset of the focus group--but she had seen documentaries about porn such as *Hot Girls Wanted* (Jones, Bauer, Gradus, Huckabee & Bauer, Gradus, 2015), which she cited extensively later in the focus group as the discussion turned to the porn industry. To reiterate, this documentary provides a scathing view of the unregulated amateur porn industry in Miami and emphasizes the at-times brutal and exploitative treatment of the young girls who are recruited for these films, many of which are part of the "hard-core" or "humiliation" genres of porn. This film was clearly there in her mind from the outset, as she started her response with "I think" but then quickly moved to "I imagine" when discussing porn as "an exploitation of the body, male and female." It seems she could only "imagine" this exploitation, because her main reference point was second-hand. But her wording confused me - the idea that porn was "absolutely exploiting one's body" suggested a kind of agency that seemed at odds with her statement. I tried to clear up

whether her concern was actually with other people being exploited and she seemed to concur, suggesting that even supposedly "consensual" BDSM was actually exploitation, as in her worldview no one would willingly submit to "spitting and all those things."

This line of conversation clearly made Sara uncomfortable, despite the fact that she brought it up; she stuttered, she hesitated, she laughed nervously. Her discomfort was palpable. However, I see her willingness to push through her discomfort to talk about these topics at the outset of the focus group as reflecting a desire to be seen as one who can speak with authority on porn, despite her inexperience with it. This is, indeed, a performative utterance, one that situated her in the normative camp of those who oppose extreme, fetish pornography as inherently harmful (see Chapter 4). However, that it was this "hard-core" vision of porn that haunted her imagination also suggests several anxieties percolating beneath Sara's surface. First, there was her initial claim that in participating in porn, performers exploit their bodies, ostensibly through selling sex for money -- a concern that circulates in anti-porn discourse more generally and that suggests Sara's investment in ideas of sex work as a degradation or defiling of the self. Second, her immediate association of porn with pain and exploitation might also point to anxieties she has around sex more generally, as that which might also be degrading and painful, especially if what she has seen in documentaries is to be believed. Because based on her questionnaire (in which she says she didn't even learn about sex until she was 18) and based on her discussion throughout the focus group, I would speculate that Sara had had very little if any sexual experience at all. And so her discomfort in talking about porn might in fact have been a discomfort in talking about or thinking about sex; a discomfort which she pushed through in an attempt to perform the "straight not narrow" person she imagined herself to be, particularly as she was faced in this moment with other women who seemed much more at ease and familiar with these kinds of topics. Sara's unprompted expression of disgust at an imagined hard-core BDSM

pornography that involves spitting on other people could also be read as revealing her twinned fascination with, and rejection of, a kind of sex and subjectivity that might take pleasure in its own abjection. Though she condemned this kind of porn at a conscious level, producing herself as a seemingly knowledgeable and normative member of the group, that she brought it up at all suggests a deeper, perhaps unconscious desire to know, to see, to take in that which she professes to detest. But in the end, her statement concluded with the charged language of "degrading," "dominating," "disgusting," suggesting an investment in this vision of porn (and possibly sex) as an unhappy object; a vision that implicates others who might enjoy or participate in porn as perhaps "degraded," "dominated" and "disgusting" themselves.

As soon as Sara finished speaking, it was evident that Daria wanted to respond -- she was staring directly at me with a purposeful look that let me know she would not let this thought go. When she finally got her turn to speak, it was clear she was shaken. Her voice rose and it almost seemed like she was going to cry. She began her response by directly addressing Sara - an act which itself was rare in the space of the focus group, as participants regularly agreed with, but rarely challenged one another (a limitation of the focus group method that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). Daria immediately took issue with Sara's use of the term 'disgusting' to describe BDSM and Sara interjected with an assertion that it was "hard-core BDSM" that she found "disgusting." However, this qualification didn't placate Daria, although she did turn her statement away from Sara towards a more generalized cautioning that "we" should all beware of kink-shaming because "for certain people that is like a lifestyle that they could enjoy." The assumption that could be made here, of course, is that Daria herself was one of those "certain people" who might enjoy these kinds of "kinks," although nothing in her demographic survey pointed specifically to an affinity for BDSM (not that this survey was in any way exhaustive of participants' histories of sex, porn

and desire). At the very least, Daria was willing to risk being identified in this way by the rest of the group in order to address what she saw to be Sara's judgmental statement. Perhaps more telling of Daria's own defensive subjectivity in this moment was that from her defense of BDSM and those who might enjoy it, Daria then slid into talking about 'slut-shaming.' Daria's seemingly unprompted discursive move from kink-shaming to slut-shaming suggests a broader defense against Sara's construction as 'disgusting' those facets of herself or her experiences that might be considered 'kinky' or, more likely, 'slutty,' such as her own personal enjoyment of sex, which she referenced throughout the focus group. In boldly challenging Sara, Daria could be seen to be rejecting the conservative discourse that equates sexual purity with worth in order to reassert her investment in discourses of sex positivity and female empowerment (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the tension between these two discourses in the focus groups). But she was not only making a general statement about sexuality; she was also defending herself against Sara, as she again turned to Sara and suggested that "if you're uncomfortable with it...don't really shame others for it" because the language of disgust "can hurt some people." While she moved away from suggesting that she herself was hurt by these words, protecting herself through the language of "some people," Daria's emotional response as well as her direct address to Sara strongly implies that Sara had hurt Daria's feelings.

3. Case Study: Tim, Abdi, Omar and 'male sex toys'

The second interaction I want to examine took place in Focus Group 2, which consisted of four male-identified participants. After having facilitated the female-identified focus group the day before, I was feeling more confident and organized in terms of how to

move things along and what questions needed tweaking. However, I was also a bit nervous about facilitating a group of male participants, wondering if my female-ness would leave me feeling vulnerable, or if they would feel as comfortable sharing intimate details with me as the women had the day before. But as we settled into the ice-breaker questions, the participants opened up and conversation flowed fairly naturally for most of the focus group, with the exception of a few somewhat awkward moments; many of which involved Tim.

Tim was 22 years-old at the time of the study and identified as Guyanese, male and bi-curious. He was recruited after contacting me in response to posters I had set up around York University's campus, and although he seemed very interested in the topic, he was rather shy and quiet throughout most of the focus group. The interaction involving Tim that I recount here took place during a conversation between all participants around the porn industry and whether or not it was exploitative. As the three other participants, Abdi, Omar and Jay, were discussing whether porn has always and will always exist, Tim raised his hand and broke in:

Tim [to me]: Um…if we say 'porn industry' does that also include sex toys?
Alanna: Uh, it could, yeah.
Tim [turning to the rest of the group]: Okay, so, what are your views on that?
[Abdi, Omar and Jay look confused]
Alanna: On sex toys in general?
Tim: Yeah.
Alanna: What are *your* views on sex toys?
Tim: I don't know. Do you guys watch porn, I guess, just to see what a sex toy is? How it's used?
Abdi [laughing]: Um, no not to see what a sex toy is, but to see the girl using it.
Omar: I think it may, it may come up, but it's not my intention.
Tim: Okay.
Alanna: Yeah, but I mean it is its own category, right, so obviously there's like definitely people interested in, in that, yeah.
Tim: And you only watch female sex toys, even though you're a male?
Abdi: Um, female sex toys. What...what is that? Like a… [looks down at his lap and gestures with his hands, indicating a penis].
Tim: You said you watched, you know, might watch, a porn video to see how a female enjoys it, but what about male sex toys too?
Abdi: I haven't--
Omar: It's based on your preference, right?

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> Tim [in a low voice]: Preference.
> Abdi: I have seen, uh… [trailing off]
> Alanna: Male sex toys is a growing industry, definitely.

The conversation then moved on to a discussion of The Fleshlight and how the porn industry is involved in producing sex toys. Tim never did get his answer.

