

Mia Helene "Ted" Engeskaug

## Putting in the work:

Young, gender- and sexuality-diverse people's  
relationship with porn use

Master's thesis in Equality and Diversity

Supervisor: Elisabeth Stubberud

Co-supervisor: Jennifer Branlat

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# Læringsmål masterprogram Likestilling og mangfold, NTNU

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En student som har fullført programmet, forventes å ha oppnådd følgende læringsutbytte, definert i kunnskap, ferdigheter og generell kompetanse:

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## Abstract

Researching young people and porn is nothing new, but there's little going beyond heteronormative, binary narratives of harm which treats young people as uncritical porn users. This thesis tries to amend this by exploring young, gender- and sexuality-diverse people's relationship with porn, and analyses how they make this relationship "work". The empirical material consists of interviews with nine people aged twenty to twenty-five and two thirty five-year-olds. I analyse using a discourse inspired analytical approach; with special attention on how discourses produce certain identities, ways of being, and of course resistance. The theoretical framework draws inspiration from porn studies and porn literacy, with a focus on Foucauldian, Butlerian and queer social constructivist theories. The analysis has three chapters, where each chapter sheds light on different discourses young people are engaging with in their developing relationship with porn. The first analytical chapter is about how young people navigate a coming-of-age-discourse in their first meeting(s) with porn; young people make sense of their accidental, forced or fun first meeting(s) with porn as either being "too young" or stating that every teenager is sexually curious. The second chapter is about young people's strategies to make porn "work" for them as they grow up; by engaging with discourses that state sexuality as pre-discursive, yet malleable, that "good" porn is "authentic" if it mirrors "real" sex, and that there is a difference between fantasies and wants, they are able to have their sexuality validated as real by society, while also finding porn that "works" for them. The third chapter is about young people's notions of a "normal" and "healthy" relationship to porn; by being weary of porn as "addictive" and critical to the porn industry, they avoid being viewed as unhealthy and protect their sexuality from "corrupting" porn, while enjoying porn without shame.

## Sammendrag

Å forske på unge mennesker og porno er ikke noe nytt, men det er lite som går utover heteronormative, binære narrativer om skade som behandler unge mennesker som ukritiske pornobrukere. Denne oppgaven prøver å endre dette ved å utforske unge, kjønns- og seksualitetsmangfoldige menneskers relasjon til porno, og analyserer hvordan de får dette relasjonen til å «fungere». Det empiriske materialet består av intervjuer med ni personer i alderen tjue til tjuetvå og to trettifem-åringer. Jeg analyserer ved hjelp av en diskursinspirert analytisk tilnærming; med spesiell oppmerksomhet på hvordan diskurser produserer bestemte identiteter, væremåter og selvfølgelig motstand. Det teoretiske rammeverket henter inspirasjon fra pornostudier og porno forståelse, med fokus på foucauldianske, butlerianske og skeive sosialkonstruktivistiske teorier. Analysen har tre kapitler, der hvert kapittel belyser ulike diskurser unge mennesker engasjerer seg i under sitt utviklende forhold til porno. Det første analytiske kapittelet omhandler hvordan unge mennesker navigerer en «coming-of-age»-diskurs i deres første møte(r) med porno; de snakker om deres med uhell, tvungne eller gøyale første møte(r) med porno som enten for tidlig eller med at alle tenåringer er seksuelt nysgjerrige. Det andre kapittelet omhandler unge menneskers strategier for å få porno til å «fungere» for dem da de vokser opp; ved å engasjere seg i diskurser som angir seksualitet som pre-diskursiv, men likevel formbar, at "god" porno er "autentisk" hvis den speiler "ekte" sex, og at det er en forskjell mellom fantasier og ønsker, er de i stand til å ha sin seksualitet validert av samfunnet, samtidig som de finner porno som "fungerer" for dem. Det tredje kapittelet handler om unges forestillinger om et «normalt» og «sunt» forhold til porno; ved å være skeptiske til porno som «avhengighetsdannende» og kritiske til pornoindustrien, unngår de å bli ansett som usunn og beskytter seksualiteten sin mot "korrupperende" pornobruk, mens de nyter porno uten å skamme seg.

## Preface

It is the end of May 2024 and I am sitting in my tiny but safe home in Svartlamon in Norway and I am handing in my Master's thesis, while across the city fellow students have created a Palestine-encampment to protest NTNU's collaboration with Kongsberg Gruppen, who are selling weapons directly and indirectly to Israel which contributes to the current genocide of the Palestinian people. Writing a Master's while people are being murdered feels farcical... maddening even. Therefore, my thoughts first and foremost go to my fellow Palestinian students whose universities are now gone, lost in the rubble. But remember, *they tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds*. May Palestine and all other colonized peoples be free in our lifetime, from the river to the sea.

I also wish to thank my brilliant supervisors Elisabeth and Jennifer, who have always believed in me and been incredibly supportive, both intellectually and emotionally, and flexible to my chaotic and emotional goblin-ness. They are shining examples of academia at its best, and I do not take their support remotely for granted.

This thesis would also not exist with the wonderful insights of my informants – I am humbled by their trust. May our sexualities and bodies be free from the pain, control and violence of cishet-normativity, replaced by only joy and pleasure and the fun kinds of pain. Thank you also to my community of queer anarchist babes who have made me feel seen and understood in my womanhood like no others – I am free when I'm with them.

Writing this master's has been one of the most difficult things I've done – the disabling executive dysfunction and ensuing shame almost got to me, so many times. I've been nauseous, had night terrors, temporarily lost my ability to orgasm, felt so stupid I've hit myself in the face, and have not truly enjoyed the wind in my hair or the laughter of my loved ones for a long, long time. So... I also want to thank myself for doing something which, at times, felt physically impossible – actually doing a master's degree.

A humongous thanks and hug to my beloved spouse Colin for their support and love even though they are far away in Brazil right now doing amazing things. Our phone calls have kept me sane. I also wish to thank Solan and Ibi for providing me a study space, Purre for mjauing in my lap, Sonja, Aster, Didrik, Hamish, Guri, Kalle for feeding me both endless Kvikk Lunsj and Cola, and actual food. And another thank you also to Ask, Ranja, France and Karolina for intellectual support and feedback. A sentimental thanks to my two exes for the delicious joy of sex free from gender norms. And let me not forget to thank Tord, my 3 am rant guy - thank you for the collective dinners, TV-shows and boulder sessions. Everyone's support for me is so cherished - no goblin is an island.

Free Palestine!

Mialene "Ted" Engeskaug,

Trondheim, 27. Mai 2024





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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Me, myself and porn

This is a Master's thesis about porn. I was about twelve or thirteen when I accidentally saw porn for the first time. My older female cousin Bluetooth-ed me more than music to my first Sony Ericsson phone – in shock, I deleted it quickly. I think. This was also around the same time I discovered masturbation from seeing a woman have a lot of fun with a shower hose in the Steve Carrell classic *The 40-year Old Virgin* (Apatow, 2005) – a discovery I would share with several of my friends growing up: girls of the world unite, come join the world of bathtub orgasms! I then found mature Twilight fanfiction when I was fourteen, to my horny teenage delight. This aforementioned material became my main form of sex education. Out of fear of doing something illegal, I didn't google porn until I was well advanced into my teenage years at seventeen, with a friend. The close up of the repetitive heterosexual penetrative in and out motion was only interesting for a minute or two – and I remember thinking I could easily develop some kind of hairless vulva complex considering that none of the ones on screen had pubic hair. No thank you. Gay male porn and amateur couple porn was more tempting, as they actually seemed to like each other a lot of the time, the pleasure seemingly more authentic. Yet I rarely watch(ed) it with sexual gratification in mind, more to just enter an erotic headspace. To this day I still struggle with the search for this illusive authenticity, the (re)focusing of women's pleasure, genuine consent, deconstruction of gender stereotypes and narrow ideas of sex – both in free porn online and in my heterosexual, yet kinky, sex life. The reason I'm telling you, the reader, about this lived experience, is to show that porn isn't just one unified category, nor does it have to serve just the purpose of masturbation – and that one's relationship to porn can be complicated, filled with ethical concerns and attempts of agency and search for pleasure.

To study porn in an academic context, with its heavy feminist baggage, has stirred up different concerns in me, as has been the case for many other sex positive feminists and gender scholars before me. After all what became known as the feminist porn wars of the 70's and 80's where brutally divided on porn, torn between understanding it as either [...] a tool of patriarchy or a counter to sexual repression?' (Srinivasan, 2021:33), many fluxuating somewhere in between, no consensus reached. Even now that porn is more normalized and accessible than ever, it does emerge as a continuous struggle of navigation and back and forth on the sexual politics of desire, the role of porn, gender freedom, queer sexualities, deconstruction of shame, of control, of power, to imagine and practice a more liberated, just sexual existence in a world overwhelmed with the opposite. It is within this context, within an abundance of possible entry points that this study has taken shape.

## 1.2 Relevancy: Two contradictory trends and discourses, concerning internet porn use

### 1.2.1 Porn use as normalized and accessible online

Youth coming of age over the past two decades have seen their childhoods and adolescence increasing intertwined with technology. I remember being the last in class to get a phone at thirteen – and this was fifteen years ago. Numbers from 2022 indicate that over half of 13–18-year old Norwegian youth say they've watched porn online, while

35% say they haven't. This is an increase in 10% since 2018, especially amongst younger children and girls. Over half of those who say they have watched, saw porn when they were younger than thirteen (Medietilsynet, 2022). Internationally, although men watch more porn than women, more than 50% of women watch online porn in video-format, and these numbers are likely a lot higher since these aforementioned figures do not take into account other porn mediums than video, like for example literature (Harvey, 2020), which was my own (main) porn medium of choice.

These high percentages of porn consumption are due in part to the fact that porn has become ubiquitous, because its accessible 24/7 and (mainly) free via the internet. There's <sup>1</sup>[~~ob~~] (of the internet), that states if you can imagine it, there's already porn of it, somewhere out there in the ether. Scholarly literature has pointed out how many harmful dynamics around sex are reproduced or normalized in porn, like sexual aggression, racist stereotypes and rape culture (Hald et al., 2013, Albury, 2014). This becomes even more problematic considering people tend to be overconfident in their belief that they aren't impacted by porn and can tell the difference between porn and "reality" (Albury, 2014, NRK, 2022).

Mainstream porn, like normative sex in general, is also deeply gendered; meaning it attributes strict gender roles and expectations as to why and how one should have sex, but the decade long feminist porn wars on « the porn question» (and if it should be restricted or banned) has been decided for us by the arrival of 24/7 internet access, according to Amia Srinivasan (2021). Together with the increase of sex-positivity since second wave feminism, consuming (and producing porn and being a sex worker) has become more and more normalized. This sex positivity has also been argued as linked to postfeminist and neoliberal logics that state that society should be organized based on individualism as freedom, in this case to be a "free" sexual subject – as long as you want it, everything is fine (ibid, 2021, Gill 2007).

### 1.2.2 Deplatforming of sexual speech online and backlash to porn use

But while there is an upward trend of more and younger people consuming porn through the internet (Medietilsynet, 2022), there is also something else going on. As I am writing this in the Spring of 2024, there is both an international and national concern around (especially young) people's porn habits, but more generally a war against the internet as a place for porn, sex work(ers) and sexual content. Bronstein argues that this deplatforming of sexual speech online was emboldened with the enacting of the 2018 US anti-sex trafficking laws FOSTA/SESTA (Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act/Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act), which made website operators like Google or Meta criminally liable for content posted on their platforms that could have something to do with illegal sexual commerce – a change that made online hosting of sexual speech, no matter if it was linked to trafficking or not, a lot more risky. These laws, however, have had the opposite effect, making it more difficult to uncover sex trafficking, never mind making it a lot more difficult and unsafe for sex workers (Bronstein, 2021). These laws have then been part of deplatforming sex online, and

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<sup>1</sup> Rule 34 is an internet meme claiming that there's porn online about every possible topic. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule\\_34](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_34) John Paul Stadler argues that the existence of Rule 34 reflects the codification of paraphilias, arousal at "atypical" things, into social identity structures. Stadler, J. P. (2018). *The Queer Heart of Porn Studies*. *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 58(1), 170–175.

having emboldened technology corporations to make sweeping changes to the sexual content that can exist on mainstream platforms like Google and Meta (ibid).

The first out was Tumblr, the microblogging platform, banned all «adult material» in 2018. It was no longer the safe home of many an erotic GIF, sex workers and more alternative queer, kinky, ethically produced porn. OnlyFans as well, the website mainly known for enabling direct payment to sex workers/porn creators for sexual material aka porn, tried to ban... porn, citing concerns raised by banking services (Bronstein, 2021). Similarly Pornhub, the leading website for (mostly free, mainstream) online porn has been trying to reframe its public respectability, separating the infrastructure of the distribution from those making the actual pornographic content as well (Rodeschini, 2021). But in 2020, after it became news headlines that they were profiting from non-consensual videos, Visa and Mastercard stopped offering payment services for Pornhub, and the website removed over 75% of its content and made user verification mandatory (Roth, 2023). This overall solution also impacted smaller, more independent creators from niche kink and fetish communities who might not feel safe to share their identity with Pornhub (Cole, 2020). Gumroad, an e-commerce platform just banned artists making sexual drawings and animation (Silberling, 2024), while social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok increasingly demonetize, shadow-ban and age restrict sex educating and LGBTQIA+ content (The Porn Conversation, 2024). These examples showcase how these new policies set by these internet companies and, relatedly, in response to pressure from financial institutions, have now become proactively more restrictive, to a greater extent than they have to be, trying to distance themselves from sexual speech and sex work, going into overdrive to avoid potential legal problems, but also to attract investors and advertisers. (Bronstein, 2021). Some have argued that this anti-porn, legislative crackdown has to do with Christian nationalism's fear of porn as a public menace and threat to the social order (Perry & Whithead, 2020).

Then there are the discourses happening about porn online. In my own informal observations, I've come across countless instances of commentary from women online, and from conservative men's movements (like the NoFap movement concerned with, especially white, men's sexual prowess being ruined by porn) talking about porn "rotting one's brain" and concern for porn addiction – on men, "of course" (Hagen, 2024). I observed a similar concern about porn's impact on people's sexuality reflected in recent NRK news articles that porn consumption leads to violence and rape culture (Bogen et al., 2024), which is the same argument the Norwegian feminist organization Kvinnegruppa Ottar makes, surfacing from time to time as part of the international «Stop Porn Culture» campaign, which has been critiqued for its lack of theoretical rigour, and failure to distinguish its position from other highly conservative views on sexuality and gender (Smith & Attwood, 2014).

### 1.2.3 Relevancy

Writing a project about porn is therefore highly topical at the moment, since Srinivasan point out, the concerns of the feminist Porn Wars of the 70s, of porn's influence and power, are still with us (2021). All the while porn has become more and more normalised and ubiquitous, government intrusion and overreaching corporate content moderation is pushing sexual speech underground, where both conservative powers and

capital interests want the internet to be as «neutral», unsexed as possible. This push to drive underground occurs alongside older and younger generations of porn critical feminists who express concern about porn's role in perpetuating sexism, violence and rape culture, all the while people all over the political spectrum are concerned about porn addiction, thinking the porn industry is so singular and so powerful it can pull everything into its orbit, even the most "innocent" (Albury, 2014). I want to add here that research on the concept of porn addiction have found that it's not really a thing in the sense that it's not addictive in the form that there is something about porn that is powerful enough to change one's brain chemistry – yes, one can develop a difficult, compulsive or habitual relationships to most things, but no research indicates that this is similar to for example drug addiction. It's more often a result of social or personal reasons. It's the conflict between one's values and one's sexual behaviour, and it's ensuing shame and secrecy and lack of education on the subject, which leads to people naming their relationship to porn as addictive (Ley, 2018). To get back to my original point, it seems that everyone is concerned with porn - after all: 'Everything is sex, except sex - which is power', as the famous quote goes. This is the discursive and technological landscape young people find themselves today, and it's clear that open minded research, not fear and the rise of white nationalistic and authoritarian concerns for (white) men's sexuality and capitalistic interests deplatforming online sexual speech, needs to make sense of attitudes and meanings of porn – to create new knowledges and practices.

This project aims to take seriously their thoughts, concerns and narratives for this thesis on young people's relationship to porn. In this study I've interviewed nine young people from between the ages of 16-25, and two 35-year-olds, with various diverse gender and sexualities, on their relationship to porn. Many of my informants point to extreme standpoints, remarking that society at large either ignores or completely condemns the fact that young people engage with porn, and I would argue that rarely does this kind of attitude get us anywhere, especially not in academic research. People have genuine concerns around porn and its (potentially sexist and other detrimental) impact (as researchers like Albury and Dahl point out). More knowledge is needed about young people's relationship with porn and how it fits in with broader processes of subjectivation. Albury argues that porn needs to be understood as part of how sex, technology and the self are represented and experienced (2014), but how can we do research that engages critically with porn? I will try to answer this in the beginning of the second chapter on theory, but first I will summarize what previous research says.

## 1.3 Previous research

### 1.3.1 Young people and porn

Vertongen et al. (2022) point out that the history of porn, for while it has been used to push moral and political boundaries, express creativity, and of course for pleasure, it has most importantly been considered *indecent*. This has led to concern with protecting "vulnerable individuals" and preventing "moral decline" in society, which is also reflected in academic research – much focus has been on porn's negative impacts on children "turning non-sexual children into promiscuous adolescents" (Vertongen et al., 2022). Albury seconds this by pointing out that porn has since the mid-90's, with the rise of the internet, increasingly been framed around risk – risk to young people's well-being and to their sexual development (Albury, 2014). Focus has been on young people using porn as



(informal) sexuality education, especially when other educational sources are lacking, and their seeking out “a discourse of erotics” (Fine, 1988, quoted in Albury, 2014:172) basically instructions on how to start sexual activity and perform specific kinds of sex that isn’t described in school-based sex-ed (ibid). Particularly it has been linked to being a bad educator for young heterosexual people, especially men, as it risks erotizing gender inequality. Vertongen et al. point out how much previous research into porn has tried to link young men using porn to “aggressiveness” towards women, yet the definition of what aggressive means is not clear cut. Especially the field of psychology has linked young straight men and women’s porn use to ‘risky’ sexual behaviors. But porn being viewed as mainly a bad influence or bad educator to young people has been questioned by other researchers, especially those in the porn studies field, as the link between young people’s porn use and their actual sexual behaviors isn’t straightforward (Albury, 2014).

Coming back to Vertongen et al. (2022)’s massive summary of previous research into porn and young people, they identified, and critically engaged with and deconstructed three dominant assumptions in this research field: *that being exposed to porn leads to continuing to consume porn, that this increased consumption is harmful, and that porn provides the template for sexual practice*. They found that being exposed to porn actually led to varied trajectories in young people’s engagement with pornography, meaning it didn’t necessarily mean permanent nor continual porn use, and for some young people it actually decreased as they became sexually active. Nor did porn exposure and use uniquely *have* to just do with sexual urges; it was more often about of curiosity and information-seeking (ibid).

When it came to the assumption of porn’s harm on young people, this was problematized as how can one capture the notion of harm in a meaningful way? Previous research has been focused on harm meaning increased sexual interest, permissiveness and activity - socio-cultural moralities changing, especially around sexually objectifying others, particularly women (ibid). Yet, factors like young people not self-reporting harm and expected developmental changes “naturally” increasing interest in sex, were either decentralised or problematized in research – while experiences showing porn leading to exploration of positive moments such as sexual pleasure were mostly absent from the same research (ibid).

Finally, with the third assumption, that porn use leads to specific template/script for sexual practices, here research was usually focused on unhealthy sexual practices, which themselves were understood through a lens of heteronormativity – what is viewed as healthy is heteronormative sex and vice versa (ibid). While it’s true that evidence shows the tendency of some vulnerable young people to re-enact porn scripts that are painful, one doesn’t know which scripts they adopt and how they transpose them. The common research hypothesis that aggressive porn being paired with pleasure leads to people finding aggressive scripts normalised and then desensitised to these same aggressive sex scripts, doesn’t really hold water when one considers that there isn’t really any research that indicates that young people are repeatedly consuming violent material and finding it less arousing over time – if they find it arousing, one doesn’t know (yet) how they think about this arousal and if they think that means they like what their consuming (Vertongen et al., 2022); ‘They may consider that aggressive material is incongruent with their views of self.’ (Vertongen et al., 2022:11).

To counter these assumptions, Vertongen et al. argue that 'We need greater understanding about the different ways pornography is used by adolescents, how they make sense of it, and how this evolves as they mature. The challenge is how to include adolescent narratives into the debates' (2022:1), meaning research that actually include and engage with young people's perspectives, their thoughts on both 'risks and pleasures' (Vertongen et al., 2022:1).

### 1.3.2 Research in the Norwegian context

In the wake of this summary of some of the key research findings and assumptions in young people's relationship to porn internationally, what does research in the Norwegian context say? Besides research into numbers and consumption as done by Medietilsynet (Medietilsynet, 2022) and NRK (Porno, 2022), I was unable to locate much more, as most of the research on young people and sexuality been focused on sex education, but while Rørtveit's Master's thesis from 2022 also focuses in on sex education, she also does include young people's actual perspectives as she interviews young people between 15-22 about their relationship to and consumption of porn. She bases her research on similar research assumptions as were presented above; like the assumption '[...]that through porn consumption [...] youth adapt certain attitudes and values which they bring into their real lives, and in their relationship to others. This can lead to skewed developments in the sexual health of individual youths, but also in society as a whole' (my own translation, Rørtveit, 2022:2). After interviewing groups of girls, groups of boys, and some with "both" genders, she argues that young people are affected by porn, while they simultaneously self-report being able to separate sex from porn. Interestingly the girls were critical of boys being able to do so. Porn was identified as being consumed for a various of reasons, be it masturbation, to desire for (sexual) knowledge, and learning how to be a "proper" sexual person. All the young people in the interviews desired better sex education, so as to get a more nuanced picture of sexuality and sexual health (Rørtveit, 2022).

Coming back to Albury, she points out that research into young people's relationship to porn is further complicated by the fact that porn users aren't a homogeneous group – it is not just the stereotypical porn user - the straight teenage boy using it as a tool to help masturbation, but a diverse of group of cisgender and queer (non-cisgender, non-straight) folks, again of all ages and cultural backgrounds (2014). Wahl argues that porn is also used for education; as in constructing a sexual knowledge base, learning different sexual techniques, to explore one's sexuality, relationship enhancement (2023).