What stands out to me in this moment is the way in which Tim danced around admitting his own interest in sex toys. After determining that sex toys could indeed be considered part of the pornography industry, he turned to the other participants as though it was he who was leading the focus group: "Okay, so what are your views on that?" he asked. Abdi, Omar and Jay seemed confused, particularly as this topic had come out of left field. "On sex toys in general?" I asked, trying to clarify. I wasn't sure what he meant and I tried to get him to elaborate—"What are *your* views on sex toys?"--but he deflected, turning his question back to the group: "Do you guys watch porn, I guess, just to see what a sex toy is? How it's used?" Again, he was stymied, but he persisted, asking two more times if the other participants had ever sought out videos involving sex toys, and male sex toys in particular, getting a bit more flustered, a bit more adamant with every ask. And yet throughout this interaction, he also tried to maintain an academic, rather detached tone; he was just curious, he was just trying to get to the bottom of this issue. At no point did he suggest that he himself was interested in or enjoyed porn that depicts male sex toys. And yet his repeated attempts to get other participants to discuss this topic, combined with the fact that he initially raised it apropos of nothing, suggests that Tim was in fact very interested in sex toys, or possibly in hearing other young men talk about sex toys. But Tim's desire to talk about sex toys didn't feel rooted in titillation to me. Rather, in this moment, Tim struck me as genuinely seeking to answer that age-old question asked by all young people of themselves: Am I normal?

Tim's utterances reflected both a move towards and a resistance towards revealing his desires in the space of the focus group. His reluctance was understandable. As discussed

above, Tim identified in his survey as "bi-curious." He also listed a variety of porn interests including "teacher-student, masturbation, cute boy porn, incest, hentai, torture, shemale, bisexual and wet dreams," some of which suggest a queer orientation or set of desires. However, within the space of the focus group, Tim never explicitly discussed his identifications or desires (unlike other participants of both genders, many of whom referred either casually to the gender of their sexual partners or directly stated their sexual orientations or preferences). In finding himself in a group of young men he did not know, all of whom had identified as heterosexual in some way (indeed, Abdi even reinforced his heterosexuality in this exchange when he claimed he might look up sex toys to "see the girl using it"), openly admitting to bi-curiosity could be dangerous, particularly as queer expressions of sex and gender remain marginalized in Western patriarchal society. And while Tim seemed to think he was adequately managing this risk by adopting the persona of one who was merely curious about queer objects such as male sex toys, I would suggest that he wasn't fooling anybody. In this moment, Tim's queerness was exposed.

4. Ethical Relating in Practice

While it is evident to me now, upon analysis, that Sara, Daria, Abdi and Tim were engaged in defensive or performative utterances to protect themselves against particular anxieties they might have had in relation to their own identifications and in relation to those around them, it's important to note that in the moment of the focus group interaction, these defenses were not necessarily understood as such. As the relation was unfolding, neither myself, nor the other participants had access to the kinds of demographic information that might have allowed for some perspective on the larger meaning of those interactions or utterances. Rather what stood out to me in those moments, what makes them memorable to

this day, is the ways in which they were affectively-charged and rife with difficult emotions. This is to say that in the moment of the group encounter (especially in encounters with strangers), it is not always possible to make sense of, or give context to, others' psychosocial subjectivities. While perhaps some educated inferences can be made through superficial readings of various identity markers about who others are and what they might want, or about the larger social forces that might be haunting them, I want to suggest that in the moment of these encounters, what was being 'understood' was not Daria, Tim's and Sara's psychologies, but instead, their affects; the stories their bodies were telling us. Daria's persistent, unwaveringly raised hand and her cracking voice, her turn towards Sara and her use of the word "hurt"; Tim's flustered demeanor and repeated questions seeking different answers confronted the group in the moment with something that felt important--a vulnerability, an openness, an exposure--but something that, without further insight, we could not necessarily name. And when faced with this deeply-sensed, but unnameable feeling that something was wrong, that someone was exposed, or hurting, or ashamed or scared, when the defenses of the other were experienced in our flesh, in our bones, the only ethical thing to do in that moment was to respond.

For Sara, this response came a few minutes after Daria had engaged in her emotional rebuke of Sara's words. Although following Daria's speech the conversation moved on to the issue of porn and exploitation, something was clearly weighing on Sara's mind; the moment there was a lull, Sara's hand shot up. She turned to Daria and in a quiet voice said: "About your comment, um, that was just my, my personal opinion, like, maybe I shouldn't have used the word 'disgusting,' but for me it's just like, I don't know how people do that. You know?" On the surface there didn't seem to be much to Sara's response. Indeed, it could be read as a performative statement in defense of Sara's 'straight but not narrow' vision of herself, particularly as she was being faced with the faces of others who were clearly more sexually

experienced than she, and who were possibly calling her out as judgmental and hurtful. It could also be read as a genuine question hinting at Sara's continued anxiety, uncertainty and perhaps even curiosity around sex and sexuality, around the meaning of such acts as spitting on another person. In admitting that she doesn't "know how people do that," Sara was also perhaps inversely asking other participants: "How do people do that?" "How do you do that?" "How will I do that?" But beyond these potential motivations for her response, I also see this moment as Sara offering the gift of her uncertainty back to Daria, particularly as Sara turned to Daria with deliberation and repeated (while attempting to undo) the words that had caused the hurt: "Maybe I shouldn't have used the word 'disgusting'". She went further by taking the descriptor of 'disgust' back onto herself two times, in stating that it was just "my personal opinion" and that "I don't know how people do that." Here I see Sara as engaging in the ethical labour of trying to mend Daria's pain at having had some part of herself characterized as disgusting, a pain that Sara had caused through her use of affectively-charged, highly-judgemental language. But it was only when Daria's defensive vulnerability emerged through her relation with Sara—a vulnerability that circulated throughout the room and affected us all to the point that the conversation momentarily broke down--that Sara was moved to respond with care. Sara was affected by Daria's pain, she let herself be affected. She was listening, she heard and felt what Daria both said and tried not to say to her, and so she turned back to Daria and said in her own kind of way, "I hear you and I'm sorry." Whether Daria accepted Sara's sort-of apology is difficult to say, but after Sara made this statement, the tension in the room dissolved somewhat and we were all able to continue our conversation with the newfound realization that perhaps none of us knew who the others around us were, that all we could know is that they contained complexities beyond fathoming, and that going forward we must all be more thoughtful, more careful in what we do and say.

While Sara's response emerged out of the pain she had directly, if inadvertently caused Daria, the ethical work undertaken by Abdi and Omar in response to Tim's vulnerability was of a different sort. Tim's queries about sex toys arrived as an interruption to the flow of the conversation. He tried to make his interjection seem natural, as though it was merely an extension of the conversation that was already underway—"If we say 'porn industry', does that also include sex toys?"--but the segue was forced, and it threw me off a bit as I struggled to respond in an affirmative way: "Uh, yeah, it could." It seems to me that Tim had something he wanted to talk about--sex toys--and that he was simply looking for a moment where he could work this topic into the conversation in what he likely hoped was a casual way. But it was not, and that it was not is what made the entire moment feel rather awkward, particularly as Tim kept pressing the point, asking the other participants their thoughts on sex toys and porn three separate times, despite their seeming (and perhaps performed) lack of interest in this topic. Tim seemed to really need to know if anyone other than himself cared about that topic and it was in his almost desperate persistence that he was rendered vulnerable, as the queerness that he had not publicly asserted nevertheless poked through into the heterosexualized space of the all-male focus group. But, importantly, even though none of them identified as queer (and even though Abdi did defensively re-assert his own heterosexuality in that moment), the other participants did not castigate Tim for his vulnerability in his backhanded admission of an interest in sex toys. Instead, I see Abdi and Omar as having engaged in a kind of ethical labour through their responses, through the ways they tried to dissolve Tim's anxiety by meeting him halfway, by creating space for Tim's interest that didn't necessarily implicate him personally. Abdi made jokes: "female sex toys. What...what is that?" he asked, while looking at his crotch, suggesting that maybe his penis could be considered a toy. More seriously, Omar suggested that although he doesn't seek out sex toys intentionally, he had seen them in porn, reassuring Tim that he was not alone. And

ultimately, it was Omar who helped Tim land on the vagaries of 'preference' - a term that Tim repeated in a low voice, as though turning it over in his head, a gift that had been offered. In this moment I see Omar and Abdi as having engaged in the ethical work of being very careful with Tim's vulnerability, experienced as an intensely awkward affect, as he was unintentionally revealing something that he had not manifestly stated about himself. 'It's just a matter of preferences,' they said. 'There is no right or wrong, you are not strange for wanting this,' they implied. 'You are safe here, you are okay.' These things could not be said explicitly because that would have broken the façade of generalized interest in sex toys that Tim had built around himself in that moment. But the recognition of Tim's painful otherness and the ethical work of kindness on Abdi and Omar's part is implicit.

Beyond the ethical work undertaken by focus group participants in these moments, I also want to consider the ethical nature of my own role as facilitator during these moments of psychosocial and affective vulnerability. I had initially designed the focus group questions in such a way that I imagined participants could answer entirely in hypothetical or theoretical responses, thinking that they might not be comfortable sharing personal aspects of themselves with unknown others. However, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, even when speaking about hypothetical others, participants also often appeared to be speaking about themselves, and in this way the notion that I could somehow "depersonalize" the discussion was faulty. At the same time, I still wanted to offer participants the sense within the focus groups that they were being protected, particularly when they appeared to be reaching their limits, as in the cases of Daria, Sara and Tim. To that end, I undertook a kind of caring work in response to their vulnerability that is akin to Bion's concept of "containment" (1962). Rooted in psychoanalytic thinking, "containment" describes

> a very particular relationship in which the mother proffered not only loving,
> nurturing, nourishing qualities to the baby, but also formative mental ones,
> of the sort that could be drawn on to *make sense* of experience; that could

make meaning available and thus could *actively* contribute to the growth of the mind (Waddell, 1998, p. 33).

When faced with the chaotic passions of the young child, the mother as container is ideally "able to take in the [infant's] projections, to resist being overwhelmed by them, to render them manageable and, in a sense, to hand back to him a quality of experience which makes him feel divested of terror and capable of reintegration" (Waddell, 1998, p. 30). She does this not through an "active making sense" of what the child is feeling, but rather through "the simple of act of being able to hold the other in mind, to listen to the other, and to accommodate the feelings and ideas they are able to express even before the meaning of them can by fully grasped" (Low et al., 2017, p. 41). Containment is therefore akin to the experience of "being held in a primary psychic skin" (Waddell, 1998, p. 33). Through the mother's unspoken and understanding presence, the child is kept from coming completely undone in and through their passions and can therefore eventually build up their own ability to hold and contain themselves.

As participants in my focus groups engaged with one another around the topic of porn and were rendered vulnerable as a result, I found myself undertaking the work of attempting to contain their vulnerability, which they themselves likely did not recognize in the moment, by taking in the affects alongside their words and offering something less implicating and hopefully less painful back. For instance, immediately following Daria's statement against kink- and slut-shaming, the affective charge in the room was palpable; she was shaking with emotion, on the verge of tears. I could feel that she was working through complex emotions of anger, hurt and shame and so I tried to take these feelings off of her and turn them into something else, in this case offering to the rest of the group a version of her words as a general admonishment that we all be mindful of our language:

> I think the word 'disgusting' is just, it's a very loaded word I guess is what you're [Daria] saying, yeah, so maybe we can try to at least keep in mind

that something that might be disgusting for one of us might be very pleasurable for somebody else or might be enjoyable or something that they're interested in, so even if we just, uh, you know, use our, use our language recognizing that, like, what we think about something might not be, like, a blanket statement we can make about something in general, 'cause, yeah, porn is so personal, right?

Here I am taking the word 'disgusting' off of Daria's shoulders and putting it into my hands, turning it into something else, into pleasure, into joy, into interest, into that which that ought not be judged by anyone else. After all, 'porn is so personal' I state, suggesting that my porn use is also personal and that it is not something I (nor anyone else by extension) need feel ashamed about. In this moment I am also taking Daria's emotional admonishment of Sara into my hands as well, de-personalizing it with collective pronouns such as 'we' and 'our' so that both Sara and Daria can escape this moment relatively unscathed, but with something hopefully useful having been handed back to them; a different, less painful, less pain-inducing way of thinking about and talking about this topic moving forward.

In a different manner, I also felt compelled to intervene in Tim's attempt to draw out a conversation on sex toys with the other participants, as in doing so he was rendered vulnerable through hinting at his own potentially queer desires. As he asked the other participants about sex toys, and they gave confused and lukewarm responses, I interjected twice: "Yeah, but I mean it is its own category, right, so obviously there's like definitely people interested in, in that, yeah"; and "Male sex toys is a growing industry, definitely." These two statements each did the work of containing Tim's exposed self in this moment, an exposure which was experienced at an affective level as a kind of awkwardness, even desperation. But through generalizing my statements to suggest that because there are "definitely people interested in, in that [sex toys]" it is "a growing industry" I was also doing the work of blanketing his exposed self with the less implicating language of "people" and "industry" to suggest that an interest in sex toys is just another form of desire in the wide spectrum of what can constitute 'normal'--and marketable--sexuality. These kinds of

statements also hopefully did the work of giving Tim space to imagine himself as part of a larger community of other like-minded sex toy enthusiasts that he can count himself among (if he wants) without shame.

In revisiting my responses to these participants, it's possible to read them as also reflecting my own discomfort with the strong affect that was circulating in those moments; an affect which I perhaps took to be too disruptive to the sociality of the group and that I then proceeded to shut down. For instance, I could have moved towards participants' discomfort in order to unearth something further about it, perhaps through asking Tim point-blank about his interest in sex toys rather than letting him deflect it, or perhaps through asking Daria to consider why she was so upset by Sara's comment. However, I want to suggest that as a facilitator of a space wherein participants were encountering one another for the first time, I had an ethical responsibility to contain rather than provoke difficult affects in the focus group and amongst and between participants. This is where the focus group differs from the one-to-one experience of the psychoanalytic or interviewer-interviewee relation described by Jefferson & Hollway (2013) in their work on defended subjects. Whereas the interviewer/analyst may be seeking to arrive at *the gestalt* (p. 69) of a person's thinking on, or experiences with, something like pornography, the nature of the focus is group is such that participants may be rendered vulnerable to others in ways that are unbearable for them. I felt obliged to hold Tim, Daria and Sara's vulnerability alongside them, to help them contain it and turn it into something less risky, less personally implicating, and also less publicly painful, enabling them to maintain, at least within the momentary space of the focus group, something of their idealized sense of self. In doing this, I was perhaps also giving them the space and opportunity to later engage in some kind of self-reflection; a process that may involve a deliberate return to the affectively charged moments to sort out their meaning and that is integral to the further development of the 'psychic skin' discussed by Waddell (1998,

p. 33). Indeed, in her follow-up questionnaire, Sara reflected on her experience in the focus group, stating that "I was uncomfortable." And when asked what she learned about herself through her participation in the study, she stated that she learned that "I'm a bit conservative when it comes to porn," a lesson that was no doubt forged through her painful encounter with Daria; an encounter that she will have to continue to think about if she wants to enact the 'straight not narrow' person she imagines herself to be. (Daria, unfortunately, did not complete her questionnaire, so I have no further insights into whether this encounter stayed with her or not).

Tim, too, returned to the affectively charged moment described above in his follow-up questionnaire. Although he again didn't state his own personal interest in sex toys, he did note when asked what he learned about what other people think/feel about porn that "It was interesting to see everyone's reactions on the topic of sex toys." That it was this moment that Tim recalled as noteworthy or "interesting" is unsurprising, as it was here that he was most exposed. And perhaps he will continue to think about what this moment means for him, as he continues to grapple with his own unique desires. Whether Tim is gay or bi or something else entirely is unimportant -- what matters is that within the space of the focus group, his manifest 'otherness' was handled with care, hopefully opening the possibility for him to know that whatever he wants, whatever he is, he is okay.