### 1.3.3 Girls as porn consumers

Scarcelli interviewed "both" genders between 16-18, and while he found that girls were more negative towards porn and reported consuming less, like Rørtveit - he also found that this was cultural. The girls he interviewed conceptualized boys' relationship to porn as normal and instrumental (to masturbate) as boys were viewed as biologically more interested in sex, while girls' relationships to porn as perverted and had to serve a different purpose since girls are supposed to not be interested in sex: '[...] because we watch that kind of video to understand something, or to laugh. Not to come.' (2014:245). It was allowed if it had a different purpose; like ritually consuming porn in a group (of girls) to learn more about how to have sex and about boys' desires. Watching porn together both allowed the girls to remove the aura of perversion around porn and instead be playful. It also had a "group normalising function", as to evaluate what is "normal" by one's peer group and to maintain the gendered borders between girls and

boys. Girls finding “extreme” porn and laughing and mocking what they were viewing separated them from how they imagine boys’ sexuality works. He also described scenarios of boys watching porn with other boys as a form of homosocial reinforcement of masculinity, but also boys introducing girls to porn, in a form of teaching mode - reifying the view of boys as the holders of sexual knowledge. Scarcelli’s key finding is still that girls also play with gender, finding ways, like watching in groups, for them to explore boys’ universe without dealing with the stigma that society places on girls interested in consuming porn. Goldstein similarly talks about how young women are allowed to orientate themselves towards porn; as “learner”, “laughter”, “lover” and “critic” - reflecting both normative ideas about what it means to have a “good” female sexuality, and the common understandings of porn as problematic. Still, she identifies a shift in the contemporary terrain of femininity where young women are increasingly allowed to express a more unashamed and “banal” relationship to porn, sex and sexuality (2021).

#### 1.3.4 Queer and trans people as porn consumers

Gredler notes that while a lot has been said on how porn might affect people, this has often meant straight people - very little academic research has been done on porn’s effect on queer people (2021). Harvey seconds this, pointing out that mainstream porn remains mainly heterosexual and centering women as the object of desire, keeping a heteronormative discourse intact, and when it sexual and gender minorities are included, it’s done in a way that ‘fetishises difference rather than serving’ (Harvey, 2020:47). Harvey and Albury both show that queer people have barely been researched as porn consumers. They both argue that the question of porn’s influence isn’t “[...] so much which practices young people have seen and can name (or want to try), but whether young people have access to other forms of education that promotes skills to help them navigate their sexual learning processes ethically and safely’ (Albury, 2014:173). This project takes (some of) the variety of porn users into account, by interviewing a rather gender and sexuality diverse group of young people. But what does the (little that is of) research say here?

Harvey interviewed queer students between the ages of 18-25 about their relationship to free, easily accessible visual porn online, something akin to the concept of mainstream porn, and found that mainstream porn does reproduce heteronormative, binary norms and creates unrealistic sex and body expectations, unto young queer people, but that was more to do with it being reflection of wider societal problems than porn as a medium in itself. Many described positive experiences as well, like using porn as an idea bank, like a tool for sexual experimentation. But to counter the more aforementioned negative impact of mainstream porn, safe communication with peers and in relationships, comprehensive queer sex education, easier access to more alternative, queer(er) porn was proposed - ‘Until gender, sex, and sexuality education and discussions are common within society, sexual images of any nature are going to be problematic.’ (Harvey, 2020:48). Harvey (2020) continues by saying we have to accept it’s ‘[...] possible for pornography to be simultaneously positive and negative.’ (49).

When it came to specifically trans and non-binary<sup>2</sup> people’s experience with porn, as porn consumers (and not porn producers), I was only able to find one (!) single research paper, published last year by Italian authors Pavanello Decaro et al. (2023), a fact the

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<sup>2</sup> Some non-binary people identify as trans, others don’t.

authors also point out (ibid). They collected data from 212 trans and non-binary people (TGNB) about their porn preferences and habits, their opinions about TGNB representations in porn, the sensations they experienced when watching porn, and their differing experiences when watching porn videos with cisgender or TGNB protagonists. They found that heteronormativity and cisnormativity was a major issue in porn, with a '[...] need for deconstructing the current cis-het-patriarchal normative and binary system, which dominates pornography except for the ethical porn industry]' (Pavanello Decaro et al., 2023:1) They also found that when TGNB-people watched TGNB porn, that there were positive sensations such as identification and empowerment, but also negative sensations like objectification and dysphoria. Porn fetishizing queer and trans people is identified as a major problem; where trans feminine people are victims of both homo-transphobia, cis-sexism, and trans-misogyny, while being uniquely sexualized, while trans masculine people were made invisible, less likely to be represented (Pavanello Decaro et al., 2023).

### 1.3.5 Porn as a turning point in socialization process

I want to end this summary of previous research into young people's relationship to porn by briefly referring to Wahl's findings; young people using porn, or, in some cases, not using it, was viewed as one kind of *turning point* in '[...]the trajectory of their sexual self-development over the course of their life. Turning points are '[...] abrupt life events that redirect the course of a trajectory (Sampson and Laub 1992, 1993, quoted in Wahl, 2023:13). Understanding then why and how people use, or disregard, porn is crucial to explore how - from people's first exposure to porn to their present - sexual selfhood is a socialization process. It is a non-normative one, as porn is not viewed as an approved tool of socialization, but Wahl finds that it is still a part of sexual socialization. It can be used to learn new sexual techniques, new sexual behaviors, or shape novel sexual preferences, or be a place to find communities where their sexual attitudes and behaviors are normalized (away from the stigma of their everyday life). To Wahl's informants, the manner of which porn is used (or not used) was therefore keenly connected to the development of their sexual selves - often not in accord with socio-sexual scripts in society (2023).

### 1.3.6 Research gap summarized

I, like Vertongen et al. and the other researchers mentioned in this previous literature part, argue that young people of all genders and sexuality watch porn (increasingly so), and that there is a need for research that goes beyond heteronormative, binary narratives of harm, and that instead explore both harm and pleasure through a bottom-up approach (2022), by talking to young people themselves and viewing them as critical consumers (Pavanello Decaro et al.) of various kinds of porns: '[...] greater consideration needs to be given to how adolescents engage with and make sense of pornography, and how this evolves over time and is connected to developmental changes'. (Vertongen et al., 2022:10). One cannot view porn as separate from the rest of the social and material world and all that entails, and aspects like normative ideas of gender and sexuality have a big impact - research then needs to address questions on power and ensuing resistance (Albury, 2014). I will explain more thoroughly in the beginning of the theory chapter on what I mean by power in this project.

## 1.4 Motivation, purpose and research question(s)

I've called myself a sex-nerd, and my theoretical background (UK-based Cultural Studies) prior to this Master's was heavily focused on trying to understand the social and material world through understanding and deconstructing power and discourses. This thesis is to me also therefore an inherently critical project, with an end goal of *liberation*. I want to understand the various discourses around porn, gender, sexuality, desire/fantasy, and subjectification, and struggle with these discourses in a transformative way, by asking questions that don't assume porn is inherently harmful, that are non-heteronormative and not binary, and take my informants seriously as critical porn consumers. Hopefully the interviews, and ensuing analyses, can help me understand my own experience with porn better, but more importantly contribute towards some sort of liberation from powers that seek to subjugate, control, shame and make invisible people's complex sexualities and pleasures, especially those on the margins. A second, more minor purpose for this thesis is to be able to help provide research that might lead to more diverse, power-critical, non-heteronormative sex education. My main research question and sub-questions are therefore the following:

*How do young people navigate discourses around porn as they grow up?*

To illuminate the main research question I have developed three underlining research questions:

- 1. How do young people talk about sexuality and gender in their first meeting(s) with porn?*
- 2. What strategies do young people have when encountering discourses around sexuality, sex, desire and ethics in their porn use growing up?*
- 3. How do young people talk about health and normality in relation to porn use?*

## 1.5 Definitions

### 1.5.1 Porn(s)

While I've referred to mainstream porn previously in this text, I've operated with a definition in line with Harvey's definition: '[...] pornography that is freely and easily available video footage of sexual acts on the internet.' (Harvey, 2020:1), I think it is also important to inform about the ways in which I'm defining porn in this thesis. Porn in general is actually quite difficult to define. Leading researchers in the field of pornography operate with two seemingly incompatible definitions: 'sexually explicit material that exists to arouse' McKee et al., 2020:1085) and then something that is culturally relative, i.e. which indicates that porn has not some inherent characteristic, something pre-discursive. Some researchers believe that all texts (i.e. text in anything for any element that carries cultural meaning for the consumer, such as books, films, pictures, but also clothes, hairstyles, coffee cups etc) that have nudity are porn, while others believe that these pornographic texts must have sexual acts or aroused genitalia to count. Others do not provide a definition at all. This problem of defining porn becomes even more difficult with the blurred lines between porn, art and sex education, not to forget texts that are not created to turn someone on, like a shoe advertisement, can be

used by those with foot fetishes to masturbate. There is also great variation in what those who consume porn regard as pornographic, because even though there is quite a lot of agreement about what is the least and what was the most pornographic, there is much more disparity and disagreement in response to (possibly pornographic) texts in the middle of the spectrum. It is also more common for those who consumed more porn to categorize more texts as pornographic (McKee et al., 2020). Therefore, 'the dominant definitions cannot handle such multiplicity, for pornography, the dominant social concepts, cannot possibly cover pornography, the actual aesthetic forms. (Andrews, 2012:458-459)'. Since it is therefore impossible to find a definition of porn, it is therefore recommended that researchers and academics should think carefully, choose their own definition in view of the project's needs, and explain what this definition is and why they have chosen it (McKee et al., 2020). Based on both my own personal experiences where porn was rarely in video format - which I rarely used to masturbate, and research indicating it's impossible to come up with a unified definition, I am using a purposefully vague definition of porn for this project - instead I start my interviews saying I'm using a broad definition, give some examples of porn mediums to open my participants' mind to what could be considered porn, and to let associations float freely when we are talking, so that they decide themselves what counts as porn to them. This bottom-up approach is an important dimension of this project.

## 1.6 The thesis' structure

So far I've talked about my personal interest for the topic of the thesis, the scholarly and discursive landscape and relevancy of the thesis, and summarized previous research on the topic. I've also presented my main research question and sub-questions that are the basis for this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis is structured thusly:

Chapter 2: Theoretical frameworks, which talk about the thesis' theoretical framework, which includes theory around power, discourse/subjectification, sexuality, gender and fantasy/desire, with a focus on social-construction perspectives.

Chapter 3: Methods, which describe my methodology; from choice of the semi-structured interview method, recruitment and information about my informants creating the interview guide, doing the interviews, analysing the interviews through thematic and then discourse inspired analysis, to ethical concerns and my role as researcher.

Chapter 4: "Coming-of-age": discourses of sexuality and gender in young people's first meeting(s) with porn. Here I will answer my first research question: *how do young people talk about sexuality and gender in their first meeting(s) with porn?* I will do this by explaining the related discourses I found in my data material, and analyse what identities and ways of being they promote and make invisible, look for moments of resistance, before connecting it to a larger societal context.

Chapter 5: 'There's porn and then there's *porn*': young people's strategies to make porn "work" for them. Here I will answer my second research question: *What strategies do young people have when encountering discourses around sexuality, sex, desire and ethics in their porn use growing up?* I will do this by explaining the related discourses I found in my data material, and analyse what identities and ways of being they promote and make invisible, look for moments of resistance, before connecting it to a larger societal context.

Chapter 6: "A healthy relationship to porn": young people navigating norms of health and normality. Here I will answer my final research question: *How do young people talk about health and normality in relation to porn use?* I will do this by explaining the related discourses I found in my data material, and analyse what identities and ways of being they promote and make invisible, look for moments of resistance, before connecting it to a larger societal context.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: summary, discussion, limitations and further implications, where I will summarize my most important findings, discuss them, talk about implications for further research into the topic(s), and briefly discuss research limitations.

## 2. Theoretical frameworks

### 2.1 On being a critical porn project

Previously, in my introduction, I mention wanting to engage with porn critically, but does it mean to do so from a porn studies, feminist, queer, and sex education perspective? And more importantly, what kinds of theoretical frameworks does this engagement highlight?

#### 2.1.1 Being porn critical

Ironically, when the interdisciplinary journal *Porn Studies* (which I've used much in my research for this thesis) was going to be established in 2014, the aforementioned Stop Porn Culture called for the journal's editorial board and the creation of another journal called *Critical Porn Studies*, as the original editors were accused of "Pro-Porn Studies". If they didn't use harm as the starting point of their research, they must therefore be in cahoots with the porn industry and creating propaganda for them. Being 'critical' for those signing the Stop Porn Culture petition meant here being anti-porn, in the sense of producing 'criticism of pornography' (original emphasis), with fault-finding and condemnation of porn being the most important (Smith & Attwood, 2014). For the editors of *Porn Studies*, this kind of perspective is not critical – 'although it may well 'make sense' to those who wish to draw lines of connection between the literal description of particular media texts and the surface appearances of attitudes and behaviours' (ibid:8), where porn is treated as '[...] abstract, monolithic, with only the simplest and most obvious of meanings.' (ibid:8). To actually be porn critical, the editors argue that one has to have an appropriate theoretical framework that is able to unpack what's at stake in the construction of certain practices and views, by drawing from disciplines that have insights into the complexity of culture, the shifts and continuities in how sex and sexuality (and media) is historically constructed (ibid), 'of the ways in which knowledge is socially and culturally wrought' (ibid:9). To be critical also involves being aware of how research is framed by asking certain kinds of questions (ibid) – if they're only focused on harm or the "corruption" of young people's "pure" sexuality, as most research has been focused on per my previous literature summary.

#### 2.1.2 Feminist perspectives

This example shows that feminists' perspectives on porn are notoriously divided. During the 1970s, while a cultural backlash against feminism was on the rise, feminists began to identify porn as giving life to the patriarchy, anti-porn feminists declared that 'Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice' (Morgan, 1974, quoted in Srinivasan, 2021:37), as it (apparently) eroticized women's subordination. In contrast, during the Barnard Sex conference in 1982, it was stated in the conference concept text *Towards a Politics of Sexuality*, that the desire was to recognize that sex is 'simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency' (Vance, 1984:1, quoted in Srinivasan, 2021:41). Srinivasan believes that the anti-porn feminist perspective is more understandable when one understands that porn = problematic sex for the previous generation, whether it was sex that did not take into account women's pleasure, rape fantasies, BDSM, sex without love, sex with power imbalance, or just sex with men in general. Either sex was (as it has existed until now) a patriarchal concept that eroticizes sexism, and the relationship between men and women had to be revolutionarily changed (being a political lesbian or celibate was the next best thing). Or sex was something positive that women had the



right to decide for themselves: As long as it was consensual for all parties, women should not be shamed or stigmatized for their desires, even if they involved men. Srinivasan then believes that many feminists found themselves between these two views, by standing strongly against rape culture, which they believed was reinforced by porn, while at the same time believing that there was a difference between rape and wanting sex (Srinivasan, 2021).

### 2.1.3 Queer perspectives

Stadler argues that the aforementioned second-wave feminism of the Porn Wars led to both queer studies and porn studies, as both disciplines came from the need for dissent and reconfiguration; working to denaturalize sex and uncover its social constructions, while also working against patriarchal processes of normalization. To Stadler this is why there is a queer heart of porn studies. Gayle Rubin asked why feminism had not yet critically engaged with sexual practices that fell outside of that imagined division between “good” and “bad” sex – to her both porn and homosexual sex both exceed this division, this normalizing boundary (Stadler, 2018). For Linda Williams, porn holds the vexed position of bringing ‘[...] on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated obscene and kept literally off-scene.’ (Williams, 2004:5, quoted in Stadler, 2018:171) - revealing a queer sort of “slipperiness”, the arbitrary line between the “good” and “bad”, which shows the importance of having context when studying porn. Eve Sedgwick argues that the political desire to find out what “causes” homosexuality is similar to asking a nauseum about the presumed causal effects of porn – for both reveal a desire for eradication rather than understanding. A queering of porn studies therefore chooses to ask different questions; where ‘[...] sexual depictions and activities need to be considered outside the framework of fixed identity categories’ (Paasonan, 2011:153). One might think that the variety of forms of porn, the codification of range of paraphilias into identity structures, but instead one observed that categories of identity began to blur and cross (Stadler, 2018). Therefore, ‘[...] a queer orientation to pornography involves analytical curiosity and openness that does not start from or resort to binary models.’ (Paasonan, 2011:153, quoted in Stadler, 2018:174), resisting some preset knowledge (Stadler, 2018).

### 2.1.4 Sex positive/sex critical perspectives

Key in the contemporary feminist view on sex, and by extension porn, is the concept of sex positivity (and therefore sex negativity as well), and this has been shaped by liberalism, now neoliberalism, and post-feminism; with the focus on individualism, consumerism and sexual subjectification as key to human fulfillment (Harvey, 2005 & Gill, 2007). Lisa Downing argues that a dichotomy between sex positive vs sex negative might not be too helpful, as a sex-positive approach may overlap with a belief in ‘[...] the liberating nature of sex in itself, which could potentially ignore traumatic, abusive or simply indifferent experiences of sex, while also championing forms of sex that a lot like hetero-patriarchal ideals, which are then rebranded as ... empowering’ (Downing, 2012:1). Downing then talks about the term “sex critical”, stemming from a need to put all ‘forms of sexuality and all sexual representations [...] to critical thinking’ (Downing 2012). As what first seems to be a contemporary form of sexual citizenship is actually just a ‘[...] partial, private, and primarily leisure and lifestyle membership’ (Evans, 1993:64, quoted in Smith & Attwood, 2014) of society. In such a neoliberal framework, being sex positive (or neutral) to different forms of sexual media, like porn, is again, relying too much on the potentiality of “empowerment” (Smith & Attwood, 2014). Gilbert argues that thinking

of porn, and therefore, sex as more of a consumptive act than a relational one, as a commodification, is one of the key characteristics of contemporary neoliberal culture (2013). In critiquing neoliberalism, porn is viewed as important to critique 'for its apparent power to shape sexuality, create definitions of who women are and what they are for, and how sexual relations should be conducted between men and women.' (Smith & Attwood, 2014:13), but unimportant for '[...] its abilities to open up new vistas of sexual being, for its possibilities of imagining oneself and community, or its possibilities as fantasy and as pleasure' (my own italicization, *ibid*:13). Yes, the neoliberal agenda has a tendency to co-opt even non-normative sexual interests and desires, but as Weiss argues; 'Late-capitalism works by inciting and capitalizing on these desires, yet it can never control the emotional effect of this excess' (2006, 128).

Smith and Attwood then argue that being sex-positive can also be beyond neoliberal, postfeminist sentiments, but more a philosophy that thinks of sexuality as a potentially positive force in people's lives, which celebrates not only individual choice based on consent – but, importantly not in simply a celebratory way or uncritically, but also celebrates sexual diversity, different desires, and different relationships structures. They also point out that sex positive often overlaps with the term sex radical, which describe 'those seeking and advocating more egalitarian, experimental and challenging forms of sex – whether as public activists or solely within their personal sexual practice' (Chapkis, 1997, quoted in Smith & Attwood, 2014:13). Both these perspectives stand in opposition to censorship of sexual representations, regulation of sexual practices, and restrictions of sex education. (Smith & Attwood, 2014)

### 2.1.5 The porn literate perspective

This last point on how being sex positive or sex critical has to do with the importance of sex education leads me to the concept of porn literacy. This is a semi-new concept, where one applies the critical analysis of media literacy to porn, where porns are understood as constructions that project certain values that have been created for profit and/or power. (The Porn Conversation, 2023) Yet, educators often discuss porn as «an inherently problematic genre that young people should be inoculated against through comprehensive media literacy education», which is «(...) an approach that often ignores the nuance of young people's engagements with porn and which often isolates pornography as outside of and infringing upon young people's everyday lives» (Goldstein, 2020:70), when ideally it could have the '[...] the capacity to open up critically productive conversations about the ways popular and institutional discourses define particular forms of sexuality, sexual identity, and sex/gender expression as 'legitimate' (or 'illegitimate') knowledge for young people.' (Albury, 2014:178).

To summarize what it means to be critical when it comes to porn, in combination with previous research on young people and porn, it's clear that one needs theoretical frameworks, lenses, that go beyond fear, moralizing and a main focus on harm. Instead, theory is needed that go into the historical and social discourses that we are enmeshed, that show how oppressive powers that reinforce binary gender and sexuality stereotypes, but also how (young) people have agency as well. I will therefore now go into theoretical frameworks based on social construction, which treat sexuality as a site of power, of discourse, of subjectification, alongside aspects of sexuality like gender, desire and fantasy.

## 2.2 Foucauldian perspectives on power, discourse, and subjectification

### 2.2.1 Power

Michel Foucault famously in his work *History of Sexuality*, which analysed sexuality as a key site of power, and his work has been instrumental in shaping feminist theory, gender studies and queer studies according to Chloë Taylor. Power to Foucault, has in contemporary society gone from being historically about sovereign power, a kind of state or governmental power (Taylor, 2016) to '[...] take life or let live' (Foucault, 1978:138), to what he refers to as biopolitics and disciplinary power, where in contrast it is the power '[...] to foster life or disallow it to the point of death' (Foucault, 1978:138). One can think of this power having a micro-technology, in the form of (self)discipline and macro-technology, in the form of biopolitics. This kind of power is now able to get access to our bodies (bio) because this new power functions through norms rather than laws. Norms about how we speak, eat, sleep, move our bodies, gesticulate, even have sex, and these norms are internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts or threats of violence; '[...] first a practice is forced on you, but if you repeat it enough times it becomes a habit, and eventually a habit becomes a desire.' (Taylor, 2016:22). This form of power cannot be located in a single individual nor a government body, like with sovereign power, for now it is dispersed throughout society - it's everywhere, in and around all of us - and therefore often goes unrecognized as *power* (Taylor, 2016).

If it's everywhere, that means everyone exercises disciplinary power - the power of enforcing social norms - and everyone exercises it over everyone else - our peers, lovers, neighbours, children are all trying to make us *normal* (Taylor, 2016), but importantly, there is no mastermind behind it all who understands the bigger picture: 'People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (Foucault, quoted in Taylor, 2016:65). Power is also therefore relational to Foucault, it's not something one can have, get, take, share, or lose - instead we're always in several shifting relations of power. Of course, these relations are not equal, structural reasons lead for some people to be normally in more privileged positions than others within these relations of power - he calls these "major dominations"; the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations' of relations (Foucault, 1978:94). But power relations are always moving and complex, and no one is completely powerless in them (in situations of completely subordination, that is violence, not power, to Foucault): '[t]he characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct - but never exhaustively or coercively' (Foucault, 1994:324). Understanding power is then not about 'who exercises power' but about 'the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was' (Foucault, 1988:104, quoted in Taylor, 2016:61).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Foucault argues that power also *produces* resistance: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet... this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1978:95). Taylor argues then that for Foucault, 'resistance is something that happens in bodies when there are gaps or contradictions in power, or it is an unpredictable result of the excesses of power on the body' (Taylor, 2016:69); it is more often than not the effect of an error in power's application, rather than a self-conscious rising up on the part of the subjects to whom it

is applied. I would argue that this understanding of power as producing resistance, shows two key points we need to bring with us: 1) Power can never be complete 2) But it's incredibly important to be aware how power can *co-opt* resistance to maintain itself. Co-option here refers to a system, be it neoliberalism as mentioned earlier or the institution of marriage, neutralizes threats to it by incorporating and (regaining) control of critical actors or opinions into itself. This in combination with an understanding of power as creating resistance but in unintentional ways, makes power more invisible and harder to understand and resist and liberate from – can it even be resisted with intention?