The two moments described in the case studies above were brief, and on paper, don't seem to amount to much. But that they stayed with me, that they moved me to think about them in such depth points to the ways in which these kinds of difficult encounters bring ethics to the fore not as a pre-ontological state of being, nor as prescribed set of principles to be followed, but as a lived relation to otherness. Ethical relating as it was undertaken by my research participants and myself involved *being for* the actual others in our midst; being

moved by them and showing up for them in body, in gesture, in speech, in action. This is a vision of ethics as an embodied form of labour that must be engaged in in the flesh; it is a kind of praxis. And because ethics is praxis, it takes practice. Indeed, without practice there is no ethics, and in this sense my understanding of ethics is akin to what moral philosopher Joan Tronto calls an ethics of "practices all the way up" (Van Nistelrooj, Schaafsma, & Tronto, 2014). Our goal as educators, then, should be to not only teach young people about ethics and ethical issues, such as those outlined at the end of Chapter 4, but to give them (and us) ample opportunity to actually live as, and work on, their (and our) ethical selves. To the extent that my pornography and sex education focus groups resulted in the kinds of relations that brought out difficult affects and therefore ethical responses in participants, they serve as a useful model for thinking about what a pedagogy committed to developing greater ethical capacity in our students might look like. The question of what such a pedagogy might entail will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

5. Ethical Practice and Pedagogy

If ethics is a practice that emerges through one's participation in affectively charged encounters, how could we develop a pedagogy that makes space for this kind of practice to occur? That is, how can we create environments where *being-of*, and therefore, *being-for*, become central features and not mere accidents of our pedagogy? Todd (2003) argues that as it stands, the majority of encounters in the classroom fail to transcend the reality of 'being-with,' instead reflecting

> a mode of communication that is constrained by the parameters of time and
> place, whereby people may have interesting interactions but are not
> transformed in any way by them. As a consequence, aspects of the self are
> engaged in ways that are normative and safe…teacher-student and student-
> student interactions are most commonly of this type. (p. 47)

Indeed most pedagogical practices begin and end with the goal of being-with; with each student getting an opportunity to state their opinion and have their say, and with other students nodding in a feigned understanding, rarely engaging in more depth (Uttal, 1990). And this kind of surface-level interaction undoubtedly describes much of what took place in the focus groups – while discussions were certainly interesting, rarely did participants challenge or even address one another directly in ways that might have opened intersubjective and affective linkages between them. Unfortunately, a pedagogy that does not move beyond 'being-with' is bound to end up back where it started, with little in the way of true ethical learning having occurred.

Contemporary sex education curricula--even those considered sex positive and progressive--have also typically failed to move beyond the limitations of 'being-with.' In these curricula, learning about ethics in relation to sexuality often centres around attempts at fostering 'recognition' and 'empathy' in students through exposing them to the stories and experiences of minority youth, or through emphasizing ethical conduct (such as practices of consent) in sexual relationships. While these are certainly important starting points, to centre ethical relating as a primary goal of sex education is to emphasize that "the quality of one's response to another's particular vulnerable condition is central and not merely incidental to learning" (Todd, 2003, p. 36). However, as desirable as this might be, it is also an incredibly difficult endeavour, for, as Todd contends, the moment of ethical relating "is (simply) not something that can be planned; being-for emerges unpredictably in the context of the encounter with the Other" (2003, p. 48). This unpredictability is also fundamental to the classroom, as each classroom is an "assemblage" of bodies, objects, and affects that is ever unfolding and always unique. About this assemblage, Elspeth Probyn asks,

> Why is it, we ask either in elation or depression, that the same material will
> work so differently in different situations? The magic or chemistry that seems
> so elusive to any systematization may well be the necessary result of the

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moving arrangement of particles, histories and affects that are the bodies of
teaching and learning. (2004, p. 37)

Ultimately, Probyn and Todd suggest, the unpredictability of the intersubjective relation and

the idiosyncrasies of the classroom assemblage mean that we cannot design a curriculum that

will guarantee affectively-charged moments and therefore instances of ethical relating

between our students. Instead, as Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) argue, the most we can do

is "experiment with a variety of bodies and encounters" (p. 242) in the classroom and see

what happens.

This notion of experimentation is antithetical to much of what counts as curriculum in

our schooling, particularly when it comes to the already fraught field of sex education.

Instead, it is more in line with what, in psychoanalytic terms, is described as "transitional

space." Rooted in the work of D.W. Winnicott (1971), transitional space describes a hybrid

environment that "is neither the property of the individual self nor of the world of economic

and social affairs. This 'in-between space' holds culture and imagination; it is a space for art,

play and symbol-making" (Low et al., 2017, p. 83). It is within transitional spaces that we

engage with the symbolic and material objects we encounter, taking them into our psychical

worlds, playing with them and potentially moving through to a new understanding of, and

relationship to, those objects. In short, it is only within the murky waters of transitional

spaces that something like learning can take place. And this means that as educators we must

try to account for this murkiness in our pedagogy. For Ellsworth (2004),

> the notion of transitional space invites us to reimagine pedagogy as an
> economy of moving forms and selves that operates through a logic of open-
> ended relationality, and this means that it invites us to imagine pedagogy as
> addressing the learning self as an emergence – as a self and an intelligence
> that is always in the making. (p. 57)

Ellsworth suggests that the learning self is a self come undone through its engagement with

the world, and that it is only through these engagements that something new can emerge.

However, this is by no means a uniform process. We cannot know what objects our students will attach to and make something of (nor, of course, will all students attach to the same objects or do so in the same ways). To account for and draw on the transitional spaces of learning, we must therefore seek to offer our students more unstructured spaces full of rich and varied objects that allow them ample opportunity for experimentation, relationality and play.

I want to suggest that the Pornography and Sex Education focus groups facilitated for this study in fact reflected this very kind of environment, in that they enabled the learning self to emerge through offering myriad possibilities for the kinds of open-ended relationality described by Ellsworth. Within the semi-structured space of the focus group, which itself brought together a variety of participants, 'porn' became a conceptual object of play that operated as a sort of undefined ball of putty that could be tossed, molded, squashed or caressed depending on the needs and moods of the participants. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, 'porn' often proved to be a catalyst for the kinds of conversations participants were interested in having; conversations that were sometimes rooted in anxieties around social and sexual relating that extended far beyond the object of porn itself, and sometimes rooted in more pragmatic considerations of what a 'good' sex education might look like. Playing with porn also provided opportunities for participants to try on and perform different aspects of themselves in the space of the focus group: to briefly become sex-positive and unabashed in their sexuality; or deeply political, concerned with labour relations in the sex industry or the paucity of positive representations of marginalized bodies and identities in porn; or momentarily hilarious, riffing on the ridiculousness of porn's silly tropes.

But through participants' discussions about porn and how it connects with the fields of sex, desire, identity, labour, representation, relationships and education, the free space of play within the focus groups also produced occasional moments of intense affective

exchange, as participants' experimentation sometimes took them to uncertain and even painful territory within themselves and through their relations with others. These moments, discomfiting though they might have been, also provided an opportunity for participants to 'try on,' or experiment with an 'ethical self' that could only have arisen in response to the vulnerability that emerged within these open-ended spaces of relationality. With this in mind, I want to suggest that if we want our students to engage in the practice of ethics, we must provide them with more opportunities to 'be ethical' with one another. But because we cannot dictate this ethicality, we must instead provide them with the time and space – and the objects – necessary for it to emerge of its own accord.

This approach to pedagogy is not without its risks, as different individuals are more likely than others to be made vulnerable in the transitional space of play, particularly when that play centres around fraught concepts such as sex, gender, identity and desire. As Ahmed (1998) argues, "the ethical relation cannot be abstracted from the particularity of embodied subjects who are authorised to speak differently and unequally" (p. 65). This can be seen, for example, in this comment from Tay in their follow-up questionnaire. Tay was 21 years old at the time of the study and identified as Irish-Egyptian, transgender/non-binary and queer:

> I was anxious about the fact that the person in front of me was wearing a "Donald Trump: Make America Great Again" shirt. I would assume that generally Donald Trump supporters have terrible opinions about Arabs, trans people, and queers, and being all three I felt like if I said anything about my identities that person would invalidate my experience. The whole time I was there I was just waiting for him to say something horribly problematic.

The presence of a white male in an overtly political t-shirt that alludes to a particular kind of normative subjectivity as desirable had a silencing effect on Tay, and therefore limited the possibility that they could participate in the space of 'play' that was offered. Long histories of violence and oppression of "Arabs, trans people, and queers" haunted the relation between Tay and Marco (the man in the MAGA shirt); a haunting that wove around the bodies in the room and that continued to amplify and legitimize some at the expense of others.

If the transitional space of the focus group encounter is never 'free' of social difference and marginalization, then the work of the facilitator of that group is always about more than merely providing objects of play. Ellsworth (2004) suggests that the transitional space is facilitated by the presence of a good-enough holding environment, which is, "in part, about hospitality. As host to the learning self, the good-enough holding environment must offer some measure of continuity and reliability. It must, indeed, hold us, support us, and attend to us" (p. 70). As Ogden (2004) explains, holding as a relation is about "the continuity of being sustained over time" (p.1350). It is not always about having the right response, but about being consistently present and attuned to the other's need for a response of some kind, that matters. In that way, holding reflects "a form of engagement, of seeking to engage with the other's distress or difficulty, rather than explain it" (Low et al., 2017, p. 35). It was this kind of environment that I sought to cultivate (both actively and unconsciously) throughout the focus groups; making myself available and open to the needs of participants and ultimately creating the kind of space wherein (some) participants felt able to experiment with engaging in deeply personal, potentially revealing encounters. What it would take to create the kinds of spaces that can adequately hold those participants, like Tay, who have been historically marginalized is, however, something that individual educators such as myself, and the field of education as a whole, continue to grapple with, and is something that we must actively work towards in conjunction with those individuals and communities in order for anything like true ethicality and justice to emerge.