### 2.2.2 Discourse and subject(ification)

In his work on the history of sexuality, Foucault discusses how power operates through discourse. Discourse to Foucault isn't just a conversation, it's more do to with the conditions (historical, cultural, social) which mean that utterances (or actions) are seen as self-evident, as natural, as acceptable (Foucault, 1982). The discourses about the world influence how the world is and becomes, they '[...] emphasize and legitimize certain forms of action - forms of action that contribute to creating, maintaining and changing society as a social reality' (Johannessen et al., 2018:53). It is not only the case that the discourses create social reality and vice versa, but that they are inherently unstable – there is a continuous linguistic (broadly defined) struggle that can maintain, strengthen, or weaken power, and people are both "slave and master" when it comes to this (Foucault, 1982).

People, subjects, are therefore to Foucault not, as the traditional concept of the subjects says, fully endowed with a consciousness; autonomous and stable with a core of the self, independent source of meaning and action, some being that understands itself because it was the source of meaning to begin with. To Foucault, the subject can carry the kind of knowledge discourse produces and be an object through which power operates, but it cannot exist *outside* of discourse - as it is *produced* by and subjected to discourse (Wetherell, 2001). Foucault's subject is produced in two different ways: 'Discourse itself produce subjects, figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces' (Hall, in Wetherell et al., 2021:80) – like the madman, homosexual the hysterical woman, the criminal, and more. But discourse also produces places for the subjects, subject-positions, from where its specific meaning and knowledge makes most sense; 'Individuals may differ as to their social class, gendered, "racial", and ethnic characteristics (among other factors)' (ibid) but they won't '[...]be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, *subjected* themselves to its rules, and hence become the *subjects of its power/knowledge*' (ibid). Hall provides an example here of this theory applied to our understanding of porn, arguing porn made for men will only "work" for men, if the women watching put themselves in the position of the desiring man - as this is the ideal subject-position the discourse of male porn produces. (Wetherell et al., 2001).

## 2.3 Sexuality, gender, and desire/fantasy as sites of power

### 2.3.1 Sexuality

Foucault analysed the history of sexuality, or more precisely, analysed a history of '[...] knowledgeable discourses about sex, of the invention of sciences of sex and of how we came to believe that these sciences could tell us not only about [sex], but more

importantly, about who we are and how we can be happy' (Taylor, 2016:9) - to him it was a key site of power.

He identifies a popular view at the time (which is still with us) of society having repressed sexuality and was now liberating it with the sexual revolution (of the 1960's and '70's), in part by confessing and talking about our sexualities. This does not make sense to Foucault, as he instead identifies this new confessing culture was a result of biopower from the 1800's and onwards viewing sex as a danger to people's individual health in the form of disease and unwanted pregnancies, and to the health of populations themselves if the "wrong" kinds of people reproduced (this was deeply related to the rise of the eugenics movement all over Europe), therefore it needed to be monitored, controlled, categorized – through confessing.

For power to get a hold on sex it required data, which meant that it required people to speak, and these discourses have productive effects – having created sexualities rather than (or even while) prohibiting them. For example, "perverse" sexualities like homosexuality went from nothing more than the forbidden act of sodomy, a matter of the law, but became a matter of institutions of health like psychiatry and medicine and interpreted in the 1800's (and onwards) as an act that revealed *identity*. Homosexuality became an *identity*, like other sexualities categorized at the time. Biopower started targeting women's bodies specifically, since the reproduction of life, of populations, take place mainly through their bodies. And that this was less to do with repressing some innate sexual drives of women, but instead to permeate women with sex, making new female sexualities like the historical example of hysteria. To Foucault our understanding of sexuality is itself a historical construct, produced *by* (not just subjected to) modern forms of power (-bio and sovereign) (Taylor, 2016). And sexuality became increasingly subjected to power from the 1800's and onwards, not the other way around.

Foucault argues that by thinking of sexuality as repressed, people then feel like they are automatically doing a serious, therapeutic, and even emancipatory political task when they talk about sex - paving the way to a happier future. To think that to "come out of the closet", to tell the secrets of our sex lives, is automatically liberating, actually misunderstands the relationship between sex and power. Talking about sex isn't automatically resistance to power, however, as an *extension* of power; Foucault argues that these kinds of "coming out of the closet" is exactly what needed to happen for power to take hold of our bodies and the population at large.

Instead of just talking about sex and thinking this will free us, Foucault argues we need to look into 'How was sex spoken about?'; 'What was said?'; 'What kind of knowledge was developed about sex?'; and 'What sort of power effects has this knowledge had?' (Foucault, 1978:8–9). Now we do '[...] analysis and self-analysis; we taxonomize our sexualities, giving ourselves ever more refined sexual labels (like "switches"); we see sex as a health issue (lack of interest in sex is 'hypoactive sexual desire dysfunction'); we are concerned with what is sexually normal [...]' (Taylor, 2016:17).

Power is everywhere, intrinsic to all relationships, it plays a productive role in these relationships – even sexual and romantic relationships (Taylor, 2016); 'One must not suppose there exists a certain sphere of sexuality... were it not the object of mechanisms of prohibition brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power' (Foucault, 1978:98).

### 2.3.2 Gender

I want to first mention some common stereotypes our sexist society has about gender<sup>3</sup> in relation to sexuality. Gender is often understood to be binary, where traits are assigned gender in oppositional and naturalized ways, and they should not overlap in one gendered person:

Women/female/feminine	Man/male/masculine
Passive	Active, dominating of other men and women
Naive	Worldly
Sexually inexperienced	Sexually experienced
Passive and submissive	Active and dominate
The object of desire	The one who desires
Soft	Aggressive

But what's the history of gender, and its relation to power? 'We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions [...]' (Foucault, 1978:157). Before Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble*, Anglo-American feminists had understood gender, "women", "men", as something socially constructed, as the cultural interpretations of bodily sex, while accepting the idea that sex was the biological and natural distinction between female and male: Feminists put their critical attention towards sexist ways gender was interpreted, not critiquing the "obviousness" of sex - which came from a quite obvious feminist need to be able to find some pre-discursive experience, an idea of women - some shared feature that united women as a group, to organize against repression (Taylor, 2016).

But Butler argues that when feminists produce authoritative discourses on 'women', when they try to naturalize, focus on the biology of "woman", they simultaneously socially construct the idea of "woman". And this constituting is inherently *exclusionary*, as Western feminist discourses have historically (and presently) excluded lesbians, non-Western women, women of colour, trans women from their idea of "woman" (Butler, 1990). Constructing the category of women is 'an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations' (Butler, 1990:8-9). Not only can this sex/gender distinction backfire in the fight for gender liberation, but to Butler sex doesn't exist before discourses about sex, and it's always been what feminists refer to as gender. Everything we think about sex, including the idea that there are two sexes (and only two, ignoring the existence of intersex people and variety of secondary sex characteristics in cis people), that is in itself already a gendered interpretation (Butler, 1990). This 'binary, heterosexist framework... carves up genders into masculine and feminine and forecloses the kinds of subversive and parodic convergences that characterize gay and lesbian cultures' (Butler, 1990:84-5). To Butler, it's all gendered interpretations all the way down, so less energy needs to be spent on trying to figure out what a "woman" is, and more on trying to understand how gender came to be embedded in our bodies, naturalized (Butler, 1990).

Key here is Butler's theory that gender is *performative*. Just like disciplinary power works by making subjects/people repeat practices, ways of being, talking, until these become internalized habits, until they feel natural and like yourself. Butler argues that it's the same with gender, it's the result of repeated, compulsory performances of gender

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity/what-are-gender-roles-and-stereotypes>

(Butler, 1990). Dig deep enough, and one will not find some true, pre-discursive gender, instead it is mandated by the constructs and socio-political norms of sex and sexuality. Gender is therefore something we *do*, we continuously become, but it's also something then that is done *to us*, by the rest of the social world. We gender, we scrutinize ourselves but also everyone around us (Butler, 1990); 'The girl continues to be girled; the boy continues to be boyed; and these practices of girling and boying are repeated not just by parents but also by a range of institutions that greet the child with boxes to be checked and norms to be embodied.' [Butler, 2024:25).

To further understand gender, Butler (and Foucault) argue that gender, sexuality and desire are all intertwined, in what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix; 'a sex-gender-sexuality tripartite system which accounts for how we make assumptions based on what we see.' (Tredway, 2014:163). To be woman is to be feminine is to be heterosexual, and vice versa. This is because of the heterosexualization of desire; where the consequences are that society view women who desires other women as to be unnaturally 'masculinized', and a man unnaturally 'feminized'. This also explains why children are presumed to be cishet <sup>4</sup> until proved otherwise, but why their sexuality is put into question if they don't perform gender "correctly. To be a person, a subject, is then to be cishet, everything else an aberration (Taylor 2016) that can trouble *everything*. 'To rule out the very thought of queer kinship, gay and lesbian sexual lives and forms of intimacy, and trans life, for instance, means that they have to be cast out or negated in some way, [...] the "unthinkable" has to remain unthinkable (Butler, 2024:80) But it's precisely why we then must expose, unmask, the foundational categories of sex, gender, but also *desire* as effects of a specific formation of power. (Taylor, 2016).

### 2.3.3 Desire and fantasy

As mentioned previously, since power operates through the regulation of sexuality, Foucault identified that power creates certain desires in certain temporal and sociocultural contexts (unintentionally or not), but he also argues we are surrounded by a discourse about our sexuality that identifies us according to our sexual practices and desires, where our desires are seen to hold the truth to who we are deep down, and must be set free for us to be happy. When it comes to gender, conforming to the gender expectations of our assigned sex, which ways and how we are supposed to have sexual desire, can itself feel like an innate inclination or desire, as pleasurable – as what sets us free, rather than as an effect of power (Taylor, 2016). For example, Adrienne Rich coined the term *compulsory heterosexuality* for the phenomenon that "woman meaning heterosexual" is so powerful in a patriarchal and heteronormative society, that it assumes and enforces heterosexual desires upon everyone – it compels both straight and queer women to regulate their intimacies, affinities and relations in ways that often betray what it is they really want. (Taylor, 2016, Srinivasan, 2021). Amia Srinivasan, in her chapter on *The politics of desire*, notes that, while no one is entitled to sex, perhaps it isn't banal' to '[...] observe that what is ugliest about our social realities – racism, classism, ableism, heteronormativity – shapes whom we do and do not desire and love, and who does and does not desire and love us?' (2021:95) But if desire is socially constructed and political, the question becomes then, what discourses create what desires? What fantasies? And do they reflect some deep truth within us?

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<sup>4</sup> Short for cisgender and heterosexual, referring to someone who identifies with the same gender as they were assigned at birth, and being attracted to the "opposite" gender.

Barker argues that our society tends to view sexuality as primal, especially men's, where porn functions as the equivalent of a drug – weakening one's self-control. Porn here is criticised for leaving nothing to the imagination, but Barker argues that paradoxically this literalness somehow creates a fear of sexual fantasies, and therefore porn as well (2014). The fear is that people, young men specifically, might "blur the distinction between fantasy and reality": where porn with its explicitness creates a fantasy world where for example women are always willing to perform extreme sexual acts, which then leads to the same being demanded of "real women". But for this to be possible, this world of fantasy has to be invisible to the people who visit it; 'all the acts and scenarios in the porn world have to point and draw in one single direction, to add up to a 'myth'; and the reasons for visiting and using the world have to be such that they will tend to 'spill over' into lived relationships.' Fantasies that only function to arouse, could then be dangerous, and in need of control. Fantasies are also viewed as compensatory; the distorted management of childhood problems and traumas – with no agency involved. But Barker argues fantasies do not work like this; instead, they are productive (ibid), 'in the sense that they might be the means through which adults try out versions of self-in-sexual-society, reimagining themselves through others' re-imaginings.' (2014:146). He identifies five roles of fantasies for people: As a *magnifying glass accentuating desire*, as a *mirror to the self* so we can explore our responses to things, as an *emporium full of possibilities* to be explored, as a *journey* to a distant realm of desires and activities, and finally fantasy as exploring *an alternative self*; what could or could not possibly be. It's not as simple as being exposed to porn; people orientate themselves differently, based on how different sexual fantasies relate to other parts of their lives. Fantasies are neither inherently "good" nor "bad" in themselves, as each of these can be used constructively '[...] to explore and build sexual relations of great power and pleasure. Equally, each of them can be used exploitatively and hurtfully' (Barker, 2014:155) - but there is a distinction between "reality" and fantasy. (Barker, 2014).

This difference can have emancipatory potential according to Engelberg. In porn one can, and often does, explore identifications and desires without the sanctions of exploring them in the social world – there are inherent bisexual and trans potentialities here (against normative binary monosexuality and cis-genderism). Our gendered identifications are *both* a question of what one wants *and* of who one is, but he argues that the spectator's gender nor their sexuality need correlate 'intuitively' with the pornography they enjoy - so modes of bisexual and transgender desiring and becoming are afforded fantastical space. Men being into watching sex between women, women into sex between men, gay men watching heterosexual sex, all prove how common the misalignment is between people's gendered and sexual identities and the porn they like. Engelberg argues then that fears like the NoFap movement's that porn addiction could develop fetishes or "sexual obsessions" that previously would have been uninteresting - that porn can potentially turn straight men queer, to turn cis men trans, has something to it. Not in the sense that porn can simply turn people trans or queer (nor that this would be something to fear), but that porn 'can foster curiosities to desire and identify expansively through its proffering of multiple positions of sexual possibility' (Engelberg: 2024:15); a space between spectator and text wherein desires, sexualities, and identifications can be negotiated, an opening into the domain of the possible that runs counter to hegemonic notions of proper or legitimate sexuality and gender (Engelberg, 2024); 'fantasy enacts a splitting or fragmentation or, perhaps better put, a



multiplication or proliferation of identifications that puts the very locatability of identity into question' (Butler, 1990:110).

This brings me back to Srinivasan, as she argues for working on liberating sex from the distortions of oppression, but that this is not the same as disciplining desire or fantasy. Instead, she asks what '[...] could happen if we were to look at bodies, our own and others' and allow ourselves to feel admiration, appreciation, want, where politics tells us we should not.' (Srinivasan, 2021:96). She is describing a call for a certain discipline here, not on desire itself, but on the political forces that presume to instruct what we (area allowed to) desire (Srinivasan, 2021).

### 3. Methodology

General research ethical considerations that must be made for all research - many of which are directed at the research environment and «research's pursuit of truth and freedom» (my own translation, De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene, 2014). These are *reliability*; that the research's data collection is transparent to other researchers, *validity*; the research's analysis is made transparent, by explaining what the researcher has as a theoretical starting point and how they have interpreted and analysed the data and from there made conclusions, and *transferability*; how the findings of the researcher could possibly be valid in other contexts (Thagaard, 2018). Therefore, this methodology chapter includes what form the data collection is in, how I've collected data and which methods I've used to analyse, and researcher positionality and ethical concerns. The previous chapter included my theoretical framing, and the issue of transferability will be discussed in this thesis' final conclusion.

#### 3.1 Qualitative methods: the semi-structured interview

As stated previously, the collection of data material for this project has been done through interviewing young people about porn, and I chose the semi-structured interview method to obtain this material. In qualitative research, interviews are the most common method, and this is because it can provide good and deep insight and knowledge about people's thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding the topics you want to know more about (Thagaard, 2018). I'm interested in the various discourses they are embedded in and how they navigate and make sense of them, and to acknowledge their experiences as valid knowledge - interviewing is the superior method for this particular task.

The semi-structured form of the interviews provides enough structure yet flexibility for me to ask the questions I need to answer my research questions. It also ensures that the answers of the various interviewees can be compared to each other, which ensures better quality of the data material. Being able to move beyond the interview guide in any given situation as well creates openness and the opportunity for ideas and reflections that I have not necessarily thought of before (Thagaard, 2018), but which turn out to be relevant to the person, and thus possibly relevant for the research. Since pornography is a sensitive research topic, I decided on one-to-one interviewing, which provides a safer space for young people to open up and reflect with the researcher on porn on their relationship to porn - hopefully, the interviewee together with the researcher can then try to create meaning out of all these reflections, through this specific qualitative method.

#### 3.2 Constructing the interview guide

My interview guide was semi-structured, with open questions. The three themes were their relationship to porn, gender, sexuality and desire, and porn literacy and sex education. Underneath these themes I also had several follow up questions. I end by asking if there is something we haven't already talked about that they want to add. The interview guide can be found in the appendix.

### 3.3 The recruiting process and the final selection of interview subjects (aka informants)

#### 3.3.1 Recruiting the informants

For this project I wanted to interview a diverse range of individuals between the ages of 16 and 30. This age range was decided, in conversation with my supervisors, so that I wouldn't have to manage the heavy ethical approval process relating to researching minors while also being old enough that I was able to actually find enough people to interview – yet at the same time remain within a similar enough generation so that I could compare their experiences and the similar discourses they were situated in. As mentioned previously I was particularly interested in young people because they grew up with easy access to the internet and therefore also with porn, from an increasingly early age. Diversity concerning gender and sexualities was also important; given that this is not a project specifically about women or men or queer folk and specific identity category-grounded relationships to porn. This project was rather about the generation itself, which happens to be more openly queer and gender non-conforming (Bufdir, 2022). I wished to move beyond a binary and oppositional understanding of gender and gendered experiences of porn, as I've mentioned in the recap of previous research, as it doesn't reflect the nuances of desire and gendered fluctuations and explorations that can happen through a person's experience with porn consumption.

Originally I was going to use the snowball method (Baltar & Brunei, 2012) to interview around 10 to 15 people between 16-25, where friends and acquaintances share my interview proposal around and vouch for me to potential interview candidates – as this would get me in touch with people I didn't have a potentially biased relationship with that might affect the research, while at the same time ensure that people felt comfortable and safe enough to engage with my project. I was basing this on the fact that being a researcher, but also the researcher's personal characteristics can give associations to the interviewee which means that they have certain expectations and behave accordingly (Thagaard 2003:104), and it is important to focus on conditions that can affect the interview situation in a negative or positive direction (ibid: 105). Therefore the most important thing is to establish an interview situation that inspires trust and that does not create distance between the researcher and the interviewee, (ibid: 105). I did a trial interview where I interviewed a friend of mine who was familiar with my research, and while it felt safe because of our friendship and it was a super interesting interview, it became clear that perhaps he was so familiar with my research that he tended to answer the way he thought I wanted him to answer. Academically, I felt that I received a lot of exciting information, but I knew I had to be careful to interview people who were not too familiar with my research beforehand. I also intended to contact a couple of youth disability rights organisations and have them post my project to their members, and also reach out to a friend who was active in activism around disabled people as active sexual agents, but in the end I was not able to reach anyone to interview.

The snowballing process also didn't go according to plan, for the most part. Because I was quite demotivated at the time and the process of getting people to interview seemed extra daunting and because my supervisors weren't opposed to me interviewing people I already knew, it opened up the flood gates to interview more friends and acquaintances who I'd told that I was doing a masters on porn which involved interviews, in passing, who then for the most part initiated the idea that I could interview them. This was so I

could avoid what had happened with my first trial interview where he was overly familiar with my research so that he almost said what I «wanted» to hear. I also double checked each time that that was something they were comfortable with and wouldn't feel too affected by our friendly relation, but the common response was that they felt that since they knew me as someone who was sex positive and talked about sex and kinks so much already in such open ways, that they wouldn't be or feel judged. One should always be aware of the power relationship between the researcher and informant, especially in sensitive matters of sexuality and gender, I would argue that, maybe surprisingly, the fact that they already knew me could serve here as a bonus from a research perspective – if it created a non-judgemental, relaxed atmosphere for the interviews, where the power imbalance could be more equalised.

### 3.3.2 The final selection of informants

In the end I ended up with nine interviews of people between 19-25, two with two 35-year-olds, Some I asked directly, others volunteered when I was talking about what I was up to these days in casual conversation and others I knew of and was tipped about through shared friends – there as therefore varying degrees of familiarity, but no-one was a complete stranger. Most were queer or trans in some way, but four identified as cisgender and four as heterosexual. Two were from non-European descent, and while I know several identified as having some kind of disability, this was not brought up during the interview process, and I did not think class was an important factor for this research (as I have yet to find any research that indicate one's relationship to porn is particularly class related). The largest percentage of my informants were in their early twenties, but two were in their mid-thirties and I chose to include them in the research as they wanted to be interviewed and could be used as a tool for reflection because of the contrast in internet access growing up.

While acknowledging that strict categorization of people is never fully possible nor desirable, it is nonetheless necessary to say a bit about my informants' identities in order to try to align my presentation with how people view themselves. Here is a table presenting my final informants by pseudonym, age, gender identity, sexuality:

<b>Pseudo nym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Pronoun(s)</b>
Alex	21	Nonbinary	Bisexual, Polyamorous	they/them
Billie	35	Nonbinary	Bisexual	they/them
Celine	24	Trans woman	Bisexual, Polyamorous	she/they
Declan	21	Cis man	Heterosexual	he/him
Edward	35	Cis man	Bisexual	he/him
Florence	22	Prefers not to label	Bisexual, Polyamorous	they/them
Hawke	20	Nonbinary, transmasculine	Bisexual	they/them
Josie	25	Cis woman	Heterosexual	she/they
Kevin	25	Cis man	Heterosexual	he/him
Lana	21	Nonbinary, trans woman	Pansexual, Demisexual, Polyamorous	she/they
Ollie	20	Nonbinary	Pansexual, Polyamorous	they/them

## 3.4 The interview process

### 3.4.1 Doing the interviews

My main priority during the interviews were the interview subject's comfort and safety, of course for the sensitivity of the topic and the quality of the research, but also as part of acknowledging that no research project is more important than someone's wellbeing. After we had established that they wanted to be interviewed for my project, I asked each participant where they would prefer to do it. It was always either at my home or theirs, except the one digital interview and the one we did at a local anarchist bookcafé I had access to when it was closed. The procedure in the beginning was always the same: first I explained the project and the themes I was going to talk about and showed them a digital copy of the information paper and consent form, which they consented to verbally and then signed afterwards. I then pointed out that they could stop the interview at any moment, that no research was more important than their comfort and that they could ask to retract their interview or look at my research at any point in relation to their interview. The interviews lasted between 18 and 51 minutes, with the average being around 40 minutes, and they contained plenty of laughter on both ends, with short validating comments on my part. Once the interview was done and the recorder was off, we often continued the conversation where I shared more of my own experiences, and we spoke more loosely. It was crucial to me that the person left the experience feeling seen, understood and safe, and most importantly perhaps, not exploited, as academic research on vulnerable people and topics have a tendency to do (De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene, 2014) - to offer vulnerability back to my informants was part of that.

### 3.4.2 Transcribing (and translation)

All in all, I transcribed eleven interviews plus a two minute long interview I did with a nurse who was responsible for a middle school's sex ed program last year, whose perspective I thought could be useful for framing and when discussing porn literacy. When it came to safety, I uploaded manually the voice files from the recorder device (which can only be accessed manually or via USB) to my computer. Once I finished the transcription I would then delete the voice file from my computer. The word file I wrote had auto saved through my NTNU-drive profile, so that no-one else could access the document file. But even then I named my interview transcriptions just by letters in Alphabetic order (A I interviewed first, L last) and I would transcribe: [name] instead of names mentioned in the interviewed, and I did the same with specific locations or other similar factors that might identify people. The only identity markers I didn't automatically anonymise were their gender identity or sexuality or age, if mentioned, as this was relevant to the research.

Transcription, like translation, is already a form of interpretation - some things are necessarily left out or focused on since the written medium cannot capture that of out loud conversation. I transcribed eight of the interviews, plus the one short nurse interview, in Norwegian, more specifically Book Norwegian (Bokmål) and two in English (British English) (as those interviews were conducted in English). Beyond the languages, people also don't speak how things are written, especially not with Norwegian dialects (nor different English accents), therefore I was quite conscious of trying to write as close

to how people spoke without it being phonetic – using official shortenings like «e´kke» instead of «er ikke», to capture and honour how people spoke. I used “...” to indicate the subjects thinking or pausing, and keep the repetition of words like «but, but, but» to indicate their thinking process or their unsureness. To indicate when I spoke/interrupted/added while they were talking, I added [], as to now break the flow of their speech, while also showing my reactions. There are hundreds of [mhm]´s and [OK]´s in there. I would also always laugh together with my informants mostly because I found their jokes funny, but also to appease them and make it feel more like a conversation between two acquaintances or friends – I used [laughter] to indicate this when writing. It was a fine balance between keeping as much details as possible while as well being readable and usable as quotes to analyse and include in the project.

Then there´ s the matter of translation. As I´ ve chosen to write my thesis in English for broader accessibility and that it´ s easier for me to formulate myself academically in English, despite most of my interview´ s being in Norwegian, I´ ve had to translate a lot. Translation is another interpretive, artistic process, but I´ ve tried as hard as possible to maintain the precise original meaning while also including the quotes in the original Norwegian in the footnotes.

I´ ve also made the decision to bolden certain words or sentences in my informants quotes that I use in the analytical chapter, both as to help me make my point but also to make it easier for the reader to orientate themselves around such large quantities of text.

## 3.5 Ethical concerns, researcher as “outsider/insider” and positionality

### 3.5.1 Ethical concerns and the researcher as “outsider/insider”

This research project has been approved by SIKT.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the importance of free and informed consent, confidentiality and anonymization, there are the distinctive research ethical considerations and trade-offs within the humanities and social sciences, i.e. with regard to the role and consequences research can have in society and to those interviewed. While there is little risk of physical harm in cultural and social studies, there is rather a risk of psychological and emotional harm if too sensitive things are discussed. There is also a risk of social damage if the research causes individuals and groups to be portrayed in the research in a way that leads to stigmatization or discrimination. This is particularly important if you are considering researching vulnerable groups (De nasjonale forskningsetiske komiteene, 2014); like in this case most being gender- and sexuality minorities. The last decades have also been ripe with critique of power imbalances and biases in top-down, outsider-in knowledge creation (Allen-Collison & Owton, 2014) and I am both outsider and insider. I am an outsider by being an academic and also by identifying more as cisgender and straight, in contrast to most of my informants. Levy argues, in the case of being a cisgender, heterosexual researcher, that one needs to be extra sensitivity to the needs of a disenfranchised, marginalized, underrepresented group (2013) on an intimate topic like porn. Because marginalized folks are at a greater risk of being abused or exploited by research, outsider researchers need to wisely design research that attends of representation, positionality and power (ibid).

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<sup>5</sup> SIKT reference number: 394798

But Levi also points out that the dichotomy of insider/outsider doesn't always apply, and show that researchers can be both - especially as belonging to a group does not mean a common experience or sameness, nor does not belonging to a group denote complete difference (ibid). I am also an insider, 'someone whose biography (gender, race, class, sexual orientation and so on) gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched' (Griffith, 1998:362, quoted in Levy, 2013:199) - in the sense that me and the most of the people I have interviewed are in the same queer (and activist) community - and I describe myself as living life with a queer attitude to life where I reject cisheteronormative, and this is recognized as an insider position by those I've interviewed, meaning that such an insider status '[...] provides a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. One has a starting point (commonality) that affords access into groups that might otherwise be closed to "outsiders"' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009:58, quoted in Levy, 2013:199). Both

No matter the level of "insiderness", Levy and the aforementioned national research-ethical committees argue that the researcher must still ask themselves if their research contribute to uncovering problematic values and norms in society or objectionable conditions, and does it aim to be useful for the group it's researching - they have an obligation to use their research to advocate for justice, while taking care of the individual informants (2013, 2014). I therefore want to further address such ethical concerns and how my positionality as researcher affected the interview process.

It is a privilege to be able to be trusted which such research by my informants, and I've tried to be as clear as possible here and to my informants about what my project is - it's genuinely curious, and not moralistic nor judgmental about porn and people's sexualities and porn habits. Instead, to me, it is an inherently liberatory project; leaving room for both deconstructing shame (and other difficult feelings) and refocusing on joy and pleasure, while focusing in on both how power operates in constructing discourses about young people's relationship to porn and how they have agency. There was also had a deep need and obligation not to hypersexualize nor engage in an *othering* process, as research and media has a tendency to do towards queer and trans people (Levy, 2013). During the recruiting process I only approached people who were curious about my project and wanted to be a part of it. Beyond what they thought of my good intentions based on my insider-status, I still tried to make the interview process feel as open minded as possible and reassure them that my research was not more important than their wellbeing and that we could stop at any moment. I also created an interview guide that built up intimacy slowly, while also not asking too intimate questions. I wanted the people being interviewed to feel seen, understood and appreciated - leaving feeling better than when they arrived, while also being aware of how "insider-ness" coupled with intimate knowledge of and an emotional attachment to one's informants makes objectivity incredibly difficult and leaves very little room for analytic distance' (Taylor, 2011:15, quoted in Greene, 2014:11). Still, the question of being an "objective" researcher has been problematized, and perhaps it's more important to be aware of how the researcher is already biased.

### 3.5.2 Positionality

All meaning construction is determined by a sort of pre-understanding, which includes the opinions and perspectives I already have about what I'm researching (Thagaard, 2018) - in this case porn. It's therefore also important that I am transparent of where I am coming from when I am creating the research questions, interviewing and analysing

the data material (Thagaard, 2018). I need to be able to reflect and attend to my own biases when doing research. I talk briefly in the beginning of the introduction about my relationship with porn to explain why I'm interested in researching it. While my personal experiences made me operate with quite a broad view of what counts as porn and of its purpose in people's lives, I would categorize this relationship as quite distanced... fearing porn's «impact» on my sexuality, struggling to find porn that "worked" for me ethically and sexually. In my own sex life, I've often expressed grief at sleeping with men who I felt had seen "too" much porn, which led me to develop a certain criticalness to more gendered and mainstreamed porn. Still, I identify as a generally sex positive feminist, with a nerdlike love for diverse sexualities and desires, and passion about deconstructing shame related to sex. I am known to my friends and communities as your friendly, neighbourhood sex-nerd and power critical anarchist, but I wanted to confront my own potential biases in how I relate and think of porn, and to generally understand the world of porn more. After reading myself up on previous research, some of my worries of fantasies being connected to ("real life") desires and fears of porn's potential harmful effects were questioned. It was never a project focused on harm, on porn's direct causality, but it became even less so in the process of researching and interviewing. My positionality has then guided the type of questions/assumptions in my interview guide, how I conduct my interviews, but also my approach to analysing.

## 3.6 Analysing the data material

### 3.6.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, as a distinctive qualitative analysis technique, was launched in the early 2000s to describe something that all experienced analysts can do - i.e. to find themes in the data that have been collected that together answer the project's problem, more specifically data with common features (that are considered important for the research) which are then grouped together into a theme or category (Johannessen et al., 2018). Doing a thematic analysis both brings order to the chaos of the data material, but also helps the researcher to identify new connections in them; as one often discovers the research question(s) during the thematic analysis, '[...] because we see that the data is more suitable to answer some questions rather than others' (my own translation, *ibid*).

A thematic analysis is divided into four steps, or sections. The first is about preparation, where one achieves an overview of the collected data (Johannessen et al., 2018), so I read over the transcriptions (in my case) and took short notes. The second step is coding, where one notices important points in the data - one quickly finds out what is not relevant at all, and what is very or possibly relevant (Johannessen et al., 2018). Here I wrote down some reflections and associations that the coding providing. Then step three; categorization. Here, the coded data from earlier is categorized into the themes of the analysis, which become the project's findings. Each topic should represent something specific that we are interested in, that answers the problem and doesn't overlap too much (Johannessen et al., 2018). When meeting with my supervisors I shared my noted down reflections and they helped me categorise them into themes for coding: Ethics: Affected by porn, The typical porn user, Addiction, What is a «good», "healthy" relationship to porn? Industry, production, alternative sources for "ethical porn". Authenticity: What's real about sex, what's real about porn? Sexual narrative scripts. Gender: Personal negotiation around porn as gendered subjects. How does the relationship to porn change as identity changes? Porn literacy: Sexual education, Producing sexual content oneself: Sexting. Affect: Shame (/investment), Pleasure, Joy.



The last step is reporting, where you write down and report the topics and their content. Here there is often a lot of overlap with the categorization step, i.e. discovery and change, because you discover that certain themes are not good enough, but also new exciting connections. (Johannessen et al., 2018). I then ended up with a main research questions that reflected my interest in how people navigate porn: *How do young people navigate discourses around porn as they grow up?* With three new different, or more fine tuned, themes for my analytical chapters.

The first analytical chapter then has the theme of coming of age in relation to discourses of sexuality and gender, as it was very interesting how often people described their first meeting(s) with someone else showing them porn, often forcibly and to shock. The second has the theme of how young people make porn "work" for them through engaging with discourses of sexuality, sex, identity, fantasy and ethics, as it was something I still found quite interesting, and my informants talked a lot about. The third and final chapter became an investigation into how young people's talked about being a "good and healthy porn user" in relation to the notion of "the porn addict", something my informants often brought up all on their own and wasn't directly mentioned in the interview guide, so there was something there...

### 3.6.2 Discourse analysis

After doing the thematic analysis, I then decided on using a discourse inspired analysis method to analyse my data, as this is a porn critical project interested in understanding power, as to see possibilities for resistance and agency. Discourse analysis, in contrast to thematic analysis, is very theoretical - it therefore says something about what you are looking for in the analysis. It is '[...] a critical analysis of established ways of thinking, writing and speaking [...]' (Johannessen et al., 2018:51), of given ideas, discourses, about how the world is or should be. When one does a discourse analysis, it is not just about getting the content of the text (here text is used in a broad sense), but about analysing the text itself. Johannessen et al. (2018) describe a kind of recipe for doing discourse analysis which consists of five steps; find texts that one can analyse – my transcriptions. Then put on one's critical-analytical glasses, become familiar with the field and associated discourses, then with the text and its context, and then finally examine what the text does and how it does it. This last step involves answering one or more of three questions about what kind of mindsets/discourses the text promotes, what kind of actions and ways of being the text promotes, and what kind of consequences such a presentation has or can have in society. Other useful questions to ask in a discourse analysis can be what the text demands of the reader, does the text claim about reality, which identities (or subjects as Foucault talks about – see 2.2.2 for further details) are represented and how are they represented, who can benefit from this representation, and finally, what is not included - i.e. which relevant discourses are invisible or silenced in the text (Johannessen et al., 2018:85).

There is no one way do to such an analysis, but by being inspired by discourse analysis I will first try to name the discourses my informants are engaging with, and the possible identities produced by such discourses, and then interrogate how my informants orientate and locate themselves within this – what actions and ways of being are they being encouraging to participate? Are there moments of resistance, or perhaps counter-discourses and identities? And what are the larger societal consequences of all of this – who or what benefits? Finally my findings and arguments will be put in together in a discussion part of the thesis' conclusion.

### 3.7 Reflections around the quality of the data material

For the final part of this methods chapter, I want to briefly reflect on the quality of the data material. Like I more elaboratively talked about in the beginning of this chapter, it is common to judge the quality of qualitative research by looking at its transparency, reliability, validity, reflexivity by the researcher and transferability (Thagaard, 2018). In this methods chapter I have worked hard to be transparent about the entire research process and explaining why I have made the choices I have, hopefully increasing its validity. I have also tried to do the research as reliable as possible. As this is a qualitative research project focusing on interviews with just eleven people, the result will therefore of course not be able to represent all young people, nor all ciswomen, all cismen, all trans people or all queer people. However, hopefully it has been somewhat representative of some online porn experiences, and its strength lies in the fact that there has barely been any previous research that interviews queer and trans people on their relationship to porn as critical consumers. My project also tries to treat its cis men as not a stereotype of some average porn user, nor cis women as people who are uninterested in porn. By not focusing on the question of harm, and not operating with binary categories, I hope I have been able to create a safer and more open atmosphere - for people's more honest opinions and feelings. My findings only apply for these informants and in this particular research context, so one cannot really make generalisations and be super transferrable with such few informants. Yet I would not be surprised if there is some transferability in findings, if other informants of this age group, in other porn research projects, were treated as complex and critical porn consumers. Power does move in complex ways in different contexts, but there are often patterns...

## 4. “Coming-of-age”: discourses of sexuality and gender in young people’s first meeting(s) with porn

### 4.1 Introduction

Josie: *There was a new italian boy in our [fifth grade] class that was watching porn on his computer during the lecture, and then “Hi Josie, this you’ve got to see!”, so it wasn’t really **voluntarily**. It was really like, you have to see this!*<sup>6</sup>

The quote above is from one of my informants, Josie, who describes their first encounter with porn at the age of ten. When I interviewed her, I started by asking the question I gave to all my informants, some variation of *if they had watched porn, what their experience was like the first(s) time(s)*, and what she said struck me. And it wasn’t just Josie’s first encounter, several others describe moments with similar elements to this, like Edward being shown porn at twelve by an older cousin so that he could start masturbating (to his shock and then delight), Lana being shown “advanced stuff” by a “wow, that was a fucked up kid” of a friend, and boys in Billy’s class at fifteen trying to shock them (despite Billy’s nonchalance – they had seen “much worse” already). Others describe accidentally encountering it at a “too young age”, in their own words, and being intrigued perhaps, but mostly confused or shocked. But there were also several who talked about a voluntary experience with a group of friends of the same apparent gender, where porn functioned more as social thing – either as fun entertainment and/or a form of sex education. One final person also described being older, around fifteen, and thinking that they had to look into porn as they were at the age where they were supposed to have a sexuality by now, in other words, supposed to watch porn - but what they found didn’t make much sense or work for them. My first research question is then *how do young people talk about sexuality and gender in their first meeting(s) with porn?*

In the two ensuing subchapters I will first describe the two discourses I have found, then in a final chapter discussion talk about what kinds of identities and ways of acting being this discourse promotes, how my informants orientate themselves within this, and use my theoretical framework to make sense of it all. Finally, I will discuss the role of these discourses in a larger societal context.

### 4.2 “[How old were you then?] Ah... not old enough’: “normal” children are too young be sexually curious

My follow up question when asking my informants about their first meeting(s) with porn, was how old they were. I wanted to map the age of this first meeting as I assumed the age of someone seeing it would make a difference in their experience of it and to see how it overlapped with the fact that half of Norwegian kids who have seen porn saw it before they were thirteen (Medietilsynet, 2022). It struck me that when some of my

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Da var den en eller annen, det var en italiensk ny gutt i klassen [mhm] som så porno på PCen i undervisningen [ah], og så var det «Hei [navn], dette må du se!», så det var på en måte ikke frivillig [nei, nei, nei]. Det var veldig den der du skal se dette her!’

informants talked about this first meeting they found it important, when answering the question, to add that they were *too young*:

Kevin: *Okay, so the first meeting was like random, random search. Sat and played Pokemon and I was going to google some stuff and I was going to look up Gardevoir and then a very graphic image appeared on Google images of Mewtwo just giving her what she wants [laughter], and then I was like "woah, what's this?" [How old were you then?] **Ah, not old enough.** I don't remember, I don't remember it really, I must have been like... maybe around 9-10 [...] And it didn't seem to be something I got really hung up on then, like **"what the hell is this, I'm not interested in this"**.<sup>7</sup>*

Kevin first meeting is accidental, a consequence of google search gone wrong, and he pre-emptively says he wasn't old enough – supposedly too young to be interested or make sense of what he was seeing, reacting with shock and rejection. Another informant makes a makes a similar point to Kevin, that their age was "strangely" young:

Hawke: *I think... it's a very specific memory [mhm], it must have been... some girl friends and wanted... we wanted to watch Kim Kardashian's sex tape [explosive laughter] [OMG, yes!] I must have been like 10-11 [yes], **so that's young**, but it's not so abnormal now either [No, no not at all]. I think it's a bit **strange**, but that's my opinion.<sup>8</sup>*

I would argue that both are engaging with an idea that a certain age is too young to understand or be interested in porn, though Hawke makes a point of saying that while it's abnormally young to *them* that this is just their opinion, and in fact this experience is also normal nowadays – which research indicates it is (Medietilsynet, 2022). Still, in telling the stories of both of their first meeting, it was important for them to tell me that they both aware of a notion that children around 9-10-11 supposedly aren't ready to watch porn. This idea that a child is too young to understand porn also comes up when I asked Celine about her first meeting with porn, as she suddenly remembers a vague memory of her and her stepsister trying to download music illegally from LimeWire – accidentally downloading porn in the process:

Celine: *[How old were you then?] I've no clue, I must have been sometime at primary school. [What did you experience that first time?] It was just a lot of, of **not understanding what was going on at all**, because I had **no way to conceptualize it**. Because it's kind of, it's kind of weird how... on one way I wouldn't say it as a big deal... at the same time I remember it vividly now, that it happened at least.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Okei, så det første møtet var sånn tilfeldig, tilfeldig søk. Satt og spilte pokemon også skulle jeg google noen greier også skulle jeg søke opp Gardevoir og da dukka det opp veldig grafisk bilde på google bilder av Mewtwo som bare gir hun det hun vil ha [latter], og da var jeg sånn «woah, hva er det her for noe?» [Hvor gammel var du da?] Ah, ikke gammel nok [Nei, nei, men], jeg husker ikke, jeg vet ikke helt, jeg var kanskje en sånn... kanskje sånn 9-10, jeg husker ikke helt, det er noe i den rekkefølgen [ja, ja]. Og det ble liksom ikke noe jeg ble veldig opphengt i fort da, sånn «hva fæen er det her fucka, det her er jeg ikke interessert i».'

<sup>8</sup> 'Jeg tror... det er et veldig spesifikt minne [mhm], det må ha vært... noen venninner og ville, vi ville se Kim Kardashians sextape [begge dør av latter] [OMG, yes] [...] Jeg må ha vært sånn 10-11 [ja], så det er jo ungt å si [unintelligable], men det er jo på måte ikke så unormalt nå heller [Nei, nei ikke i det hele tatt]. Det er litt rart syns jeg, men det er jo min mening.'

<sup>9</sup> '[Hvor gammel var du da?] Ha'kke peiling, jeg må jo ha gått på barneskolen en gang. [Hvordan opplevde du den første gangen?] Det var veldig mye bare sånn, å ikke forstå hva som skjedde i det hele tatt, fordi jeg hadde liksom ingen måte å konseptualisere det på. For det er liksom, det er liksom merkelig hvordan... på en måte ville jeg ikke sagt at det var en big deal, samtidig så er det en ting jeg husker vividly nå, at det skjedde i det minste.'

The memory is vague to Celine, of this accidental meeting with porn, but that it must have affected her somewhat – seeing something accidentally she wasn't even able to conceptualize at her young age. Again, "too young" to understand. Lana names this idea even more explicitly when describing how her friend showed her "too advanced" porn when she was around 13-14.

Lana: *I don't really think I have any other early experience with it, apart from my friend, who... oh my God, he was a **fucked up kid**. [Okay?] **He had sort of found out about porn very early**. So, I am kind of, at this point I am a **very innocent human being**, and I just remember that he showed me... it was actually quite for **the advanced**. [...] Yes. Yeah, but it was that really that kind of public humiliation, like cum walk-thing. So that was kind of my first... and so after that, so, so I didn't watch it for a couple of years. I was like, "ew".<sup>10</sup>*

It striking to me how she conceptualizes her early teenage self as "innocent", in comparison to her "fucked up kid" of friend, a link being made between his "fucked up-ness" and his early porn meeting with porn – therefore, *too* early. She reacted with disgust and was turned off from porn in its entirety for several years. Still, she later talks about with this being her first experience, and not for example FanFiction, as making her be into some 'really weird shit': Lana describes, as previously mentioned, their friend as a fucked up kid who had found porn too early – and makes a similar claim about her own sexuality when reflecting on this first meeting:

Lana: *[...] the fact that I didn't start off slow with FanFiction or something, has then **probably done so that today I'm into, like a lot of trans girls, that I'm into really weird shit***.<sup>11</sup>

Porn being shown *too* young is identified as part of why they're a bit "fucked up" sexually, though she talks of it mostly in a jokingly tone. Lastly, I come back to the aforementioned Josie, who when talking about how she reacted after being shown porn by a boy in their fifth grade class, talks about showing her disinterest to him and what he was showing her because:

Josie: *[...] I think it was very much that he was very... so in the fifth grade you were nine or ten years old [mhm], and he was very sexual, and I, **I could also be sexual, but I wasn't aware of it even** [no, no, right], so then it was very, it was a bit too much [yeah] in a way, at that age.<sup>12</sup>*

What's interesting here is that while Josie is also talking about her male classmate as "too sexual for their age", she is also acknowledging that she had a sexuality at that age but that she wasn't aware that was what she had – the experience was then too much,

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<sup>10</sup> '[...] jeg tror egentlig ikke jeg har noe annet sånn tidlig opplevelse med det, bortsett fra kompisen min, som... herregud det var en skadet unge. [Okei?] Han hadde liksom finnet ut om porno veldig tidlig. Så, jeg er jo på en måte, på det her punktet er jeg et veldig uskyldig menneske, også husker jeg bare at han viste meg... det var egentlig ganske sånn for viderekommende. [Hvor gammel var du da?] Jeg må ha vært sånn tretten, fjorten, noe sånt. Ja. Jo, men det var sånn skikkelig sånn public humiliation, sånn cum walk opplegg. Så det var liksom min første, og så etter det så, så, så jeg ikke på det på et par år. Jeg var sånn, «æsj».'

<sup>11</sup> '[...] at jeg ikke startet rolig med sånn rolig fanfiction eller noe sånt, har jo gjort det på en måte at dagen i dag så er jeg inne i, som veldig mange transjenter, så er jeg inni skikkelig weird shit.'

<sup>12</sup> 'Ja fordi, jeg tror det var veldig det at han var veldig... altså i femteklasse var man ni-ti år gammel [mhm], og han var veldig seksuell, og jeg, jeg kunne også være seksuell, men jeg var ikke klar over det enda [nei, nei, ikke sant], så da var det veldig, det var litt for voldsomt [ja] på en måte, i den alderen.'

or as she says in Norwegian, a bit too *'voldsomt'*.<sup>1</sup> She also doesn't look at porn again for a long time, until she is in her twenties, but does make this point of acknowledging her own sexuality as a child, even if she didn't recognize it as such at the time.