To conclude, I want to think about what can be learned from the Porn and Sex Education focus groups—flawed though they might have been—that could serve as a model for developing an ethical erotics pedagogy that seeks to centre students' ethical relations with both objects such as porn and with the others they encounter in educational spaces (as well as

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in their lives in general). However, there are some notable differences between the focus

group and sex ed classroom that must first be addressed. For instance, while the porn focus

group makes participants vulnerable to unknown others, the sex ed classroom carries even

more risk, in that students are likely to know something of each other's histories and are

undoubtedly going to see each other again. Being rendered vulnerable in these spaces in the

manner of Daria and Tim – as potentially 'slutty' or potentially 'queer' -- could therefore be

intolerable or even dangerous for students, and particularly for those who are already

marginalized. In taking into consideration the risks of vulnerability to participants in the porn

focus group, and more gravely, in the sex ed classroom, I want to suggest that, even more so

than in the focus groups (which themselves might reproduce power relations in terms of who

feels safe speaking, and who doesn't), school classrooms cannot be unfettered spaces of play.

This is because, paradoxically, unfettered spaces of play prove restrictive for certain

individuals as normative perspectives are likely to dominate.

To account for this risk, unlike my own pornography focus group experiences, the sex

ed classroom as transitional space cannot be a one-time experience. Participants entered the

focus group spaces with uncertainty as to the quality of the holding environment and they had

to test it to see if it would sustain their affective engagement. But only so much could be

accomplished in the space of two hours, and so rarely did participants move into the murky

affective spaces wherein ethical relating might occur. To develop a sex ed curriculum that

centres ethical relating, the holding environment must be developed by the facilitator (to the

extent that this is possible), but it must also be painstakingly and collectively built by all

participants. This can only happen if it is returned to again and again, allowing trust to accrue

through the moments of vulnerability and ethical relating that inevitably occur as participants

play with difficult objects such as porn – moments that cannot be mandated, but that must be

protected by caring educators in a holding environment when they do arise. This is a delicate

and perhaps impossible balance to achieve, and indeed, there were instances in the focus groups where I felt that I could have done more to protect the vulnerabilities of certain participants, where I halted or stumbled, where I turned away from, rather than towards, their pain. But so long as the holding environment remains intact, so long as the intention to care is made manifest through the labour of the facilitator (as both enforcer of rules and container of vulnerabilities), then I believe that the risks and discomforts of a pedagogy that centres ethical relating is worth it.

A further difference between the focus group and sex ed classroom is the number of participants in each; a factor that is key to developing a high-quality holding environment that can produce and sustain affective and ethical entanglements. For the kinds of ethical encounters examined in this chapter to take place, participants must be close enough together in space to see and feel one another -- they must become implicated in each other's being (and well-being) at the level of the body. In larger groups (such as the high school sex ed class) this connection often falls apart, and so too do the ethical possibilities of that group. This point was reinforced by several participants, such as in this statement from Omar in response to a question about what participants enjoyed about their focus group experience:

> I was a bit hesitant, you know, when I first came in...but I was just happy that, you know, it was really objective, you know, it was free, you know, welcoming, I felt like I could bring up whatever I wanted to...something I feel like, you know, in high school, I definitely would not feel comfortable, because people, you know, they make jokes.

I'm not suggesting that jokes and laughter aren't an integral part of the small-group encounter, especially around an object such as pornography, but rather Omar seemed to suggest that in the larger group context of the high school classroom, students are apt to not take things seriously, to deliberately misinterpret others' statements, or to perform for others in ways that make deeper affective and ethical engagement unlikely. In the small group encounter participants are required to engage with the faces of others; they cannot reasonably

turn away and this engagement at the very least opens the possibility of participants moving towards mutually expressed and experienced relations of care. The effects of engaging in this kind of space on focus group participants is vivid. For instance, reflecting on the experience in the de-briefing portion of the focus group, Jay said, "I guess I'm a pretty shy person, so it's hard for me to talk about these things, but once you do, it's kind of freeing. So yeah, I guess I'm happy, I feel better about myself." In her follow-up questionnaire, Elena said: "I felt very happy to be sharing ideas about this topic openly with others. I also felt safe and heard, like my opinion mattered," while Kim revealed, "I felt very good, like I had a big burden or big heavy weight lifted off my shoulders." Participants in the first focus group even concluded their session with the wish that there could be a weekly 'Porn Club' where they could continue to have these kinds of conversations. From these statements it is clear that young people want to engage with others around topics too-long considered too-taboo to discuss and that they benefit from doing so in ways that make them feel "free," "safe" and "heard"; that is, in small groups that give them the care they need in order to come undone and, ultimately, to come back together as something new.

Through looking at the stories of Daria and Tim, (and the responses of Sara, Abdi, Omar and myself) this chapter showed that there is great ethical and pedagogical value in providing our students with opportunities to engage in play with difficult objects such as pornography – play that will confront them with the very limits of their own selves while also implicating them in affective and ethical entanglements with others. This notion of ethical practice as emerging from unstructured conceptual play is antithetical to current approaches to sex education, which might construct such play as too risky, and which would certainly see such play as counterproductive to educational models that envision learning as simply about exposure to "correct" information. But I see this view of learning as extremely

limiting, particularly when it comes to ethics and sex. For while we can teach our students the steps to putting on a condom or how to spot the symptoms of gonorrhea, or even (purportedly) what words/actions to look for in establishing consent, we cannot teach them in any straightforward way how to care for others or how to engage in thoughtful and ethical relations, whether sexual or otherwise. Rather, I believe we must instead give them the space and opportunity to practice being ethical, to undertake the labour of caring for others, to feel and hold the vulnerabilities of others and perhaps make themselves vulnerable in turn. And while engaging in small groups around an object such as porn is not the only way to achieve this goal, to the extent that porn is endlessly malleable, acting as a surrogate for all that is unknown and unknowable yet endlessly present in ourselves, it seems to me as good a place as any to start.

Chapter 7

Conclusions: Embracing the Limits of Porn and Pedagogy

I often still think about those sexual health workshops I led so long ago; about the joy I felt in doing them, about the fun we had, about the laughter and silliness and strangeness of them, and the hopefulness of them as well. And in thinking about those workshops, I am also thinking about myself working within them; a vision that, admittedly, conjures the cool-girl, progressive sex-educator that I often imagine myself to be, the kind of educator who helps save young people from the repressive and staid sex education I tend to assume they have received (indeed, the kind of sex education I remember myself having received). It is this vision and the affective feelings attached to it--of self-worth, of confidence and competence (feelings that can be hard to come by as a graduate student!)--that continues to haunt me to this day and that in many ways drove me to undertake the project outlined in this dissertation. Indeed, I had initially envisioned the point and purpose of my research as reflecting something of a fact-finding mission that would produce the kinds of insights that might enable the development of a "better" sex education curriculum; one that would fill in the gaps exposed during those workshops long ago. I had this topic, "porn", that I knew young people were engaging with and that I knew was not being addressed in schools and so I thought I would be the one to do that work. I would get young people together and ask them what they watched, what they did, what they thought about porn, and I would then take those results, bundle them together into a neat little package and say to Ontario's schools, teachers, school boards and parents, "Here you go. You're welcome." I envisioned myself developing a "porn literacy" curriculum or resource that could be delivered in classrooms, perhaps even in a workshop format, perhaps even by me, reprising my role as "cool-girl sex educator"

(though admittedly a little older, a little more dishevelled and a lot less cool).

And although this vision still in many ways compels me, it is clear to me now, upon having actually undertaken this project, and having sorted through the messiness of what actually happened (or at least my interpretation of what happened), that my initial vision in many ways reproduced the very assumptions around pedagogy that I have sought to critique throughout this dissertation; assumptions that centre around the belief that something like a "truth" about porn, sexuality, identity, pleasure and desire can be transmitted unproblematically through language, whether from participant to researcher through the act of talking about porn, or from teacher to student in the sex education classroom. In this imagining, all we as educator/facilitators needed to do was find the magic combination of words, slides and pedagogical vibes that would get our students to open up about their experiences so that we could then enlighten them with our superior knowledge, ideally enabling them to go forward as better people. This is the dream, after all, of critical education and of the critical educator as liberator, and, to the extent that we think about developing even our most progressive research studies and sex education curricula--ones that might address topics like pornography--this is still the limit of what often gets imagined as possible, and of what I had imagined as possible.