Based on these five quotes I have identified a common notion, mindset, discourse in this first subchapter, which my informants are aware of (not that they necessarily agree with) that "*normal*" children are too young to be interested or understand sex(ual material). I would argue furthermore argue that this discourse produces the identity of *the innocent, non-sexual child* – which my informants are orientating themselves towards.

### 4.3 'I wasn't really curious about that sort of stuff really early [...], now I am supposed to have sexual needs.': "normal" people are curious about sex

I've now written about several of my informants who, when talking about their first meetings with porn, engaged with an idea of an age being too young to have a sexuality. But when is someone supposed to have a sexuality, be sexually curious, and *how*? I was struck to ask these questions after listening to Alex described their first meeting:

Alex: *I think maybe I was around 15, 16-years old. Eh, I wasn't really curious about that sort of stuff very early, **but when you're 15,16, now I am supposed to have sexual needs; "I need to be a normal person"**. And I remember that I realized very quickly that **this wasn't anything for me, this... I don't know, it wasn't... it just felt very weird.** [...] I think I tried to use it as a **tool to manage to kind of actually masturbate, which I couldn't manage anyway. But yeah, I stopped with that very quickly.**<sup>13</sup>*

Here Alex was aware of the idea that they, at their age, was supposed to be sexually curious – and made themselves look at porn a couple of times, despite it not "working" for them. They just wanted to be a normal teenager, and this was a part of this. I would argue that there is a normalising-aspect here through socialization to being sexually curious then, which is reflected in how Declan (similarly to Hawke) in describing his first meeting with porn as something fun one does with friends:

Declan: *Ehm, the first time I remember, like generally, is at primary school, on the way home, when... [How old were you then?] How old I was? Probably 11 or 12 or something. So there was some **friends of mine** who had found a porn magazine on the ground which then someone had hidden somewhere on the way home. That was then **really fun.**<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> 'Jeg tror jeg kanskje var femten, seksten år. Eh, jeg var ikke så veldig nysgjerrig på sånt veldig tidlig, men når du er femten-seksten, nå skal jeg ha seks-, seksuelle needs. [...] I need to be a normal person. Og jeg husker at jeg innså veldig fort at det føltes ikke som det var noe for meg, at det var veldig sånn, dette... I don't know, det var ikke, det føltes bare veldig rart. [...] . Eh, jeg tror jeg prøvde å bruke det som er verktøy for å klare å liksom faktisk onanere da [...]'

<sup>14</sup> 'Ehm, den første opplevelsen jeg husker sånn generelt sett [Mhm] er på barneskolen, på vei hjem, da... [Hvor gammel var du cirka?] Hvor gammel var jeg? Sikkert elleve eller tolv eller noe sånt [Mhm, ja]. Så var det noe venner meg av meg som hadde funnet et pornoblad på bakken, som noen hadde gjemt en plass på veien hjem. Da var det kjempegøy [Ja, ja, ja].'

Again, like in the previous analytical chapters, this was not something that Declan initiated and was in a group of friends, yet he does not engage in a discourse of being too young like Hawke does, but simply talks about it being really fun. Ollie has a similar experience, talking about it mainly as funny entertainment – to show your friends, but no one else – not really something to get turned on by, though this changes as Ollie develops their own personal relationship with porn later, finding things that “work” for them.

Ollie: *Well, the first times were probably **some buddies watching it during break**, so I don't remember it very well since I was very young. 12, 13. Probably just sat in the break **watching something stupid**, which one of us had found. Yeah, I think there was this kind of slight transition from **finding something fun to show my friends** after, to “oh, there is actually something good here”.<sup>15</sup>*

Hawke also talks about their experience as being more about entertainment, having fun with friend. As they try to make sense of this, they confirm their experience, after a prompt from me, as socializing:

Hawke: *[...] and watching and kind of... like **entertainment**. That it was this kind of **goofy**, you know the **classic**... [...] Ooo, there was like, I, I, I don't even know how this even happened, why we ended up in these kinds of situations, but it did happen. And then it became like... [As a part of a socialisation-thing?], yeah, yeah like a **socialisation-thing then, with, with, exploring sex, since everyone wonders “Ooo, what is sex, what do you do?”**, and then you get this first through porn nowadays, I kind of want to say.<sup>16</sup>*

So, watching porn is identified as a fun social activity where one gets to explore sex, since after all, “everyone” is curious about sex. Porn, by the nature of its easy access, is conceptualized as what appeases this curiosity – therefore, I would argue that my informants in this subchapter engage with a way of thinking, a discourse that says: *as children become people, they are viewed as having to be(come) interested in sex* (and by extension, sexual material). Besides the aforementioned informants' experiences, I think this is best exemplified in Edward's first meeting with porn at around 11-12 years old, which he describes thusly:

Edward: *The first experience was like, actually one of **my classmates just forced me to go and watch [I see]**, and gave me the video and said “you would go home and watch it today, but not with your parents. Just keep it secret. [he laughs] Nobody else should know” [Yeah] And then after, I was “aaa”, and then it was like **a new world**, this comes.*

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Vel, de første gangene var mest sannsynlig noen kompisar som så på det i friminuttet, så jeg husker det ikke så veldig godt for jeg var veldig ung. [...] Tolv, tretten. Satt sikkert bare i friminuttet og så på ett eller annet dumt noe, som noen oss hadde funnet. [...] Ja, jeg tror det var en sånn liten overgang fra å finne noe morsomt å vise vennene mine dagen etterpå, til oi det var faktisk noe bra her.’

<sup>16</sup> ‘Det var faktisk mitt første møter med porno, at vi alle satt sånn i kryss i beina [ja, ja] og så på det og liksom... som underholdning [Ja, jeg skjønner]. At det var litt sånn goofy, du vet den klassiske...[...] Ååå det var sånn, jeg, jeg, jeg vet ikke hvordan det her skjedde en gang, hvorfor vi endte opp i sånne situasjoner, men det skjedde nå [Ja, ja, ja]. Og da ble det sånn, [som en del av en sosialiseringsgreie?] ja, ja en sånn sosialiseringsgreie da, med, med å utforske sex da, alle lurer på «ooo hva er sex, hva gjør man», og det får man jo gjennom porno først da, nå i dag ville jeg nesten si.’

He is forced, in his own words, to watch porn. Shocked, he discovers a "new world". This point of force and shock is interesting, and something I not only observed in how Josie was forcibly shown porn by a male classmate, but how Billie was as well in middle school; 'The boys at school, [...] they tried to kind of shock us by showing us porn, but it was a little bit like "yawn, I have seen that before, Jesus!"'<sup>17</sup> Josie's experience made her think of porn as a '[...] thing for boys, which I am not supposed to use because... Yeah, I didn't want to hang with them. Or maybe I wanted to hang with them, but I didn't want... I didn't want that side of boys'.<sup>18</sup> I would argue that there is a gendered aspect to these experiences as well.

In this second subchapter I would argue that we can observe a discourse that relates to the first, which states that "*normal*" people are curious about sex, and that this produces the identity of a "*normal*" sexually curious teenager, which my informants are trying to orientate themselves towards. As part of this discourse I would also argue for another identity being produced, that of *the horny teenage boy*, which the boys that exposed my informants to porn were orientating themselves towards, which my informants had to either as well orientate themselves toward or away from, depending on their gender identity at the time.

## 4.4 Discussion

I named this chapter Coming-of-age, indicating a becoming... I wanted to understand my informants' experiences of their first meetings with porn, but also how they navigate these early first years, so my first research question became *how do young people talk about sexuality and gender in their first meeting(s) with porn?* As I have shown in the two subchapters above, I found that my informants talked about two repetitions, patterns, discourses that makes up this larger coming-of-age-discourse in relation to porn use; *that children are "too innocent" to be interested in sex*, and that "*normal*" people are curious about sex, with a caveat that this curiosity is supposed to have somewhat gendered differences. This in turn produces identities; *of the innocent, pure child* and *the normal, sexually curious teenager* and *the horny teenage boy* - all which my informants had to orientate themselves towards or away from when they first encountered porn. What acts, what ways of being, did these discourses and these identities promote for my informants? Are there moments of resistance? What identities or ways of being are made invisible? And finally, how do I place these discourses in a larger societal context?

I would argue that this first discourse and identity is the same discourse Vertongen et al. and Albury have identified in most previous research on porn; to do with a concern for

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<sup>17</sup> 'Guttene på skolen, da vi gikk på ungdomsskolen, da vi var sånn femten eller noe, de prøvde å sjokkere oss med å vise oss porno liksom, men det var litt sånn der «gjesp, det her har jeg sett før, Jesus liksom». [latter]'

<sup>18</sup> 'Neida men, så da, så da ble det liksom veldig fort sånn... det er gutteting, det skal ikke jeg holde noe på med fordi... ja, jeg ville ikke være noe med de. Eller jo, jeg ville jo være med de, men jeg ville ikke... jeg ville ikke ha den siden av gutter [mhm]. Ja.'



children's sexual development going "wrong" (2022, 2014). Four out five of these experiences above were either accidental, non-consensual or both – and Hawke certainly didn't talk about them watching Kim Kardashian's porn tape with their friends as their idea – they were all "too young". Kevin, Celine, Lana and Josie then distance themselves from porn, rejects it as something to do with them, not interesting, at that age – and Hawke finds it strange, looking back, what they were doing with their friends – another, more subtle rejection, distancing. Because if they're too young that means they're not *supposed* to have seen porn at that age - a too young child that watches porn is abnormal or 'fucked up', as Lana says. In the way that Kevin for example starts by saying he was 'too young', I wonder if there is perhaps something pre-emptively here, as I'm not sure if he necessarily believes himself that he was too young, but that this is the common discourse in contemporary society, so he has to make sure *I* know this.

Vertongen et al. identified the historical trend of thinking porn as indecent, and that powers in society are concerned with "protecting" those deemed "vulnerable individuals"; which presently includes children (2022). When "the child" is represented and thought of as inherently innocent and non-sexual, this crashes with the fact that when children get access to the internet they will most likely encounter sexual material (consensually or not). My informants were mostly between 9-13, and these meetings occurred around a decade ago when the internet was less accessible for children. If the child is innocent and vulnerable, it must be "protected" from not just porn, but also learning about sex in general, since it is *too young* to understand or be interested and could become confused, or corrupted, into developing the "wrong" kind sexuality and gender. The recent news<sup>19</sup> that the UK government has proposed a ban on teachings about gender identity and general sex education for children under 9, is an example of this attitude (despite research that indicating that comprehensive and age appropriate sex education for children helps prevent or discover child sexual abuse<sup>20</sup>). But power doesn't just exist in the forms of governmental policies, but also biopolitics and disciplinary power, meaning through norms argues Foucault, which are internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts or threats of violence (Taylor, 2016). My informants like Declan, Ollie and Lana have to situate their younger self as innocent, even to the point of Declan's pre-emptiveness, because they cannot be anything but innocent – the other option would be a "fucked up" child whose sexuality is or could be "corrupted". As far I can tell from my interviews, since they weren't supposed to have seen porn and knew this, being "too young", there is no mention of having talked to an adult about their experiences (though they might have). My informants were perhaps left with little room to make sense or process what they'd non-consensually seen - what Josie jokingly refers to as her 'childhood trauma'. Josie also remembers the teacher in her classroom becoming awkward and didn't know what to do – children are after all supposed to be (sexually) innocent and not have a sexuality, so how's an adult even suppose to talk to children about it? What my informants *don't* do is talk about ashamed – which I think is a small form of resistance to this discourse – they might have been "too young", but they hadn't done anything wrong.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sex-education-sunak-ban-schools-teaching-b2545354.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://kommunikasjon.ntb.no/pressemelding/17911544/god-seksualitetsundervisning-forebygger-vold-og-overgrep?publisherId=17847780>

In the findings of my second subchapter, I find an orientation towards the identity of the sexually curious teenager, as they all want to “normal”, have a normal sexuality. Therefore Alex exposes themselves to porn despite not being interested at that time, while Declan, Ollie and Hawke share and watch porn together several times as a social activity; something Hawke makes sense of by saying how everyone is sexually curious – a sexually curious teenager is “of course” interested in watching and sharing porn. This reminds me of how Wahl’s refers to porn as important in (some) people’s sexual socialisation (2023), while Declan’s all boy example reminds me of Scarcelli talking about scenarios of boys watching porn with other boys as a form of homosocial reinforcement of masculinity, making sure boys stay “boy-ing” (2015).

I would argue that this is an example of how gender is performative, according to Butler (1990). In this theory there is no pre-discursive “boy” or “girl”; instead they are continuously in a state of *becoming* boys and girls, and their behaviours are continuously scrutinised by both by themselves and by others in a form of (self)disciplinary power – which ensures they are doing gender “correctly” at all times (1990). Further, I would argue we can see the explicitness in how this discourse operates and the strength of disciplinary power by how Edward is *forced* to watch porn, even if it might have been well intentioned from his classmate’s point of view. The point is that his classmate was trying to normalise from child to man, and this form of power can even feel good to do and to receive – that’s why it doesn’t necessarily feel like power is in motion which is contemporary power’s insidiousness according to Foucault (1978). Yes, a whole new world was opened for Edward, but not mentioned in Edward’s quote is how he then describes the experience as ‘messy’, considering he had not entered puberty yet and was struggling to masturbate to the video. (In the next chapter I will talk more about how Edward talks about his porn use “messing” him up.)

This brings me to what I have argued is the other identity in play in this subchapter, one to do with gender – that of *the horny teenage boy*. Edward is after all a teenage boy, so he is “supposed” to be horny and interested in seeing porn – if not he is “failing” at doing/being a “boy”. The force impacting Edward, is also happening to Josie and Billie being forcibly shown porn by other boys. To Scarcelli, boys introducing (those read as) girls to porn is about reifying society’s view of boys as the holders of “proper” sexual knowledge; they are showing porn to Josie and Billie, well intentional or not, non-consensually and to shock, to show they are being “proper” boys and to indicate they are the proper holder’s of sexual knowledge. For these boys, doing the gender of “boy” is related to their exertion of power, what I would even call violence since Josie is left somewhat traumatised from the experience. In Hawke’s meeting with porn, they’re all assumed to be girls, and I think something like Scarcelli’s (2015) idea of homosociality is happening there as well - where one’s peer group evaluates “normal” sexuality and maintaining the gendered borders between girls and boys. Scarcelli and Goldstein both talk about groups of girls demarcating ideas of gender through how they think their sexuality should operate in relation to porn consumption, by mocking or critiquing porn (2015) while also being in the accepted roles of “learner” or “lover” (Goldstein, 2021).

I also want to make the point that these experiences can further be understood through Butler’s notion of the heterosexualization of desire, which relates to their concept of the heterosexual matrix; to be a man is to be masculine is to be heterosexual, and vice versa for woman. Linked to this is the binary oppositional notion gendered sexuality,

where men are supposed to be sexually experienced, the subject who desires – the active part, and vice versa for women (see start of 2.3.2). If my informants, and the fellow young people in their lives growing up, do this sexuality “wrong” that would mean they would “fail” as their gender as well. In Hawke’s example one sees this homosocialisation of how “girls” are supposed to be both sexually curious since they need to be “normal” people, but that this needs to be done specific ways that do not shake gendered binaries. At the same time, I would argue we see in Hawke’s experience Scarcelli’s idea of playing with these demarcations – being also somewhat allowed to have what Goldstein (2021) refers to as a “banal relationship to porn” - ‘everyone’, not just teenage boys, are curious about sex as Hawke says. This blurring of gendered expectations in the relationship to porn is also seen in the fact that Ollie’s porn viewing friend group was gender diverse. Florence (who is assigned female at birth and is nonbinary) is supposed to not be as interested in sex as boys, or else they could be considered “perverted” according to Scarcelli, but thankfully they also had a mixed gender group chat in their teens, where they all shared porn and fantasies with each other – so that Florence was assured: ‘OK, I’m not like some weird, hypersexual degenerate. I’m just like a normal teenager.’” Many of my informants are playing with gender and sexuality, letting themselves be sexual beings in less binary and heterosexual ways.

When it comes to realities or identities that are made invisible, I would argue that the first discourse leaves no room for supporting children who are no longer “innocent”, because they know they aren’t supposed to have seen porn. To Foucault, sexuality is a key site of power, as it is thought of as relating to the population’s health (1978), and I would argue that this discourse which reifies the idea of the innocent child without a sexuality nor awareness which leads to it needing to be protected, actually disallows children access to empowering sexual education (in the recent UK case). It does the opposite than protect, instead reifying their lack of agency, of power, capability to know what’s best for themselves, with no way to understand their experiences with their own sexuality or with porn, be they confusing or fun or traumatising. It also leaves no room for supporting children who are no longer “innocent”, because they know they aren’t supposed to have a sexuality or have seen porn. Another point that Foucault makes is how sexualities have become identities, something you are, your essence (1978) - a child that is then sexual, becomes essentially *wrong*. The second discourse makes invisible or leaves no room for young asexual people who are not interested in sex or need an emotional connection to do so, nor boys who aren’t interested in porn. The notion that boys “always in the mood” for sexual content (and sex) is key in this discourse, which I would argue is part of a larger culture of not taking boys’ and men’s sexual consent seriously.

To conclude this discussion chapter, I want to briefly situate this two part coming-of-age discourse in a larger societal setting. A coming-of-age indicates a coming into being – becoming a person. First the child must be protected from corruption, from “sexual deviancy” meaning controlled by talking about it as if it doesn’t have a sexuality and

discouraging their potential sexual curiosity – It isn't really thought of as a proper person, and definitely not something with agency. When the child reaches a certain age, it must become a person, which means in proper, controlled ways. In this case, becoming the right of person with the right kind sexuality-gender, which in a cis-het-norm society means well... being cisgender and heterosexual: where boys are more sexual, virile, almost spilling out with their "natural" sexual desire, with girls at the passive, but welcoming receiving end of this. It's this idea of boy's sexual virility and as owner's of sexual knowledge, which in turns make them the main focus of concern by society (Vertongen et al., 2022). According to Wahl (2023), porn is deemed as "wrong" by larger society, because it is an unacceptable form of socialisation; a threat to gendered and sexual norms. Both Foucault's biopower and disciplinary power are here then trying to make sure this porn use doesn't make too much "trouble", be it banning sex education for children or young people inspecting and acting on each other's and their own relationship to porn. Sexuality (and gender) is here thought of as both innate and natural, yet always under threat... of "perversion", of forms of queerness. I will talk more about this seemingly contradicting understanding of sexuality and gender, in the next chapter. I want to end by saying that even though no one can exist outside of discourse according to Foucault (Wetherell et al., 2001), I would argue that many of my informants' queerness, or contradictory experiences, give them a kind of outsider-looking-in look unto how power is operating – they seem to have various degrees of self-awareness of the discourses operating, even if they themselves can *reify* its power as well by having to orientate themselves in them (Taylor, 2016).

## 5. 'There's porn and then there's *porn*': young people's strategies to make porn "work" for them

### 5.1 Introduction

Lana: [...] like I knew there was **something out there that somehow could work for me**, but in a way the process of finding something that didn't, or that **matched the criteria**, and wasn't so **directly fucking horrible to deal with**, eh yeah, was quite a **lengthy process**.<sup>21</sup>

As I mention in the previous chapter, my informants' first meetings with porn were either part of a social activity, accidental and/or non-consensual, all the while navigating themselves around subject positions like the innocent non-sexual child and the horny teenage boy. For many of them it takes a while, sometimes even years, before they try to look up porn on their own, an active turning point: When Kevin gets a Sony Ericsson phone that he starts looking up sexy images of women, Celine googles for "sexy women", and Hawke looks up videos online to help them figure out how masturbation works. Alex tries to watch porn again a few years later when they start testosterone, and the same for Lana when she starts estrogen - while Josie doesn't look up porn until last autumn when she's linked to a feminist porn site by a friend. For others like Billie, Edward, Declan, Florence and Ollie the transition into actively looking up porn for personal use is vaguer - like Ollie describes; 'Yes, I think it was a kind of small transition from finding something fun to show my friends the day after, to "Wow, there's actually something good here.' When Florence describes how when they actively start looking up porn (videos) online since boys are doing it in class, they 'end up down a rabbit hole of, like, just searching progressively more bizarre shit to see what comes up.' Ollie also uses the same phrase when they had a phase around 15-16, where they'd heard about rule 34 and decided '[...] to see how true that was. [...] Sometimes, sometimes there was these weird rabbit holes that was just about too weird stuff.'<sup>22</sup>

I was struck by two things in these early, teenage experiences; where looking at porn on your own perhaps is connected to what Wahl (2023) refers to as one turning point in their sexual self-development, and how these early experiences porn was identified has having some characteristics to it, rabbit hole one can fall down, encountering increasingly stranger and stranger sexual imagery. How do my informants talk about their journeys "down the rabbit hole" of porn; into the "bad", "the weird" and the "good" and their navigation of potentially several turning points as they grow up? My research question is *What strategies do young people have when encountering discourses around sexuality, sex, desire and ethics in their porn use growing up?*

In the three ensuing subchapters I will first describe the three discourses I have found, then in a final chapter discussion talk about what kinds of identities and ways of acting being this discourse promotes, how my informants orientate themselves within this, and use my theoretical framework to make sense of it all. Finally I will discuss the role of these discourses in a larger societal context.

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<sup>21</sup> '[...] altså jeg visste at det var noe ute her som på en måte kom seg å funke for meg, men på en måte prosessen av å finne noe som ikke, eller som matcher kriteriene, og ikke være sånn direkte fette horrible å ha med å gjøre, eh ja, var en ganske langvarig prosess.'

<sup>22</sup> 'Jeg hadde en fase da jeg var sånn 15-16, hvor jeg hadde hørt om rule 34-regelen, så jeg bestemte meg for å sjekke hvor sant det var, og da kom jeg borti det meste. [...] Noen ganger, noen ganger kom det sånn skikkelig rare rabbit holes som bare gikk i altfor sære ting.'

## 5.2 “Down the rabbit hole”: sexuality as pre-discursive and pure, yet malleable

I would argue that the concept of porn as a rabbit hole (like Florence and Ollie talked about above) is linked to the idea of porn’s potential shaping power unto sexuality; most explicitly identified by Lana’s first experience with “advanced” porn as being so powerful it, in combination with her trans girl-ness, as having an impact on what she finds arousing; her sexuality:

Lana: *Yeah, but it was pretty **powerful**. Yea, I mean, the fact that I **didn’t start like gently with FanFiction** or something, has probably done so that today I’m into, like a lot of **trans girls**, that I’m **into really weird shit**.<sup>23</sup>*

Several things are happening here. Firstly, she identifies more hardcore porn, “for the advanced” (in comparison to seemingly gentler forms of porn), as having some power over sexuality. And secondly that her specific identity, her gender of being a trans girl, as having some impact, leading to a certain orientation towards what she finds sexually arousing. Still, it’s important to note that she says all of this *playfully* – it’s not talked about as necessarily being a bad outcome. I will get to this point of various forms of porn and this identity aspect in the next subchapter, but for now I want to dig deeper into the idea of porn’s power – because that means sexuality is thought of in a specific way as well; as both pre-discursive, meaning existing before discourse and having some essence or purity to it, all the while also being malleable or corruptible by what is deemed powerful. As I was previously in this thesis process more interested in a potential causal relationship between porn and sexuality, I asked all my informants about this – if they felt porn had shaped their desires, their sexuality, their relationship to sex; Hawke’s answer is similar to loads of other’s:

Hawke: *That’s a bit of a difficult question. I don’t think it’s affected my **attraction to people**. I do think it’s **given me a couple of kinks** [laughs], or **discovered** a couple of kinks. But like **sexuality** wise, I don’t think it’s done so much.<sup>24</sup>*

Here, Hawke makes a small difference between their sexuality; in how we contemporarily understand it as attraction and identity, and what someone’s kinks or interest in sexual acts or kinks are – but makes a point to correct themselves so that I understand that this is also a discovery of something that could already exist within them. Something still somewhat innate to them:

Lana: *No, I’m really tempted to say no. It is rather that my sexuality has impacted how I look at porn. No, it is kind of like, it can be **in the process of finding out what you like**, that **you realize something about yourself**, kind of.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Ja, men det var jo ganske heftig, ja, jeg mener jo at det har jo på måte, det at jeg ikke startet rolig med sånn rolig fanfiction eller noe sånt, har jo gjort det på en måte at dagen i dag så er jeg inne i, som veldig mange transjenter, så er jeg inni skikkelig weird shit.’

<sup>24</sup> ‘Det var litt vanskelig spørsmål. Jeg tror ikke den påvirka min attraksjon til folk [mhm], jeg tror det har gitt meg et par kinker [ler], eller oppdaga noen kinker. Men sånn seksualitet så tror ikke jeg det har gjort så mye.’

<sup>25</sup> ‘Nei, jeg er egentlig veldig frista til å si nei. Det er heller at seksualiteten min har påvirket hvordan jeg ser på porno. Nei, det er jo på en måte sånn, det kan jo være i prosessen med å finne ut hva man liker at du på en måte, at du innser noe om deg selv type.’

It can unlock something new, or be a safe way to and practical way to find out their sexuality like Kevin says; '[...] a very like straight forward, binary quick "yes or no", "okay" and just "no", and just "nice, thank you, good"'<sup>26</sup>. Then I don't have to find out in a more uncomfortable way'. Josie, who just started using porn last autumn, 'I've become more aware of what I like... like specifically'<sup>27</sup>. but all reject the idea that porn can change someone inherent sexuality in the form of gender attraction. Alex does think their sexuality has been affected, but is referring specifically to

Alex: *'[...] **which kinks I have do definitely come from what I've had access to explore, there's probably many other things which I could be interested in** which I've never heard about and have never seen at all. [...] So... I think **my taste** has been really affected. And maybe the attitude to how I am **supposed to behave** and stuff like that.'*<sup>28</sup>

Billie has a similar answer, but questions the premise behind my question, so I've included the entire exchange:

Billie: *That's very difficult to say... **To a certain extent, I think maybe so, because you get inspiration from looking at what other people do or what other people think about and you get like; "Oh, I didn't know that this was even possible, but now that I know it does, I think that's super hot". [...] So in that sense, I kind of think so, but at the same time [...] when you talk about sex with your friends, you are also influenced. I kind of feel that, not that, I'm not saying that you do that, but when one says: "Yes, porn has affected my sexuality", it very quickly becomes such a moral question [Yeah], and that "Oh, oh, wow, you like the things you like because of porn, is that so ethically good? » But at the same time, you are influenced by everything you see and do in the world, in a way. And I don't see it as ethically wrong to be influenced by porn.***

Me: *No, no, as one is influenced by all sort of things. And that, that, that's not my intention with the question.*

Billie: *No, I realized that it wasn't, but it's more like that society as a whole puts such a negative stereo-, **negative view of porn that if you discover part of your sexuality through porn, then it's somehow taboo.***<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> '[...]veldig sånn straight forward binær kjapp bare ja eller nei, okei og bare «nei», og bare «nice, takk, fint. Da trenger jeg ikke å finne ut av det noe mer ubehagelig måte».'

<sup>27</sup> '[...] jeg har blitt mer klar over hva jeg liker sånn... mer spesifikt'

<sup>28</sup> 'Ehm, så ja... hvilke kink jeg har er jo definitivt kommer jo fra jeg har hatt tilgang til å utforske, så det er jo sikkert mange andre ting som jeg kunne vært interessert i som jeg aldri har hørt om og aldri har sett i det hele tatt. Kanskje jeg har hørt om det, men aldri fått illustrert til meg hvordan det kan se ut da. Så... jeg tror smaken min er veldig påvirket. Og kanskje holdningen til hvordan jeg skal oppføre meg og sånn.'

<sup>29</sup> 'Det er veldig vanskelig å si... Til en hvis grad så tror jeg kanskje det, fordi man får jo inspirasjon av å se på hva andre folk gjør eller hva andre folk tenker på [Det her ville jeg likt å gjøre], ja og man får jo sånn «Åja, jeg visste ikke at dette en gang gikk an, men nå som jeg vet at det går an, så synes jeg at det er super hot». [Ja, ikkesant]. «Eh, jeg hadde ikke tenkt på det før, men oi, det er jo hot». Så sånn sett så tror jeg kanskje det, men samtidig så blir man jo påvirket av vennene sine, når man snakker om sex med vennene sine [ikke sant], så blir man jo påvirket også. Jeg føler på en måte at, ikke at, jeg sier ikke at du gjør det, men det at man sier; «Ja, porno har påvirket seksualiteten min», blir veldig fort et sånt, et sånt moralsk spørsmål [Ja], og at «Åja, oi, wow, du liker tingene du liker på grunn av porno, er det så etisk bra liksom?» [Ja, nei]. Men samtidig så blir man jo påvirket av alt man ser og gjør i verden, på en måte. [Ja, ja] Og jeg ser ikke på det som etisk feil å blir påvirket av porno [Nei, nei, som man blir påvirket av alle andre ting]. Og det, det, det er ikke min intensjon med spørsmålet. Nei, jeg skjønnte at det ikke var det med, men det er mer sånn samfunnet [Ja], som helhet setter en sånn negativ stereo-, negativ syn på porno at hvis du oppdager en del av seksualiteten din gjennom porno, så er det på en måte tabu.'

Billie makes the point that while they think porn has affected their sexuality because one gets inspiration and ideas one might not have had on their own, yet how is this different from other societal effects on one's sexuality? Celine says the same; [...] almost every way of being exposed to a narrative is kind of part of reinforcing it in a way. But I don't know if there is anything about porn that is more strong...<sup>30</sup> They question why porn's impact is a somehow a moral question, and that argues that this is because porn is viewed so negatively in larger society that its influence is deemed tabu or wrong. She continues:

Celine: *I am not the kind of feminist who believes that porn is intrinsically negative or harmful. Yeah. Like, yeah, yeah I, no I **think some parts of it is that it has affected what things I want to do. But that doesn't have to necessarily be bad thing**, in way, at least not when enacted in the context of **playfulness**.*<sup>31</sup>

I would argue that my informants here are engaging with a discourse that states that sexuality as pre-discursive and pure, yet malleable. This produces two identities that my informants are torn between, the born-this-way-sexuality-haver and the playful-and-malleable sexuality-haver.

### 5.3 'This isn't doing it for me': "good" porn is "authentic" if it mirrors "real" sex

One thing that struck me when my informants described their relationship to porn as they were growing up was how they talked about differences in porn, and their struggle to find porn that was "good" and "worked" for them as people as they grew up; 'I try to like find a good one. It's hard to find like a free, good porn', as Edward says. Out of the rabbit hole, after a year of looking at porn for fun with friends, Ollie realised: 'Wow, there's actually something **good** here.' What is then "good porn" and does it mean for porn to "work" for someone, according to my informants?

The first meetings are with mainstream porn, what Harvey (2020) characterises as free and easily available video content of sexual acts online – Billie describes it thusly:

Billie: *'[...] a super short two-minute intro where the girl is a bit like "Oh, hehe" and the man also comes and is like "hhhhhhh grrrr" [laughter], and then they fuck, but first she's going to give him a blow-job for like two minutes, and then they will have sex in about three positions that are not so great **in reality**, but which look good [on camera] on camera. And then the man has to come in a way so that you can see the semen and then it should preferably be on the tits or on the face or somewhere sexy, and then it's done. That's kind of the narrative for mainstream porn, and that **does very little for me in real life**.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 'Det er litt vanskelig å si. Det er jo liksom, nesten alle måtene for å bli utsatt for et narrativ på er jo liksom med på å forsterke det på en måte. Men jeg vet ikke om det er noe med porno som er noe mer sterkt...

<sup>31</sup> 'Jeg er ikke den typen feminist som tror at porno er intrinsisk negativ eller skadelig. Ja. Sånn ja, ja jeg nei jeg tror noe av det og er sånn det har påvirket hvilke ting jeg har hatt lyst på. Men det trenger ikke nødvendigvis å være en negativ ting [nei, nei!] på en måte, hvert fall ikke da det er gjort i den lekne konteksten.'

<sup>32</sup> 'Det mesteparten av mainstream porno er en liten superkort sånn to-minutters intro der dama er litt sånn «Åh, hehe» også kommer mannen og sånn «hååååå grrrr» [latter], og så puler de, men først så skal hun gi han blow-job i sånn to minutter, og så skal de ha sex i sånn tre stillinger som



All of my informants describe the main problem with this mainstream porn in its inauthenticity, its fakeness in how it depicts sex:

Declan: *There is always a kind of over-, overreaction by the women, lots of noise and excitement. It feels, feels so **fake** in a way. [...] There are times when I've looked at porn, it's more just... just, just for the visuals because it, because the narratives they've chosen to go for, **don't appeal to me at all.**<sup>33</sup>*

Florence: *[...] like the most generic and also like really unsexy porn that you can find. And then you're like, "this isn't particularly enjoyable. [With] [...] the... fucking **porn moaning** [...]*

Edward: *[...] if it's like **close to the real life**, it would be better, but I think 99% of the porns I read or I watch or I see, it's like just the stereotypes of **fucking bullshit.** [...] I would definitely say the first thing is that this kind of porn that you are watching is just... fantasy movie, it's **not real at all.***

Ollie: *[What do you think about the statement "porn is not real"?] Then you're **watching bad porn.** Yeah, or there exist more porn that is real than what is not real. It's just that what's not real gets put on the top because **most people only want huge silicon tits and 20 meter long penises.**<sup>34</sup>*

Mainstream porn is easily recognisable to my informants, they've all encountered it, but it doesn't seem to work for them, at least not now, – because to them its not depicting what sex is "in real life". Declan identifies this to do with who this kind of porn is made for:

Declan: *'[...] maybe that people expect, or there's a lot of like male dominated porn if you know what I mean, where men are on top and women are pretty submissive and just kind of there, you know [...] I feel like porn is, to a large extent at least, is made for men and that is kind of the male fantasy...'<sup>35</sup>*

I would argue that we meet in the above quotes an idea of the average porn user, as some straight, perhaps guy which mainstream porn supposedly works for - who is not put off by this "fake-ness". As Florence notes; *'I feel, at least for me, like I've seen like a whole generation of boys have a very like, like the boys over my year have like a very, very weird idea of what girls are like, kind of as a direct result of porn.'* But Florence questions if mainstream porn is really even for anyone:

Florence: ***Like this, isn't this isn't doing it for me.** Like who is this for, like when I watch, genuinely when I watch mainstream porn I'm just like **"Who is***

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er sånn ikke så digg i virkeligheten, men som ser bra ut [på kamera] på kamera. Og så skal mannen komme så det synes, sånn at man skal se sædspruten og da skal den gjerne være på puppene eller i ansiktet eller noe sexy sted [Ja], og så er det ferdig. Det er liksom narrativet for mainstream porno, og det gir meg veldig lite i det virkelige liv.'

<sup>33</sup> 'Det er alltid liksom over-, overreageringer av kvinnene, masse lyder og begeistring. Det føles, føles så falskt på en måte [...] . Det er noen ganger når jeg har sett på pornografi, så er det mer bare... bare, bare det visuelle fordi den, fordi de narrative de har valgt å gå for, ikke appellerer til meg i det hele tatt'

<sup>34</sup> '[Hva tenker du om uttalen «porno er ikke ekte»]. Da ser du på dårlig porno. Ja, eller det fins nesten mer porno som er ekte enn det som ikke er ekte. Det er bare at det som ikke er ekte blir puttett på toppen fordi mesteparten av folk vil bare ha store silikonpupper og 20 meter lange penisler.'

<sup>35</sup> '[...] litt med kanskje at folk forventer, eller det er veldig mye sånn mannsdominert porno hvis du skjønner hva jeg mener, der menn er veldig sånn on top og kvinner er ganske sånn submissive og kind of bare er der , you know. [...] Det, jeg føler porno er, i hvert fall i stor grad, lagd for menn og det er jo liksom den mannlige fantasien...'

***this for?"*** Like none of these shots makes sense for like a targeted audience, I feel.

Several of my informants are cis-men, one bisexual, two straight - Edward, Kevin, and Declan, the supposed audience for mainstream porn. And they also don't describe mainstream porn working for them after a while – all going to more amateur porn, where people make content for free, as they get older, cause it is more authentic for them; 'at least they are **real**', says Edward. He is passionate about his dislike for mainstream porn because it was his only form of sex education and made him, in his own words, have bad sex with women for more than a decade. He did not have the same struggle when sleeping with men, as he knew his own body. But for Florence, they recognised early on that mainstream porn wasn't for them, even if it was easily accessible; 'Like this, isn't this isn't doing it for me.' What do my informants do then, when mainstream porn doesn't work for them?

Ollie: It's changed quite a bit, after I've found out who I am. Mainly when I found out I was pan, then that opened up a lot [tada!], suddenly opened itself a pretty spectrum compared to when I was younger; "No, ew, penis, we can't have that". And then when I found out I was non-binary, then that opened up a much bigger scene, so then I got into a bit more queer porn.<sup>36</sup>

Here Ollie describes the idea that what porn can work for them has changed as they found out who they were. What can work is tied to experiences of identity, and vice versa:

Celine: *The porn I've used the most, absolute most of, in the last couple of years has been the "hot wife" subreddit, which is basically [...] like a less humiliating category of cuckolding. And it's also more from **the perspective of the women**. Because it is that which is kind of, there are a couple of interesting power dynamics in that, and there is something sexy with the women getting power to cuck the man, which is kind of hot. [...] just finding porn from, from the female perspective, and then watching a lot of it and there was something about it which was **incredibly erotic to me**. And in hindsight, it was like "this makes a lot of sense."<sup>37</sup>*

Celine describes this as an "egg moment" for her in hindsight; a moment that should have told her she might have been a trans woman. But then also being a trans woman, less queer and more mainstream depictions of trans women in porn don't work for her, where they're genitals are often depicted, she says with humour, 'as having the same symbol position as cis-penis'<sup>38</sup>, meaning penetrating. But she knows her own embodied

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<sup>36</sup> 'Jaja, det har endret seg ganske mye, etter som jeg har funnet ut av hvem jeg er. Først og fremst da jeg fant ut av jeg var pan, så åpnet det seg ganske mye {tada!, latter}, åpna seg plutselig ganske mye spektrum enn da jeg var yngre «nei æsj penis, det kan vi ikke ha». Og så når fant jeg jo ut at jeg var ikke-binær, så åpna det seg jo enda større scene, så kom jeg inn i litt mer queer pornografi.'

<sup>37</sup> 'Den pornoen som jeg har brukt mest av, absolutt mest av, i de siste årene har jo vært «hot wife»-subredditen, som er basically... [...] Mhm, det er jo liksom, det er som en mindre humiliating kategori av cuckolding. Også er det jo mer fra perspektivet til kvinnen. Fordi det er jo det som er liksom, det er jo en del interessante power dynamics i det, der og det er noe sexy med at kvinnen får makten til å cuckle mannen, which is kind of hot. [...] Eh sånn, eller bare det hvor jeg fant porno fra, fra det kvinnelige perspektiv og så så jeg veldig mye på det og så var det et eller annet med det som var utrolig erotisk for meg. Og i hindsight så var sånn [i see] «this makes a lot of sense».'

<sup>38</sup> 'God, det føltes veldig gross ut da jeg sa det på den måten [ler], men ja det har jo og litt samme sånn symbolposisjon som cis-penis har.'

reality as a trans woman, and that genital dysphoria and hormones like estrogen make trans women's bodies work differently from how it is depicted in more mainstream and fetishized content – so that kind of porn doesn't really work for her. Even porn with queer or trans people in it can often not feel authentic for the queer and trans people watching it – Hawke as well tried to watch gay male porn when they were younger; '[...] but there was something weird about it. It felt like it was made for women'<sup>39</sup>, so they rarely watched it. Ollie thinks mainstream gay porn is strange; and wants a '[...] little more realistic way for people to have sex. In gay porn it's right in without any warm up or lube or clean up or any... vetting'.<sup>40</sup> Hawke and Ollie, and everyone I've interviewed who identifies as queer in some way, yearns for more porn that's actually for queer people– for something that works for them, for authenticity, where they don't have to settle for fetishisation or invisibility, in the case of transmasculine porn (Pavanello Decaro et al., 2023). Celine, like most everyone else I've interviewed, also yearns for better representations in bodies depicted as desirable in porn; 'and just like different type of bodies, for god's sake, oh my god!'<sup>41</sup> In relation to this Lana says they that porn and the people around affected her mind into being into traditional beauty standards, so now:

Lana: *I do sort of make a **conscious effort to engage with as much diverse people in erotic media** as possible so that I, I don't go around... [...] Yes, but I think in a way that's how it is with any art really, but you take what you need or what you get out of it then and there, and **you can choose to engage with what you want.***

Many of my informants also want more depictions of equal pleasure and content where queer folks and queer bodies are allowed to feel pleasure, on their own terms – something Celine found in the porn game medium. Like Celine's mention of Reddit earlier, the answer to finding good porn for most of my informants have been not on conventional porn sites like PornHub, but on social media platforms that don't forbid sexual content (yet!); like Twitter<sup>1</sup> and the aforementioned Reddit. Ollie describes these places as having amateur porn made by an 'Absurd amount of people who only produce because they like to produce, without any monetary reasons'.<sup>42</sup> There is of course many who link to their OnlyFans' as well. Florence, for example, was able to find on Reddit '[...] like the **honest expression of desire**, as opposed to like just like the... fucking porn moaning [...] And yeah, again, it was very nice seeing people just express themselves differently and strangely and like **honestly.**' It's been their main source for porn the last six years, and it's Ollie's main source for "good" porn as well. Hawke was also to find 'lots of fantastically good gay porn'<sup>43</sup> though he wants more transmen-porn – though there is 'cute' little trans porn community there as well.

In this subchapter I have identified a discourse that states "Good" porn is "authentic" if it mirrors "real" sex, which produces an identity of *the average porn user* – which they are actively moving themselves away from.

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<sup>39</sup> 'Jeg har, når, når jeg var yngre så prøvde jeg meg på den homsepornograia, men det, eh, det var noe rart med det. Det føles som at det er lagd for kvinner.'

<sup>40</sup> 'Ja litt mer realistisk måte for folk å ha sex på. I homofil porno er det rett inn uten noe warm up eller lube eller clean up eller noen... vetting.'

<sup>41</sup> '[...] og bare sånn forskjellige type kropp, for guds skyld oh my god.'

<sup>42</sup> 'Absurde mengder folk som bare produserer kun fordi de liker å produsere, uten noe monetert grunnlag.'

<sup>43</sup> '[...] twitter, der er det mye fantastisk bra homseporno.'

## 5.4 “(Un)ethical desires”: there’s a difference between fantasies and wants

So, I’ve argued that some of my informants take part in a discourse of what porn works for them, aka what is deemed as “good” porn has to do with its “authenticity”, grounded in how “real” sex works. Yet most of my informants also talk about how much non “realistic” porn works for them, precisely because it’s not real.

Billie: *[...] there are things about animated porn that I really like in that you can create such completely **unrealistic bodies**, [...] one thing that often happens in animated porn is that they are getting fucked and so you kind of see the stomach moving, because the cock is so big that it sort of explodes inside the stomach. And that is completely **unrealistic** [laughter]. [But fun?] **But fun!**<sup>44</sup>*

Ollie: *So it’s a bit of a freer medium when its drawn compared to when it is with real people. [In what way?] No, well you get **different angels you wouldn’t normally, you have positions you can’t really do.***<sup>45</sup>

Billie and Ollie enjoy the medium because it is unrealistic, more in the realm of fantasy, enjoying seeing scenarios which would be impossible in porn mediums involving real people on the screen. Alex shares this enthusiasm for animated and drawn porn, but link it explicitly to ethics as well:

Alex: *Erm, yes, there are also a lot of fantasy aspects to it, that... **real life cannot show all the fantasies.** Eh, some things literally don't exist, if there are, for example, fantasy creatures or aliens or monsters like that. There are also other things, that some things are just very difficult or just impractical for people to do, like if, if there are such extreme sizes of dildos or penises, it's usually not very good for the recipient. It may be for some, but then... that's quite difficult. So it's also one thing, there's a lot more, **it's not a person who has to... go through something.***<sup>46</sup>

Not only are they then able to enjoy their fantasies being depicted in porn, but do not have to worry about someone getting harmed in the process. It is precisely because of this “non-real”-ness it works so well for them. Compare this to Alex talking about the techniques they employ to be able to enjoy BDSM porn with real people:

Alex: *And **my problem** is that I, I, **it's my kink** [laughs], so it's not like it's a turn-off in a way. [...] Eh... now maybe it's because I would have been on the less powerful side, so maybe that's why I don't see sex that way,*

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Ja, også er det også det at det er ting med animert porno som jeg liker veldig godt i det at man kan lage sånne helt urealistiske kroppar, så man kan liksom ha en kuk som er liksom en meter lang liksom, og det er jo helt [men så går det fint] urealistiske, men så ja går det fint [latter], og så kan man på en måte, en ting som ofte skjer i animert porno er at de blir pult og så ser man liksom magen beveger seg, fordi kuken er så stor at det sprenger inni magen liksom. Og det er jo helt urealistisk [latter].’

<sup>45</sup> ‘Så er det er litt mer friere medium når det er tegna enn når det er med faktiske folk.[Hvordan da liksom?] Nei, altså du får forskjellige vinkler du ikke får til vanlig, du har posisjoner du ikke kan gjøre til vanlig. [latter]’

<sup>46</sup> ‘ja, også er det jo mye sånn fantasy-aspekter med det, at det... virkelige livet kan ikke vise fram alle fantasiene [mhm]. Eh, noen ting er literally finnes ikke, hvis det er for eksempel fantasiskapninger eller alien eller sånn monstre liksom. Også er det jo andre ting som noen ting er bare veldig vanskelig eller bare upraktisk for mennesker å gjøre, sånn hvis, hvis det er sånne ekstreme størrelser på dildoer eller peniser så er ikke det veldig godt vanligvis for den som mottar. Det kan jo være det for noen, men liksom det er, det skal litt mer til. Så det er jo også en ting, det er veldig mye mer, det er ikke en person som må... gå gjennom noe da [nei].’