This understanding of "education as enlightenment" in many ways influenced the design of this study, as well as my interpretation of what happened. For instance, although I apply a more nuanced interpretive lens to my analysis in Chapter 4, one that seeks to look beyond participants' literal utterances for something of the "hauntings" beneath, this chapter in many ways does the more traditional work of collecting participants' narratives to develop something that looks more or less like "curriculum." After all, as I suggested in that chapter, there are patterns and themes to the ways young people engage with porn, to the ways they make sense of and talk about it, and although these themes have more to do with socially-

constructed discourses, psychosocial anxieties and histories of hauntings than they do with young people's "real" relationship to something we might call "porn," they can still tell us much about the worlds young people inhabit. And in looking at these themes, I tried to tease out what they could be pointing to in terms of the kinds of topics we as educators might want to address, particularly if we are endeavoring to work from within an ethical erotics framework (as I believe we should be) that centres young people's "thick desires" (Fine & McClelland, 2014) – their desires for the social, political, economic and interpersonal conditions that will enable them to live joyful, ethical and equitable lives. For in listening to participants' discussion on porn, I in fact encountered many other threads that could be followed by educators—threads that relate to porn, but that also extend far beyond it, weaving through the fabric of young people's everyday lives.

In outlining some of these actual threads or discussion points—which included topics ranging from the representations found in the media, to discourses around youth health, to labour practices across industries—I was attempting to provide something of a pragmatic and digestible approach to addressing pornography in contemporary sex education pedagogies. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, despite its ubiquity, pornography has been deliberately and systematically excluded from spaces of schooling for a host of reasons, many of which trace back to concerns around talking with young people about a "taboo" subject that they are not *supposed* to be engaging with until the age of 18. Bringing pornography into the classroom as a topic is therefore immensely risky for educators and administrators, who might be seen as deviant for doing so, as seeking to taint the purported innocence (and presumed monogamous-heterosexuality) of the young people in their care. My suggestions for threads that might be followed in the classroom therefore deliberately de-eroticize these topics, moving the emphasis away from individual sexual desires, identifications and practices towards more "acceptable" school topics such as, for instance,

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political economy and the media. The suggestions with which I conclude Chapter 4 therefore reflect an attempt at opening up spaces for educators to imagine talking about porn in ways that would be permissible in the restrictive environments of schools. In this way, Chapter 4 and its conclusions reflect a recognition of the 'fourth look' of education – what Bobby Noble (2014) describes as "the imagined social scene of the looking" (p. 102)—wherein the (presumably disapproving) gaze of the public is conjured so that its potential critiques can be defended against. That my reflections and suggestions in Chapter 4 hew so closely to what might be considered the traditional modes and methods of the critical educator-liberator is both strategic and pragmatic in that I am thinking in part about the need to placate this fourth look. This is not to say that I don't believe in the significance of the themes I describe and the pedagogical conclusions I draw from those themes. Rather, not only do I see these kinds of topics as important for helping young people make connections between their seemingly individual experiences with pornography, sexuality and desire and the larger social context that shapes and frames those experiences, but these themes and threads are also those that concerned parents and administrators could be pointed towards should they be worried about the corruption of their children through discussions on porn in the classroom. After all, schools have to teach *something* to young people—and to the extent that porn as a topic touches upon so many other topics that are of interest and importance to ethical erotics educators, we ought to continue to fight for its inclusion as a pedagogical object in the classroom.

However, as my discussion in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate, when porn is brought into the space of a group encounter, all kinds of unexpected things happen. Although the framing of my focus group questions certainly attempted to reproduce the impersonal, generalized and de-eroticized tone that we have come to expect in a research or school setting, the reality is of course that no such space could ever possibly exist. And this is

perhaps especially true when bodies are brought together in a context and around a topic that is deliberately asking people to think about and feel their own haunted subjectivities. For not only does porn touch on and extend into the social, but it also circles back into the psychical, the remembered, and the forgotten, into the nooks and crannies of our identities, into those spaces infused with myriad complex desires and anxieties that we often do not know and cannot name and that only emerge through intersubjective encounter with others. And so what came out of my experience of undertaking these focus groups, what I had not expected when I first proposed, planned and conducted this study, was that pornography would emerge in many ways as a "limit object"—as an object that would point to the very impossibility of speaking about and educating around something as nebulous as sexuality, or identity, or desire at all.

For instance, in Chapter 5, I considered the ways in which my focus group discussions ultimately revealed the majority of participants to be deeply ambivalent about pornography. While they certainly problematized and critiqued it with gusto, they also revealed that they watched it, learned from it, laughed at it, used it, loved it and shared it. They took it extremely seriously as something (or many things) that might be harming them, their friends, their relationships and their society, and they also made light of it, of its supposed impacts, of its representations, of their own engagement with it. These ambivalences manifested in several different ways—through contradictory statements made over time, through the changing tone of the conversation and within individual statements that sounded and felt like the waging of an internal battle—and in the end, no "conclusion" about the meaning of pornography was ever arrived at. While I had assumed that this study would in fact reveal that most participants had a far more complex relationship with pornography than discourses of porn as inherently harmful typically allow, the question of what this ambivalence might mean for educators and pedagogies that generally traffic in

certainties was something that I had not necessarily considered. For ambivalence is not just about indecision, about individuals in need of more information but is also, as I have argued, about fluidity, opacity and tension. It is a movement betwixt and between contradictory discourses, and/or the entanglement of pasts, presents, and futures, and/or our desires to move towards others in joyful encounters of relationality, and also to move away from them in fearful or anxious defense. Ambivalence is a reflection and a function of the "too muchness" of our lives and our selves, of what Avery Gordon (2008) calls our "complex personhood." For Gordon (2008), complex personhood "means that all people…remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others" (p. 4). This understanding of ambivalence, complexity and uncertainty as fundamental to our humanity challenges traditional, modernist understandings of human subjects as coherent, cohesive, conscious and rational and therefore challenges pedagogies that might seek to teach to those subjects. Because if we are all inherently in flux, moved by the winds of our contexts and our encounters, then who is it that we are teaching (and who are we, the teachers) when we imagine ourselves to be teaching someone? And how, therefore, could anything we teach ever possibly "stick"?

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, to the extent that talking about and thinking about pornography brings ambivalence to the fore, it emerges as an object that points to the very limits of our attempts at educating around something like "sexuality" at all. Indeed, as Jen Gilbert (2014) argues in her work on sexuality in schools, "sexuality remains a question, and this radical quality is unsettling because it points to the subject's opacity: we cannot answer the question of sexuality because a part of ourselves is foreign, and that foreignness—often understood as sexuality itself—refuses to be known" (p. xix). If sexuality refuses to be known, and if pornography as a discussion topic summons that refusal, indeed brings it to the very tips of our tongues, the flesh of our skins, the flush of our cheeks, while

also simultaneously submerging and negating it, then the issue for educators becomes one of figuring out what to do with that limit. I want to suggest that rather than asking our students to resolve their uncertainties through helping them understand and make sense of something called "porn," we ought to instead think about what it might mean to have them wade into and embrace the unknown, to help them find pedagogical value in those very moments where our common-sense understandings of pedagogy as about "learning something" come undone.