*because for me **it is always a playful game**, where power is playing around, yeah, and it is very obvious that no person can actually decide something over me or... uh, well force me to do something. [...] So I think **maybe how I do sex affects how I look at porn, instead of the opposite**. That, that it is since I have such clear boundaries and clear rules, so **I think that it is like that in porn as well, even if it is not necessarily so**. And what is presented is not, it is not in the text that, that there is consent in the same way then. It's not in, in, it's not in the text, it's not usually in the subtext either, that here this person can say a safe word or that the girl likes to be treated that way, right. I feel like, it's not shown at all! But **I keep watching it because it might be something I could like then. But the fact that I like it doesn't mean she likes it...** I don't know.<sup>47</sup>*

Alex is only able to make this kind of porn “work” for them by imagining that the people depicted are as playful and careful about BDSM as they are, yet they still worry about the potential ethics of how the people depicted, usually the submissive, “used” person, in this case a woman. Billie as well argues that their appreciation for animated porn or erotic writings is not only to do with how the endless possibilities or the plot is depicted, but also because:

Billie: *[...] some of **the things I like aren't really OK to make movies about**. So for example, I can find it to be arousing with rape, and that is not really quite okay to watch rape films online, that's not really... good. So, so from an **ethical point of view** I would than rather read text-based things than watching a video I do not know the authenticity of. [...] **And If I want to [...] consume blurry content, than I'd rather read a story or a comic or an animated thing, than watching a video and sitting and thinking "I'm not really sure if this lady really wants to be a part of this", kind of.**<sup>48</sup>*

It's the same for Hawke, who is torn between their love for porn and ethical concerns; 'I'm all for porn, all for it, and support it completely and I think it's really fun, but it's just really difficult to find porn that feels okay to use, sort of.' They as well find that 'Text is then kind of okay, because you know that it's not impacting anyone [...], it's just a person sitting and writing, with good imagination.'<sup>49</sup> Many of my informants, as shown in the quotes above, are trying to find ways to enjoy porn and sexual fantasies in ways that feel more ethical; other porn mediums like texts or animated videos (or queer and trans porn

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<sup>47</sup> 'Og problemet mitt er at jeg, jeg, det er jo kinket mitt [ler], så det, det er ikke sånn at det er en turn-off på en måte [nei] [...] Eh... nå er jo kanskje fordi jeg er på den, i så fall hvis jeg hadde vært med på dette maktspelet i porno, så hadde jo jeg vært på den mindre mektige siden, så da, det er kanskje derfor jeg ikke ser på sex på den måten, fordi for meg er det alltid en lek [ja], der makt er en lek [Ja, det er så opplagt], ja og det er veldig opplagt at det ikke faktisk er en person som kan bestemme noe over meg eller... eh, tvinge meg til noe da [...] Så jeg tror kanskje hvordan jeg gjør sex påvirker hvordan jeg ser på porno, i stedet [jaja!] for motsatt. At, at det er siden jeg har så opplagt klare grenser og klare regler så , så tenker jeg at det er sånn i pornoen og, selv om det ikke nødvendigvis er det. Og det som framstiller er jo ikke, det er jo ikke i teksten at, at det er consent på samme måten da. Det er er jo ikke i, i, det er jo ikke i teksten, det er vanligvis ikke i subteksten heller, at her kan denne personen si et safeword liksom eller at ehm, jenta liker å bli behandla på den måten, ikke sant. Jeg føler det, det vises jo ikke i det hele tatt! Men jeg fortsetter å se det fordi det er kanskje noe jeg kunne likt da. Men det at jeg liker det betyr jo ikke at hun liker det, I don't know.'

<sup>48</sup> 'For eksempel, så kan jeg syntes at det kan være opphissende med type voldtekt [Mhm], og det er det egentlig ikke helt okei å se på voldtektfilmer på internett [nei], det er ikke helt bra. Så, så fra et etisk perspektiv så vil jeg heller lese tekstbaserte ting enn å se den videoen som jeg ikke vet autenticiteten til.' 'Ehm, og hvis jeg vil lese om blurry, konsumere blurry consent, så vil jeg heller lese en historie eller en tegneserie eller en animert ting, enn å se en video der jeg sitter og tenker «jag vet ikke helt om hu dama egentlig er med på det her», på en måte.'

<sup>49</sup> 'Jeg er all for porno, all for it, og støtter det helt fullt ut og syns det er kjempegøy, men det er bare veldig vanskelig å finne porno som føles greit ut å på en måte bruke [ja, skjønner]. Da er tekst liksom greit, fordi da vet du at det ikke går utover noen [nei], det bare er en her person som sitter og skriver [ikke sant], med god fantasi [ler].'

games as Celine and Lana are a fan of) work so well then for my informants because its "unrealistic-ness" them to fully indulge themselves, as people concerned with ethics, in the fantasies depicted.

I would argue that there is also something here about a self-awareness of what fantasies one isn't supposed to have, like rape-fantasies or fantasies of being used. Celine also describes, when talking about past fantasies of abuse, or current ones of being used, of being torn between recognizing that such narratives, which she says are amplified in porn, can be harmful; 'The woman as submissive and used as an object' and also finding 'that there is something really sexy about it'<sup>50</sup>. She links these fantasies in part to how society views womanhood as associated with pain and suffering, and therefore feeling like those things were supposed to be experiences; that then one must have those things to be a "real woman". Florence as well talks about this ambivalence, of sometimes feeling vaguely shameful of their fantasies, yet recognizing it's not something to be shameful about. Based on their experience with porn, they are operating with a distinction between fantasies and real-life desires, as very rarely do they watch porn for fun that is related to the actual sex they're having:

Florence: *I feel like, um, some of the porn like categories that I quite enjoy, they're very, very much the **type of thing that I would like fantasise about**, and either would be like, just logistically difficult to participate in real life or like are the **type of thing that I just wouldn't want to do in, like real life**, they're **just something that's enjoyable to fantasise about** [...].*

To navigate notions of ethical or non-ethical fantasies, I would argue that my informants here engage with a form of counter-discourse to the previous subchapter, that states *there's a difference between fantasies and wants*, and that this discourse produces the identity of *the ethical porn user* which they are trying to orientate themselves towards.

## 5.5 Discussion

This chapter is about young people's strategies for making porn "work" for them... What strategies? I wanted to understand my informants' experiences with porn as they were growing up, but also how they navigate identity, sexuality, gender, ethics and desire. So my second research question became *what strategies do young people have when encountering discourses around sexuality, sex, desire and ethics in their porn use growing up?* As I have shown in the three subchapters above, I found that my informants talked about three repetitions, patterns, discourses that makes up this larger idea of their strategies for navigating their porn use growing up; that *Sexuality is pre-discursive and pure, yet malleable, that "good" porn is "authentic" if it mirrors "real" sex, and that there's a difference between fantasies and wants. This in turn produces four identities; two identities that my informants are torn between in the first subchapter of the born-this-way-sexuality-haver and the playful-and-malleable sexuality-haver, and the average porn user, and the ethical porn user - all which my informants had to orientate themselves towards or away from when they are navigating their porn use growing up. What acts, what ways of being, did these discourses and these identities promote for my informants? Are there moments of resistance? What identities or ways of*

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<sup>50</sup> 'Kvinnen er underdanig og brukt som et objekt... men så samtidig er det noe veldig sexy med det.'

being are made invisible? And finally, how do I place these discourses in a larger societal context?

In the first subchapter, I would argue that they are operating with discourse that states that sexuality is separated into more of to do with attraction to certain genders, therefore an identity, an essence, which can be discovered but you are unearthing something was always there, and into what sexual acts one finds arousing – this second part is conceptualized as more malleable, potentially affected by porn. I would argue that this discourse of sexuality is aligned with Foucault's argument that modern sexuality is viewed as identity or essence of sex, less to with what sexual acts one does or finds arousing (1978). I identify here both an identity of the born-this-way-sexuality-haver and the malleable-and-playful-sexuality-haver, and the aforementioned informants have to navigate themselves around these in ways that legitimize their sexual identity in a society that is constantly trying to delegitimize queerness – as they have to legitimate their sexuality without threatening the very foundations of sexuality which could threaten the cis-het-normative society's acceptance of queer folks (Taylor, 2016). My informants identified themselves with their specific sexuality, being bisexual for example, was something that was part of their being which they had always known or had discovered. Yet, some of the specific kinks or sexual acts they liked were identified as more malleable other parts of their sexuality. So they're finding ways to incorporate both their real life embodied experiences as queer as something innate or true to them, while also that their desire for playfulness, that their sexuality can be explored further, into new sexual opportunities and discoveries by deconstructing porn's affect as inherently bad. I would argue that it is the fact that Lana, Hawke, Billie and Alex are both trans and bisexual (or pansexual) that they've had to realize through figuring out that and enacting their difference, that a discourse of gender and sexuality are neither inherently natural or pure nor do they operate in binaries, is just that – a discourse. They do not exist outside discourses of sexuality, but they are aware of them. When it comes to their relationship to porn, they then go down the rabbit hole because of how porn works on the internet, but are able to come out the other side - perhaps shaken by all the "weird" or "bad" stuff they've encountered - but also more aware of how their sexualities work and of the possibilities of what one *can* find arousing. What my informants do beyond this, is recognize that sexuality is also affected by society at large. This gets to the essence of the point I want to make here, that they recognize a larger societal and porn-negative feminist discourse about what is allowed to affect people's sexual desires; the more malleable parts. My informants engage with a discourse that states that porn, especially not all that one might discover down the rabbit hole, is not viewed as an approved tool of sexual socialization (Wahl, 2023). Celine's point of playfulness acknowledges that my informants view sexuality as in part unstable, malleable, as constructed in the social world, but that that's not a bad thing - it can even be empowering and fun.

In the second subchapter, by going through how my informants talked about their struggle to find porn that "works" for them, that they can get something out of, I would argue that they're engaging in a discourse that states that "good" porn is "authentic" as it mirrors "real" sex. "Bad" porn in comparison is identified as "fake", exemplified by the

notion of mainstream porn. Ollie identifies that a lot of the problems of mainstream porn being so “bad” at depicting sex, is that it is the result of the desires of a specific identity this discourse produces: the average porn user. Who is thought of as male, straight, simple and often sexist and fetishistic in his desires. All of my informants mentioned in this subchapter have to navigate themselves around this identity, and they distance themselves. Mainstream porn is talked about as being fake, not depicting how sex or bodies actually work, therefore something this average porn user doesn’t know either – instead my informants talk about “real” sex and “authentic desire.” Edward feels particularly strongly about how mainstream porn is all ‘bullshit’ because he was this porn user in a way – “tricked” by porn’s “false” depiction sex until he felt he had to confront it. Declan talks about this porn being made for the male fantasy, yet none of the male informants find it appealing – they after all, are not this average porn user (presently).

My informants try to then look for “real” sex in porn that mirror their lived experiences of sex, increasingly using other platforms like Twitter and Reddit for authenticity. It makes sense that my informants want other depictions of sex that are not sexist, racist, fetishistic, queerphobic, transphobic or fatphobic and that they also want to find porn that feels enjoyable and truthful to their experiences.

Yet I would argue that a consequence of talking about this contrasting with the so-called average porn user’s desires, reifies and naturalises an idea of the average porn user’s desires. Srinivasan (2021) argues that depictions of who is desirable and lovable does affect who is considered so in real life – meaning, Foucault argues as well, our desires are not natural, but political, the product of power (1978). The danger of my informants trying to distance themselves from the desires of the average porn user, is that they are simultaneously *constructing* the average porn user (and “his” desires). We see Florence wonder out loud who mainstream porn is even for, meaning does it reflect most people’s desires? Can we be sure that the porn industry’s mainstream depictions of sex are what the average porn user wants? This entire subchapter has clearly, no matter their gender or sexuality, showed how much my informants struggle to find porn that works for them – could it also not be the same for other people?

But my informants are also trying to create space for themselves as porn users in a larger societal discourse that views porn users negatively, and this involves construction themselves as critical porn user in contrast to a notion of a porn user that is uncritical – strengthening a *counter discourse*. They are aware desire is political, so they are also trying to grapple with what “authentic” sex could be through their porn use, as what Smith & Attwood refer to as porn’s ‘[...] possibilities of imagining oneself and community, or its possibilities as fantasy and as pleasure (2014:13)’. I would also argue that several of them are showing how porn can be a site where trans and queer bodies are not just fetishised or used, but allowed to feel pleasure and be desired (not just for their transness). Especially Lana who talks about consciously making an effort in her porn use to find desirable those deemed undesirable by society, reminds me of Srinivasan’s call to action for a kind of self-disciplinary work that doesn’t discipline desire, but the political forces which are instructing who we are allowed to desire.

My last point here is to grapple with “authentic” sex as the ideal – it is of course not one thing and there is no pre-discursive sex (Foucault, 1978). I would argue my informants probably have various definitions of this “real” sex based on their specific lived experience and exposure to images of sex. Florence points out that perhaps people have



more critical distance of what they are consuming when it looks very “fake”, but that people are perhaps worse at differing “normal” sex on screen from “real” sex. By *mimicking* notions of “real sex”, one can also *construct* the “real” more. And even “real” sex with “authentic” expression of pleasure and desire, as Foucault argues, is without power relations (1978).

In my third subchapter, I’ve shown here how many of my informants are drawn to certain “un-real” mediums of porn because they are engaging with a discourse around what fantasies are ethical to have and if there is a difference between one’s fantasies and one’s wants; which I would argue produces an identity of “the ethical porn user”. How do my informants orientate themselves in relation to this discourse and related identity? They identify with this “ethical porn user”, and try to find ways for their enjoyment of porn to not be riddled with shame or guilt - Lana describes this process of finding things worked for her; [...] which match the criteria, and isn’t like directly fucking horrible to have to deal with, eh yeah, [that] was a pretty long lasting process’. Trying to align themselves with “the ethical porn user” also entails a constant negotiation with themselves over the “problematic-ness” of their fantasies and if they’re ok to have and if they are harmful.

But they, in this case Celine, Billie, Alex and Florence also make active choices over what porn they watch and engage with a counter discourse to a larger societal one that equates our desires with who we are as people (Foucault, 1978) - by talking about sexual fantasies are sometimes just that, fantasies. To my informants in this subchapter there can be quite a difference between what one enjoys fantasising about and what one would find arousing to enact in real life, which is also something Barker argues (2014). I would then argue that they’re engaging with this discourse when talking to me to somewhat render harmless their “problematic” fantasies, and thereby still maintaining their identity as “ethical” porn users. They will not let themselves be shamed by society for potentially “inappropriate” desires. Fantasies are neither inherently “good” nor “bad” in themselves, because they can be used both to explore and build sexual relations of great power and pleasure, and to exploit and hurt (Barker, 2014). The beauty of fantasies in animated porn or erotic writings or drawings or porn games is that it allows my informants to use fantasy as not only a *mirror to the self*, but to what Barker refers to as an ‘emporium of *possibilities* to be explored, as a *journey* to a distant realm of desires and activities, and finally to *an alternative self*; what could or could not possibly be’ (2014:155).

When it comes to realities or identities that are made invisible, I would argue the first discourse leaves little room for people whose sexuality and gender identity changes several times. In this idea of sexuality, one cannot for example be authentically gay and then bisexual – you have had to be bisexual the entire time. Or identify as trans for a while and then cis. Nor enjoy sexual experiences or playing with gender expression without it being linked to some truth within you. This is because it would destabilise our entire modern concept sexuality and gender, which now operates with the understanding it is something you are born with, that can be categorised. The second and third discourses leave room for both realities; that “good” porn can be found both in

“authenticity” and in “un-real-ness” – if they were not both at play for many of my informants, I would argue that one of the discourses would make its counterpart invisible, and vice versa – as I’m sure is the case for many people.

To conclude this discussion chapter, I want to briefly situate this three part “making porn work”-discourse in a larger societal setting. In the previous chapter discussion, I argued that, while no one can exist outside of discourse, many of my informants’ queerness, or contradictory experiences to mainstream discourses of sexuality and gender, give them a kind of outsider-looking-in look unto how power is operating. And they do not just fall down the “corrupting” “rabbit hole” of porn and not come out again. In fact they are constantly navigating discourses of a pre-discursive born-this-way identity, finding out malleable one is allowed to be. The fear of this malleable-ness indicates to me that larger society, despite talking of the “naturalness” and “truth” of heterosexuality or cis-ness – is afraid that this can be corrupted – in this case by porn. Fears one can easily see in the NoFap-movement or general anti-porn feminism. For why else would one need a strong discourse of sexuality as deep, stable identity – who you are - unless one was afraid it wasn’t so. The notion of the average porn user in contrast to my informants’ hard struggle to find porn that “worked” for them, that they could fully enjoy – no matter their cis-ness or heterosexuality, indicated to me that straight men’s *desire* is not innate or simple or straight forward or out of control. It, like for everyone else, is a result of specific spatial and temporal power (Foucault, 1978). That men must always be in the mood and must desire women who are submissive in a dominating manner (like Butler’s concept heterosexual matrix observes, 1990), denies them their complex humanity, their feelings, and their boundaries. And lack of desire. By thinking of men’s sexuality as simple or uncritical, it is reified. Not much room for anything else, as then they are deemed to do manhood wrong. It also leaves no room for women’s and other genders’ horniness or complex desires. Yet when people are able to engage with the idea that their desires do not have to be reflection of their true self or what they want to do in bed IRL; less space is needed for shame or denial, and more is available for exploration of Engelberg’s notions of bisexual and transgender potentialities (2024). And to investigate how power orders acceptable desire around (Srinivasan, 2021). Society’s shaming and desire for control over people’s porn use makes more sense now. I would argue that if we were able to be more open about our complex malleable sexual experiences and desires and fantasies, without the need to categorize and identify (which Foucault observes in the confessional instinct of the sexual liberation’s movement, 1978), we would realize that there is no clash – for our gender and sexuality are not inherently stable nor natural entities. There is room for agency.

## 6. “A healthy relationship to porn”: young people navigating norms of health and normality

### 6.1 Introduction

When I asked my informants about their relationship with porn growing up or presently, I was struck by how often I would get an answer similar to this:

Alex: *So right now it is a **tool** that kind of **sets the mood**, ehm, it is not, I don't think I view it **positively or negatively**. It's a little bit like, I feel there's a lot **problematic stuff with the industry** og I actually do want to pay for what I watch, but I don't have the money for that right now [laughs]. So until further I will **just have to deal...** and it would have been nice if it was less... that it was a **need**.<sup>51</sup>*

Unprompted, Alex talked about porn in neutral ways while criticizing the porn industry, and being concerned about them “needing” it. Other informants talk more explicitly about *others* needing to have a more open and critical conversation about porn, and concern about a “healthy” relationship to porn. As mentioned in both the introduction and in chapter 5, society at large and my informants have certain concerns about porn's power over sexuality – especially when it comes the porn industry and mainstream porn, and “needing” porn – of not being able to have critical distance. This chapter is then about how young people conceptualise porn (and the porn industry), and then what they think is a normal, healthy relationship with porn.

My research question for this chapter is *How do young people talk about notions of health and normality in relation to porn use?*

In the two ensuing subchapters I will first describe the two discourses I have found, and then in a final chapter discussion talk about what kinds of identities and ways of acting being this discourse promotes, how my informants orientate themselves within this, and use my theoretical framework to make sense of it all. Finally I will discuss the role of these discourses in a larger societal context.

### 6.2 ‘Use it carefully’: porn as addictive

Unlike in chapter 5.2 where sexuality is talked about as pre-discursive, yet malleable and many of my informants talk about porn's potential impact on their sexuality in relaxed ways, some of my other informants do talk about being *weary* of how porn has or could affect their sexuality. Kevin describes struggling with his porn use when he was younger, as it was often more about a strong habit, which meant he used porn even when he wasn't aroused and just bored:

Kevin: *[...] since like high school then maybe, I wanted to get away, but it's also this kind of **gross habitual pattern**. Gross meaning that **I am maybe***

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Akkurat nå så er det et verktøy som liksom setter humøret, ehm, det er ikke, jeg tror ikke jeg ser på positivt eller negativt [mhm], det er litt sånn, eh jeg føler det er veldig mye problematisk med industrien og... jeg har egentlig lyst til å betale for det jeg ser på, men jeg har ikke pengene til det akkurat nå [ler]. Så inntil videre så får jeg bare deale og så hadde det vært fint å vært litt mindre... at det var et behov da.’

**doing things to myself I am not comfortable with**, it was maybe not what I really wanted.<sup>52</sup>

Kevin's relationship to porn became kind of out of his control, and somewhat non-consensual, but still identified as to do with habits. Alex above mentions that they wish they *needed* it less, and many of my other informants identify that there is something about porn having a specific kind of power. Josie for example, who now has watched porn a few times and is having a positive experience, still thinks of it as:

Josie: *That it, it is an alternative, and if I feel like it I can watch it and that can be exciting. But I don't want to be **addicted to needing it**.*<sup>53</sup>

She is afraid that it could get her addicted, even though at that moment she had only watched it. Declan describes (mainstream) porn as being made with '[...] exaggerations, that is what they do in porn, because people grow bored of something and **then one needs a higher and higher dose**, kind of.'<sup>54</sup> Edward describes porn in similar terms:

Edward: *[...] because you know, **it's easy to just get addicted with, like seeing these things and your mind just shape around** this kind of porn that all the girls should be like this, the guy should be like this, and then it's these stories happen.*

Here, Edward talks about, as if it's a given, that porn is addicting and can shape your mind. He is referring to his own story of struggling with how porn affected his sex life. He goes on, talking about how almost all the porn he has seen is trying to, well, manipulative and is able to turn someone on:

Edward: *[...] but I think 99% of the porn I read or I watch or I see [...] just try to show some like, you know, the **shiny thing and just turn you on and yeah. I think that it's, uh, like the story it's repeating, repeating in the porn**, but I don't think that it's a good.*

Declan, who just talked in the terms of needing a bigger hit, dose, says that:

Declan: *[...] from childhood, when we found out about it, then it was kind of "wow, here is just a fun kind of **stimuli, the more the better, right**" But then, then **it takes a some time before one starts becoming critical** to it, and is a bit like: "**maybe one should calm down a little**" [laughs].<sup>55</sup>*

It's striking to me how matter of factly Declan talks about talks about his experience as universal, as the experience of porn. Hawke also talks about this addictive nature of porn:

Hawke: *I, I think that there are **different people's relationship to porn, if this becomes an addiction or a problem**, because it is possible to be addicted to porn. Eh, at that it destroys your sex life. I think that's*

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<sup>52</sup> '[...] sånn siden videregående da kanskje [mhm], jeg vil komme meg bort, men det er også den her liksom ekle vanemønsteret [ja, ikke sant]. Ekkelt i den forstand at jeg kanskje gjør ting med meg selv jeg ikke er komfortabel med, det var kanskje ikke det jeg ville egentlig [ikke sant, også bare ja]. Ja.'