What such a pedagogy might look and feel like, and what I see as particularly valuable in this vision of "pedagogy beyond learning" is at the heart of my work in Chapter 6. In this chapter I sought to move the discussion beyond considerations of what kinds of topics or themes might be included in a pedagogy that addresses pornography, towards considering how such discussions themselves act as a kind of pedagogy that centres not discourses, not objects, not even learning per se, but relations. As shown through the case studies involving Daria Sara, Abdi, Omar, Tim and myself, discussions about pornography take us to the limits of ourselves in terms of what we know and can know about who we are, what we fear, and what we desire. For instance, Sara's intense expression of disgust at the thought of someone enjoying being spat upon likely points to her own complex and unconscious anxieties and desires around sex, bodies, fluids, pleasure and pain. However, this expression was not made in isolation, or towards the (ostensibly) objective individual researcher, but was said within the context of a group, and therefore also affected others, specifically Daria, who balked at this comment, pushing back in anger and hurt while also seeking to deny any personal connection to, or knowledge of, that which had brought Sara "disgust." In this moment of encounter, as in the encounter between Tim, Abdi and Omar, pornography became the discursive object that in many ways brought these young people together into an intersubjective relation with one another that could not be fully articulated nor acknowledged, its origins or meaning never entirely known. Instead, the limitations of

their conscious subjectivities were exceeded in that moment by the presence of strong affects circulating throughout the room; affects we might name pain, or shame, or anger, but that exceed even those descriptors. I see these affects as a function of the manifest vulnerability of the subject taken to the limit of themselves within a social context that exposes them to the gazes and speculations of others. And, as discussed throughout Chapter 6, these moments of affectively-intense vulnerability, risky though they may have been for participants, also bound them to one another in a relation that demanded some form of recognition and care, that demanded a lived, practical, embodied form of ethics in the moment.

As difficult as these moments may have been, pornography's revelation in these focus groups as that which brings people to the limits of their subjectivities in and through their relations with others is also what makes it such a potentially valuable object for educators, such as myself, who are increasingly convinced that we ought to centre ethical relating, rather than merely discussions about ethics, as the point and purpose of our pedagogies. Of course, there are certainly great risks and ethical considerations in doing this kind of work, especially with young people (and queer, racialized, trans and working-class young people in particular) who may already be experiencing vulnerability and marginalization in a variety of ways. To that end, pornography also emerges as a limit object in terms of what it might be possible, or desirable, or responsible to bring into the classroom, to do to and ask of students. As educators and researchers, we must continue to ask ourselves: what should seek to know or discover about our students lives, or have them reveal through their relations with others, given that sexuality will always exceed that very will to know (Gilbert, 2014).

In responding to this ethical dilemma as it arose within the moment of the research encounter, I found myself attempting to "contain" this excess (Bion, 1962), and at times, offering participants a "way out" of difficult moments, a dignified extraction that would enable them to remain in the space of the focus group. For if Daria had started crying or had

insulted Sara as I felt she might be moved to do, or if Tim had continued in his line of questioning and outed himself in a more direct fashion, it's possible that these participants might have found it untenable to remain in the focus group altogether. I was determined to work with them to smooth over the bad feelings that arose so that they could feel safe and contained and could retain (at least the illusion) of having remained intact. This was the limit, for me, of my research in those moments—although I perhaps could have gotten even "more" out of participants, I had to ask myself, I continue to ask myself, at what cost?

However, not only did these discussions of porn bring participants to their own subjective and affective limits, pointing to what perhaps ought to be the limits of our research and our pedagogies, but they also, necessarily, brought me to my own limits as a psychosocial subject who experienced and interpreted these encounters through my own opaque, conflicted and haunted subjectivity. As a novice researcher still struggling to assert my place within the academy, my desires to have the focus groups "go well" bumped up against the moments of relational breakdown described in this dissertation, and although I felt the need to contain the painful affects of the participants, ostensibly for their own protection, there is no denying that I was also protecting myself. As much as I told myself that I wanted to get down to the nitty-gritty of what my participants think about and do with porn, I also struggled to sit within the discomforts that emerged when they did so. Daria's tearful rebuke, Tim's awkward intrusions—they were almost more than I could bear, both on behalf of the participants and on behalf of myself. I didn't want bad feelings to arrive and linger, I worried that they were a sign of my failure to produce the cool, fun, open atmosphere I had envisioned; and although I could not, of course, refute them entirely, my efforts at containment were likely as much about my own anxieties around the research moment as they were about participants' wellbeing.

At the same time, there is no denying that I felt implicated and vulnerable in my own

intersubjective encounters with these young people as well, in that they were also unknown strangers to myself. This was brought home when, in each focus group, someone invariably asked me why I decided to research this topic. As other porn scholars have noted, there is a suspicion around those who seek to talk about and study porn, particularly with young people (Lehman, 2006; Williams, 2004), and so in response I always doubled-down on my construction of myself as the cool-girl educator who was definitely not creepy for wanting to talk about this, who was just trying to learn more about this topic for the sake of young people themselves. And yet despite this stated desire, despite the tone I tried to maintain throughout the focus group, I never actually talked about or revealed any details about my own engagements with porn. Indeed, even writing about it now, knowing that these words will be read by others, makes me uncomfortable. For my own desires, my own porn practices, are haunted by my own past histories of attachments and wounds that I am always also reckoning with in the present, and that I feel very protective of. And in thinking that others would be similarly protective, and in feeling myself obliged to help protect them, I did not ask participants to talk specifically about their own desires and practices either; and yet some of them willingly, even nonchalantly, did so, to my great surprise. Could I have just casually mentioned that I was into "incestuous father-son-coach threesomes", as one participant, Nina, did? Not likely. Perhaps this is a reflection of the difference between those who have grown up with porn readily available, and those, like myself, who did not. Or perhaps this points to the ways in which porn, and all that porn indexes, took me to my own limits in terms of what I could, was willing to, or thought I should share in the focus groups.

Although I was, and am, perfectly comfortable talking about porn on a theoretical or hypothetical level, that I refused to discuss my own actual engagement with it raises some questions. Was I just afraid to reveal my own desires, interests and curiosities, thinking them personal, idiosyncratic and none-of-anyone's business? Was I trying to remain distinct from

my participants by keeping myself at a degree of removal that would better protect me from entering into the kinds of relations that might have made me intolerably vulnerable in the space of the focus group? Should researchers and educators wade in the muck with our participants, or do we need to remain apart, keeping vigilant for signs of pain and affective excess so that we can step in to contain them when necessary? These are questions to which I do not have answers, but are those that linger with me as I think back on the pornography and sex ed focus group encounters and of myself as researcher, facilitator and participant within them.

This project in many ways raised more questions than it answered. What does it mean, after all, to devise and implement a research project and potentially a pedagogy around something that cannot be talked about? At a pragmatic level, of course, we can situate pornography in a larger social context of historically unequal relations and use it as an example of how these relations manifest in and through everyday objects, representations, practices and industries. But at another level, as my focus groups show, we must also find something of value in the moment of encounter around pornography itself, even if that moment seems to produce nothing tangible. This requires thinking differently about our pedagogical practices; about what we hope to accomplish through them and about what they should therefore look like. I want to suggest that above all else, my focus groups point to the value in developing sustained spaces of in-person, embodied encounters that bring people—students, or anyone else--together to talk about difficult topics, whether porn, race, gender, sexuality, religion, discrimination, oppression, hate, fear, love or death. As it stands, so much of our schooling seems to be about closing the self off from its vulnerabilities and learning how to publicly regulate our emotions so that the business of learning can take place. But I am suggesting that what is lost in this vision of education is a recognition of the ways in which we are always necessarily vulnerable in our relations with others, and that there is

indeed much to be gained from feeling our own and others' vulnerabilities—that it is only through doing so that we are moved to care for others, and to feel cared for in return. The increasing move towards online learning, particularly at the post-secondary level, is truly troubling to me for the very reason that it removes the possibility that young people might encounter theirs and others' limits and might therefore be moved to engage in these everyday relations of care. Keeping our pedagogies in the flesh, whether they are about the flesh or about something else entirely, is crucial to practicing and developing our most ethical selves, and it is this lesson from both the sexual health workshops of my past, and the focus groups of my present, that stands with me to this day.

What this means for my future is that I will continue to think about how to design a pedagogical practice that reflects these lessons, but that learns from them as well. To that end, I am interested in developing more long-term, small-group spaces of encounter that engage young people around the complexities of their lives, but that, unlike the focus groups, make more space for, and provide more time for vulnerabilities, discomforts and potentially even bad feelings to circulate, giving more opportunities for young people to do the work of containing one another. Such a space would require me to continue to take on the position of facilitator (for there must be some kind of overall holding structure), but to also work towards de-centring myself in the moment of the encounter, letting go of my identification with the cool-girl educator who remains above the fray to save her students/participants, and instead to see value in the discomforts of making myself vulnerable, and potentially even cared for, too. This is a vision of ethical erotics as a form of pedagogy in which relations of pain, fear, anxiety and uncertainty, as well as care, love, recognition, respect, and "loving attention" (Brennan, 2004) move in all directions, with no centre, no purpose and no end. Whether this kind of pedagogy can exist in formal spaces of schooling is unknown—there are certainly structural and institutional limitations that might impede implementing these

kinds of small-group encounters around difficult topics. But that this kind of pedagogical practice is necessary, particularly in our increasingly technocratic society in which disembodied relations seem to drive violent expressions of hatred towards unknown others is, to me, beyond a doubt.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Questionnaire

Focus Group #_____ Date: _____

Name (optional): _____

Age (optional): _____

How would you describe your race/ethnicity?
_____

How would you describe your gender?
_____

How would you describe your sexual orientation?
_____

1. At what age did you first come across online pornography?
_____

2. Was this exposure to pornography intentional or unintentional? (Please Explain)
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Between the ages of 12-17, how often did you access online pornography? Circle the best answer.

    Never

    Approximately once a month

    Approximately once a week

    Every day

    More than once a day

4. If you accessed online pornography between the ages of 12-17:

a) What reason(s) did you have for watching it?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

b) What format(s) of online pornography did you access? Check all that apply:

      Full-length films _____

      Short clips _____

      Images _____

      Webcams _____

      Other (please describe) _____

c) What categories/kinds of pornography did you typically access? (i.e. "gay" "blowjobs" "threesomes" etc.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

d) How did you watch online pornography? Check all that apply.

      Alone _____

      With a friend(s) _____

      In a group _____

      With a partner _____

      Other _____

e) How did you access it?

      Personal computer _____

      Someone else's computer _____ Whose? _____

      Mobile phone/tablet _____

Public computer (i.e. in the library) _____

Other (please explain) _____

5. Between the ages of 12-17, did you ever create your own pornography and/or participate in someone else's pornography? (this includes making/sharing "sexts") Please explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. In a few words or sentences, please describe how you felt about pornography between the ages of 12-17:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. How often do you **currently** access online pornography? Circle the best answer.

Never

Approximately once a month

Approximately once a week

Every day

More than once a day

8. If you currently watch/access online pornography:

a) What reasons(s) do you have for watching it?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

b) What format(s) of online pornography do you currently access? Check all that apply:

Full-length films _____

Short clips _____

Images _____

Webcams _____

Other (please describe)
_____

c) What categories/kinds of pornography do you typically access? (i.e. "gay" "blowjobs" "threesomes" etc.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

d) How do you watch it? Check all that apply.

Alone _____

With a friend _____

In a group _____

With a partner _____

Other _____

e) What technology do you use to access online pornography? Check all that apply:

Personal computer _____

Someone else's computer _____ Whose?_____

Mobile phone/tablet _____

Public computer (i.e in the library) _____ Explain
_____

Other _____ (please explain)

I do not watch pornography _____

9. Do you currently create your own pornography and/or participate in someone else's pornography? (this includes making/sharing "sexts"). Please explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

10. In a few words or sentences, please describe how you **currently** feel about pornography:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Focus Group # _____ Date: _____

Site: _____ Moderator: _____

# of Participants: _____

Start time: _____ End-time: _____

Ice-breaker: What ideas, images and words come to mind when you hear the word "pornography"? How do you know an object is "pornography" and not something else?

Section 1: Attitudes/beliefs/experiences around online pornography. To begin, I will show participants several news articles/media stories addressing the issue of young people and pornography.

Q 1. What are some of the concerns around young people and pornography evident in these articles or that you have heard discussed in general?

> 1a. Do you think these concerns are valid? Do you have any other concerns with regards to pornography?

Q 2. What kinds of benefits might there be to young people using/watching pornography?

Q 3. What are some things you would tell a young person who has never seen pornography, but who was thinking about accessing it for the first time?

Q 4. How do you think boys and girls use/watch pornography differently?

> 4a. (The wording of this question will depend on the gender configuration of the focus group. In the mixed-gender group, both versions of the question will be asked): What are some things you think boys should know about how girls feel about about/use pornography? AND/OR What are some things you think girls should know about how boys feel about/use pornography?

Q 5. Do you/have you ever discuss(ed) pornography with other people? Who? What did you talk about?

Q 6. What do you think about the pornography industry and/or those who make/participate in pornography?

Q 7. What have you learned from using pornography? What kinds of questions did it help you answer?

Section 2: Attitudes/beliefs/experiences around pornography and education. Participants will be shown two examples of pornography education websites aimed at young people.

Q 8. What did you think of these websites? What did you find useful/interesting/problematic about them?

Q 9. Would you/have you ever use(d) these websites, or other resources to help you understand pornography or your relationship to pornography? Please explain.

Q 10. Did your sexual health education ever discuss pornography?

     10a. If so, how was pornography framed/talked about? If not, do you think pornography is a topic that can or should be addressed in schools/by educators? Why or why not?

Q 11. What advice would you give an educator who wanted to talk to teens about pornography? What would a pornography education look like?

     11a. In what space/format would this learning take place?

     11b. Who/what would be present?

     11c. What topics would be covered?

Q 12. What might educators learn about sex and education from pornography and the pornography industry?

Q 13. Why do you think it is considered difficult or controversial to teach young people about sex and pornography?

Q 14. What else would you like to have learned about sex or pornography in your formal education?

Section 3: Debriefing

Q 15. Why did you agree to participate in this focus group study?

Q 16. How did it feel to speak about pornography in a group?

Q 17. What did you learn about your own thoughts/feelings on these topics from participating in this focus group?

Q 18. What did you learn about what other people think/feel about these topics from participating in this focus group?

Q 19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C: Follow-Up Questionnaire

Name: _____ Focus Group #_____

Thank you for your participation in the Pornography and Education Focus Group. Below you will find several questions asking you to reflect on your focus group experience. Following these questions, you will find a full list of questions asked during your focus group. Please take a moment to consider whether there is anything you would like to add to any of the answers you have already provided.

Focus Group Reflection

Q 1. What did you enjoy about your focus group experience?

Q 2. What did you find difficult or challenging about your focus group experience?

Q 3. What are the advantages of a focus group format for talking about sensitive/taboo topics, such as porn and sexuality?

Q 4. What are the disadvantages of this format?

Q 5. In a few short sentences, please describe how you felt during the focus group:

Q 6. In a few short sentences, please describe how you felt after the focus group:

Q 7. What else would you like to add about your focus group experience not covered by this questionnaire?

(A full list of focus group questions will be provided as well)

Appendix D: Focus Group Power Point Slides

LET'S GET IT ON:
THE PORNOGRAPHY AND
SEX ED STUDY

Focus Group Schedule

- 12:00-12:20 – Arrive, eat pizza, complete Porn History questionnaire
- 12:20-12:30 – Ground Rules and questions
- 12:30-12:45 – Intro: What is porn?
- 12:45-1:15 – Thinking about porn and society
- 1:15-1:45 – Thinking about porn and sex education
- 1:45-2:00 – Debrief and wrap-up

Ground Rules

- **Respect each other:** refrain from using language or making comments that are racist, sexist, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist, classist, ableist or discriminatory in any way. This is a safe space. This kind of language will not be tolerated and you will be asked to leave the focus group. NO MOVIE FOR YOU!

- **Confidentiality**! This focus group will involve the discussion of personal and sensitive topics. A promise of complete confidentiality of what is discussed in this room is expected, although it clearly cannot be enforced – at the very least, please refrain from referring to specific things said be specific people

- **Anonymity!** You will not be compelled to talk about anything you don't want to – if there is something you would like to add, but don't feel comfortable bringing up in the group, write it down! You will have a chance to share you thoughts in the follow-up questionnaire

- **Opt out any time –** If at any point you feel uncomfortable or unable to continue the focus group discussion, you may opt out at any time

Intro: What is pornography?

- What ideas, images and words come to mind when you hear the word "pornography"?
- How do you know an object is "pornography" and not something else?

Teen pornography use in the news

- http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gabe-deem/porn-many-teens-watch-it-_b_5450478.html
- http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/16/living/feat-teens-online-porn-parents/
- http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2013/04/22/is_pornography_changing_how_teens_view_sex.html
- http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/how-the-dark-world-of-pornography-is-damaging-kids-lives-forever/news-story/bec519e56373f344adb95c8c2113c8db

Pornography Education Resources

- http://www.scarleteen.com/article/gender/looking_lusting_and_learning_a_straightforward_look_at_pornographyjyvx
- https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/health/services/promotion/sexual-health-sex-101/pornography
- http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/digital-issues/pornography