<sup>53</sup> 'At det, det er et alternativ, og hvis jeg føler for det så kan jeg se på det og at det kan være spennende. Men at jeg ikke vil være avhengig av å trenge det [mhm, skjønner]'

<sup>54</sup> 'Fordi overdrivelser, det er jo det de gjør i porno, fordi folk blir lei av noe også må man ha høyere og høyere dose på en måte'

<sup>55</sup> 'fra barndommen, da vi liksom fant ut av det, så var det jo liksom «oi det her er bare en morsom type stimuli, jo mer jo bedre sant» [jaja]. Men så, så tar det jo litt tid før man begynner å bli litt kritisk til det, og er litt sånn, «kanskje man skal roe ned litt» [latter].'

*probably quite a difficult subject, because it's a little bit like **you don't want to shame anyone**, but in reality it destroys your sex life. Maybe you kind of **need to have** these... brutal things **all the time to become turned on and get ready** and to be able to have good sex. And it is also, a thing that one can kind of mention when one is teaching people about porn, is that sort of, how should one put it, "**use it carefully** [laughing], it's quite **addictive**".<sup>56</sup>*

Everyone here is talking explicitly about porn addiction, using the language of stimuli, dosage, where porn has qualities to it that makes it addictive, similar to how substance addiction works by altering one's brain chemistry (as I mention in the introduction). Hawke makes a point here of this danger of addictiveness concerns certain people, other people, as they know about '[...] people who have that kind of, it's never ruined **my** sex life really. Other times it enriched it.'<sup>57</sup> Here Hawke is explicitly names something I find quite interesting, the idea that certain people are more likely to become what I will name this discourse's produced identity; *the porn addict*.

### 6.3 "Normal porn use": a healthy relationship to porn is controlled and critical, but still enjoys it without shame

So, what is a healthy relationship to porn according to my informants? Alex, in the beginning, talks about its present function as setting the mood, and that they don't view it either negatively or badly, but neutrally – but that they're critical of the porn industry – they only wish they needed it less – therefore to Alex, ideally, porn shouldn't feel needed. Ollie says they now use porn '[...] as it should be used, I guess. [Which is what?] Masturbation.'<sup>58</sup> Edward, who is very critical to most porn and weary of its (supposed) addictiveness still uses porn now, because his therapist '[...] told me at some point that it's good to masturbating, because it's just to release some bad things. It helps to kind of relaxing and definitely porn helps to kind of turn on and go, but uh, I try to like find a good one.' To him this notion of him being able to be healthy through masturbation (through porn) is also linked to being healthy for more than himself:

Edward: *'[...] but still I really need to just uh, get rid of my hormones [laughs], you know. And that can be helpful. I mean it's both **helpful for the mental health, for the society, health of the, my family** because if I'm not in a good mood, I would not be a good person for anyone'*

Declan's present porn use goes in waves, which right now means he is barely watching it; 'But like it's not really, it's not really a decision, I just haven't really wanted to.'<sup>59</sup> But sometimes he does watch porn, when he really wants to: '[...] then I think it's okay to do

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<sup>56</sup> 'Jeg, jeg tror altså det er forskjellige menneskers forhold til porno da, om det her blir en avhengighet eller problem [ja], fordi det er jo mulig å bli avhengig av porno. Eh, og at det ødelegger ditt sexliv. Det tror jeg er en ganske vanskelig tematikk [ja], fordi det blir litt sånn du vil ikke shame noen [ja ikkesant], men det ødelegger ditt sexliv sånn i virkeligheten. Du må liksom ha de her kanskje... brutale tingene hele tida for å bli tent og komme i gang og klare å ha god sex [mhm]. Og det er jo og litt også, det er en ting at man kan på en måte nevne da man prøver å lære folk om porno, er på en måte at, hva skal man si, use it carefully [latter], it's quite addictive.'

<sup>57</sup> 'Jeg vet folk som har det liksom [ja], det har aldri ødelagt for meg i sexlivet mitt, egentlig. Andre ganger har det beriket det'

<sup>58</sup> 'Nei altså nå bruker jeg det som det skal brukes, i guess. [...] [Brukes til?] Onanering.'

<sup>59</sup> 'Men det er liksom ikke, det er liksom ikke en avgjørelse, jeg har bare ikke hatt noe særlig lyst liksom.'

it a little from time to time, but there are probably people who have much more problems with distancing themselves from it<sup>60</sup>. He then points to the benefits of less “stimulating” porn like sound porn or drawn porn. Many other also talk about this current porn use as going in periods, in waves; like Billie says: ‘I use that really periodically’<sup>61</sup>, Celine: ‘Now I use porn sometimes, while I masturbate’<sup>62</sup>, Florence: ‘I definitely watch less porn now than I used to, but like quite a bit, I don't think I ever watched like tonnes to begin with but like.’, Hawke: ‘Now it's... primarily, I don't really watch it often’<sup>63</sup>, Kevin: ‘Now I barely watch... [...] Yeah, so I've largely gone away from like sitting and watching porn online sort of’<sup>64</sup>. Porn is now mainly used to get horny or masturbate and has lessened in quantity compared to when my informants were younger.

Declan's other reason for watching less porn, besides fear of overstimulation, is linked to the fact that he is critical of the porn industry; ‘And I also feel sort of, well the porn industry isn't always so good, as far as one has heard, so it's okay to not express support.’<sup>65</sup> When I asked my participants how society should navigate porn, Celine uttered a similar point of being critical, but “in the right way” that is nuanced and doesn't shame:

Celine: *I think it should be a little more and, should be a little **more critical, but critical in the right way**. Because there is a **very big difference between the "porn is intrinsically bad" criticism and 99% of porn is made under absolutely terrible conditions and is like that, a result of capitalism and a lot of bullshit that makes it impossible to do good ethical pornography**. But then there's the point of explaining that it can be okay and there doesn't need to be any **shame associated with it**. It's like something that I've never... I've never felt any shame even about using porn, unless it's like, beyond that talking about sex is awkward-phase. **But at the same time, I know that there are a lot of people who have**. Yeah.<sup>66</sup>*

I would argue that there is a discourse here of a “healthy” relationship to porn meaning being in control and critical, but still uses it to masturbate, without shame. This discourse then produces an identity, which here is that of the “normal” and “healthy” porn user; who uses it only to help their “natural” needs for sexual satisfaction in the form of masturbation, is critical of the ethics of the porn industry, but isn't ashamed of their porn use.

## 6.4 Discussion

This chapter is about how young people navigate norms of health and normality in their porn use. I wanted to understand my informants' experiences with their present porn use, and also how they navigate societal notions of “health” and “normality”, so my

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Porno nå, eh, det bruker jeg veldig periodevis.’

<sup>62</sup> ‘Nå bruker jeg porno av og til, mens jeg onanerer.’

<sup>63</sup> ‘Nå er det, jeg ser ikke så mye på det først og fremst’

<sup>64</sup> ‘Nå ser jeg veldig lite på... [...] Ja, så jeg har jo gått i stor grad bort fra liksom sånn sitte å se på pornovideoer på nettet på en måte.’

<sup>65</sup> ‘Eh, også føler jeg på en måte at det, pornoindustrien er jo ikke alltid like bra så vidt man har hørt [mhm], så det er greit å ikke uttrykke støtte.’

<sup>66</sup> ‘Jeg mener burde være litt mer til og, burde være litt mer kritisk, men kritisk på riktig måte. Fordi det er jo veldig stor forskjell på «porno er intrinsisk dårlig»-kritikken og 99% av porno er lagd under helt forferdelige forhold og er sånn, et resultat av kapitalisme og masse bullshit som gjør at det er umulig å få til bra, etisk pornografi. Men så er det jo og det med å forklare at det kan være greit og det trenger ikke å være noe skam assosiert med det. Det er liksom noe jeg aldri... jeg har aldri følt på noe skam selv over det å bruke porno, med mindre det liksom, forbi den å snakke om sex er kleint fasen. Men samtidig så vet jeg at det er veldig mange som har det. Ja.’

second research question became *how do young people talk about morality, health and normality in relation to porn use, both personally and societally?* As I have shown in the two subchapters above, I found that my informants talked about two repetitions, patterns, discourses that makes up this larger idea of how their navigating their porn use growing up and presently; *that porn is so powerful it can be addictive, "corrupt" a (supposed) pre-discursive sexuality and that a healthy relationship to porn is controlled and critical, but still enjoys it without shame.* This in turn produces two identities; that of *the porn addict* and *the healthy porn user* - all which my informants had to orientate themselves towards or away from when they are navigating their porn use growing up and presently. What acts, what ways of being, do these discourses and these identities promote for my informants? Are there moments of resistance? What identities or ways of being are made invisible? And finally, how do I place these discourses in a larger societal context?

In the first subchapter, my informants orientate their relationship to present porn use through the porn addict identity which they push away, distancing themselves from porn, it is dangerous, an illness, one always has to be on the watch out, in control; like for example for Josie, who is worried about how it could affect her sexuality even though she has only consumed porn 5, 6 times in all her life. Declan as well, says: 'Because I think people... well now I don't have a problem with distancing myself away from porn [...]'<sup>67</sup>, it's others, not him after all - he is always aware of this other, and he is (or has to be) the opposite. I am understanding these actions and concerns through Foucault's idea that a key part of our contemporary notion of sexuality where we see sex as a *health* issue and we are concerned with what is sexually normal (Taylor, 2016). It also indicates that they believe they have a pure, pre-discursive sexuality which can be corrupted. Perhaps most interestingly are these particular informants mention of *others* sexual health. By using Foucault, I would argue this is a symptom of the fact that everyone exercises disciplinary power - the power of enforcing social norms - and everyone exercises it over everyone else, we are trying to make each other *normal* (Taylor, 2016) - since disciplinary power also categorizes people into hierarchies, of normalcy, health, morality (Wetherell, 2001). But I would argue we can also understand my informants actions as a symptom of biopower in action; the concern for life, for populations, as the "decline" of the health of individuals in a community is dangerous and must be controlled - which involves sexualities being "proper" and "normal" and "healthy" (ibid). Also, by showing they are in control of porn's supposed power, they are "healthy" individuals themselves, above those who are deemed less healthy or normal - i.e. the porn addict. Finally, it's interesting to me how Kevin talks about his issues with his own porn use by talking about habits - as this is what most researchers on problematic porn use, use to identify "porn addiction" as; a difficult, compulsive, or *habitual* relationships to porn yes, but not an actual addiction (Ley, 2018). Porn it not as powerful as my informants described, as it isn't powerful enough to change one's brain chemistry the way certain drug addiction can. A problematic relationship to porn is more to do with social or personal reasons and a conflict between one's values and one's sexual behaviour. The ensuing shame and secrecy and lack of education on the subject only makes the problem worse (ibid); creating the notion of the "porn addict" - someone who has failed to control their sexuality and fallen victim to the

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<sup>67</sup> 'Fordi jeg tror folk, altså nå har ikke jeg noe problem med å distansere meg selv fra porno'

“all-consuming power” of porn – a notion most of my informants reify. I also think their notion of the porn addict is more male than female, considering how much of discourse around young male sexuality is that it’s uncontrollably virile (Vertongen et al., 2022).

In the second subchapter, my informants orientate themselves toward the identity of that of the “normal” and “healthy” porn user; someone who uses it only to help their “natural” needs for sexual satisfaction in the form of masturbation, is critical of the ethics of the porn industry, but isn’t ashamed of their porn use. This is an interesting combination of traits to me. The first one being related to a being a tool for “healthy” masturbation – what it’s there for according to Ollie. The fact that Edward mentions that he is now fine with using porn if it helps him masturbate, since his therapist told him so, is quite something. I would argue we see again biopower in action here, this time explicitly from the expert of the therapist; an extension of the institution of psychology which has been perhaps the key part of how sexuality has been the site of power the last couple of centuries (Taylor, 2016). Even further, Edward himself talks about his use of porn as a tool for masturbation as part of helping the health of *society* – does it get any more explicit than this? While most of my informants in previous chapters, including Ollie, talked about using porn as a tool for sexual exploitation or fun or sociality – now it seems they are supposed to have “grown” out of this. Perhaps now sexuality is supposed to be settled; distanced, normal, and in control – no longer the orientated around *the horny teenage(r) boy* we meet in chapter 4. Then there’s the second trait of criticalness to the porn industry. I would argue that this is deemed important by my informants because this is the way they are able to still consume porn (and talk about it); as they are aware that one of the key societal discourses around porn being bad is because of how society views the porn industry. The topic of the porn industry being the second (and third) thing Alex mentions after telling me they use it to set the mood, tells me its important for them to communicate. This way they (and other informants) can separate themselves from the mainstream societal idea of uncritical porn users, by engaging with a counter identity and discourse around porn use. Finally, there’s the notion of shameless being very important for a healthy and normal to porn. Though I was not able to get into the concept of shame more in this thesis, almost every informant brings it up in the interview – that we need to stop being shameful about our sexuality and porn use. I would argue that this shamelessness as being part of this relationship to porn is a part of a larger societal importance being put on the concept of sex positivity (Srinivasan, 2021, Smith & Attwood, 2014). Being a modern feminist subject is supposed to be sex positive; with no kink shaming and a let-live attitude as long as consent is there (Smith & Attwood, 2014) (; something we can also observe Ollie talking about in chapter 5.2). But again, also critical of the porn industry - a difficult balance.

When it comes to realities or identities that are made invisible, the first discourse around the dangers of porn addiction makes it really hard to actually be someone struggling with porn – one is supposed to know better, to be on the watch out. It also makes it not possible to consume a lot of porn and be, well, fine – especially if you are a guy. The second discourse of a healthy and normal relationship to porn being distanced and critical yet without shame, leaves no room for someone of my informants age, or older,



to be using porn to explore their sexuality or gender – a person is after all supposed to be settled by now. These discourses also leave no room for those feeling ashamed of their relationship to porn.

To conclude this discussion chapter, I want to briefly situate this two parts “healthy relationship to porn”- discourse in a larger societal setting. Already my analysis of my informants’ orientation away from the porn addict and towards the healthy and normal porn user above was situated in a larger societal context of biopolitics surrounding health and normality, where concerns of porn addiction and normality lead to certain form of self-discipline; for what if sexuality and desire “spills” over? When sexuality is constructed as corruptible and porn inherently addicting, then it is no wonder my informants are trying to protect themselves. Yet I would not categorise any of them as sex negative, nor myself, and recognise the younger me in Josie’s “paranoia”. I would argue that it’s very hard, as the Porn Wars showed (Srinivasan, 2021) to be able to be critical of the porn industry and oppressive depictions of sex without reifying sexuality as something pure and porn as having some sort of special power of influence.

## 7. Conclusion: summary, discussion, thesis limitations, and further implications

### 7.1 Summary and discussion

When I sat out to do this master thesis on young people's relationship to porn, I wanted it to be a critical project with a focus on liberating sex from forces of oppression. After eleven semi-structured interviews with young people of various genders and sexualities, we have together been able to explore how they navigate various discourses around porn, gender, sexuality, ethics, desire/fantasy, and health growing up until the present - by treating my informants seriously as critical porn consumers. The previous research showed that there was a need for '[...] greater consideration needs to be given to how adolescents engage with and make sense of pornography, and how this evolves over time and is connected to developmental changes' (Vertongen et al. 2022:10), but also that the history of research porn had been too focused on porn as inherently harmful, while operating with binary notions of gender and sexuality. I wanted to go beyond this. Yes, I wanted to confront my own potential biases and understand my own experience with porn better, but more importantly I wanted to contribute towards liberation. We are in the midst of an increase in Internet regulation, part puritanical part profit orientated, which pushes sex and sexuality (and sex workers) out towards the margins, all the while society at large are concerned for porn's impact on sexuality - even as porn use is more and more normalised. To Foucault, sexuality is a key site of power (1978), therefore this project, more than ever, needed to uncover how power operates to subjugate, control, shame and make invisible people's complex sexualities and pleasures, especially those on the margins. And how people intentionally (and unintentionally) resist (or reinforce) power structures. A second, more minor purpose for this thesis was to be able to help provide research that might lead to more diverse, power-critical, non-heteronormative sex education. My main research question was therefore the following *how do young people navigate discourses around porn as they grow up?* I will briefly explain my methods, my theoretical framework and then talk about my specific findings and how are they connected, and then briefly explain the further implications of this research and then its limitations.

In this thesis my empirical material consisted of semi-structured interviews with nine people aged twenty to twenty-five and two thirty five-year-olds. I analysed these interviews using first a general thematic analysis to find themes, and then I used a discourse inspired analytical approach; that asked questions about how discourses produce certain identities, ways of being, makes certain realities and identities invisible and of course resistance. The theoretical framework that I used was based on porn studies, queer studies, sex positive and porn literate perspectives, which lead me to Foucauldian, Butlerian and queer social constructivist theories. As my project is a porn critical one, I then found how the aforementioned theories talked about power, discourse, sexuality, gender and desire/fantasy. The analytical part of my thesis consisted of three chapters, where each chapter shed light on different discourses young people are engaging with in their developing relationship with porn.

The first analytical chapter was about how young people navigated a coming-of-age-discourse in their first meeting(s) with porn, something I was interested in when I heard about how these first meetings were either accidental, forced or fun social events. I found that my informants kept talking about being "too young" to have been sexually curious. I argued that such a discourse produced the identity of *the innocent, non-sexual child* – which my informants were orientating themselves towards. This discourse left no room for children's agency, nor for them to make sense of their first meeting(s) with porn – of what one of my informants jokingly referred to as her 'childhood trauma'. Another way my informants talked about this first meeting(s), was by understanding them through how normal people are sexually curious, and I found that this produced the identity of a "normal" *sexually curious teenager*, which my informants were trying to orientate themselves towards as well – one even forced themselves to watch porn because of this. I also encountered another identity in play in this subchapter, one to do with gender – that of *the horny teenage boy*, which some of my informants were moving away from and others towards based on their gender (at the time). This was then a two part coming-of-age discourse indicating a coming into being – becoming a person. The child must be protected from corruption, from "sexual deviancy" until reaches a certain age, when it must become a person. Which means in proper, controlled ways. In this case, becoming the right of person with the right kind sexuality-gender (Butler, 1990), which in a cis-het-norm society means well... being cisgender and heterosexual: where boys are more sexual, virile, almost spilling out with their "natural" sexual desire, with girls at the passive, but welcoming receiving end of this. It's this idea of boys' sexual virility and as owners of sexual knowledge (Scarcelli, 2015), which in turns make them the main focus of concern by society when it comes to porn use. Porn is deemed as "wrong" by larger society, because it is an unacceptable form of socialisation; a threat to gendered and sexual norms (Wahl, 2023). This discourse also made invisible children who are interested in porn "too early", and young asexual people and teenage boys' potentiality for consent.

The second chapter asked *What strategies do young people have when encountering discourses around sexuality, sex, desire and ethics in their porn use growing up?* I found that my informants talked about their *sexuality as pre-discursive, yet malleable* in their meetings with porn as they grew up, and that this in turn produced two identities that my informants were navigating themselves between; that of *the born-this-way-sexuality-haver* and *the playful-and-malleable sexuality-haver*. Society has operated with sexuality as identity, as something that reflect your most inner self, for the last century or two (Foucault, 1978), so my informants identified themselves with their specific sexuality and that this was something that was part of their being which they had always known or had discovered, while talking about hoe some of the specific kinks or sexual acts they liked were identified as more malleable other parts of their sexuality, and could have been impacted by porn. But several outright question why that is bad thing, and not how society impacts people sexuality? By talking this way they could incorporate both their real life embodied experiences as queer as something innate or true to them, while also their desire for playfulness into new sexual opportunities and discoveries, by deconstructing porn's affect as inherently bad. I argued that some of my informants' queerness or transness, which they've had to realize through figuring out that and enacting their difference, led them to the knowledge that societal discourse of

gender and sexuality are neither inherently natural or pure nor do they operate in binaries. They recognise that sexuality is also affected by society at large, and that there is a larger societal and porn-negative feminist discourse at play here about what is allowed to affect people's sexual desires; the more malleable parts, and it's not porn. I found that my informants are then resisting this discourse by talking about this porn influence as something fun or even empowering. In the project of finding porn that "worked" for them, my informants also engaged with another discourse; that "*porn is authentic if it mirrors real sex*", which produced an identity of *the average porn user* – which they were actively moving themselves away from. They tried to look for other places beyond mainstream porn's "fakeness" which catered to "the male fantasy", by looking for "real" sex in porn that mirror their lived experiences of sex on Twitter and Reddit. It made sense that my informants wanted other depictions of sex that were not sexist, fetishistic or queerphobic. But I argue that a consequence of talking about this contrasting with the so-called average porn user's desires, reifies and naturalises an idea of the average porn user's desires. And our desires are not natural, but the product of power (Foucault, 1978, Srinivasan, 2021). The danger of my informants trying to distance themselves from the desires of the average porn user, is that they were simultaneously *constructing* the average porn user (and "his" desires). But my informants had to engage with this as they were trying to carve out a space for themselves as porn users in a larger societal discourse which views porn users negatively, and this involves constructing themselves as critical porn user in contrast to a notion of a porn user that is uncritical – strengthening a *counter discourse*. This showed how porn can be a site where trans and queer bodies are not just fetishised or used, but allowed to feel pleasure and be desired (not just for their transness). Finally I would argue that my informants also had engaged with a form of counter-discourse to the previous subchapter, that stated that good sex is also unrealistic depictions of sex, and *there's a difference between fantasies and wants*. This discourse produces the identity of *the ethical porn user*, which they were trying to orientate themselves towards. I argued that they did this to be able to explore their sexuality and accept "unethical" desires without feeling shame or being actually unethical – which is a counter discourse to a larger one that states you are your fantasies (Barker, 2014). In this chapter, I would argue the first discourse leaves little room for people whose sexuality and gender identity changes several times, as this would destabilise our entire modern concept sexuality and gender, while the second makes invisible the complex desires and political nature of a so-called average porn user, no room for other straight male sexuality beyond the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990)

The final chapter asked *how young people talk about health and normality in relation to porn use*, since they, unprompted by me, engaged with notions of a "normal" and "healthy" relationship to porn. First they engaged with larger societal discourse of porn's inherent addictive-ness, similar to a drug, which produced the identity of the porn addict which they orientated themselves away from. It was something to be weary of, and illness always around the corner because porn is conceptualised as somehow powerful enough to corrupt their notion of pure, pre-discursive sexuality which can be corrupted. I situated this focus on health, both their own and *others* sexual health, in the notion of biopower; the concern for life, for populations and therefore a "decline" of the health as well. This involves sexualities being "proper" and "normal" and "healthy", and this must be controlled (Foucault, 1978) I argued this is also a symptom of disciplinary power, since it involved all of us categorizing people into hierarchies, of normalcy, health,

morality (Wetherell, 2001) - by showing they are in control of porn's supposed power, they are "healthy" individuals themselves, above those who are deemed less healthy or normal - i.e. the porn addict. One of the informants talked about his issues with his own porn use as to do with habits; which is how researchers on problematic porn use actually identify "porn addiction" as; a difficult, compulsive, or *habitual* relationships to porn yes, but not an actual addiction (Ley, 2018). Porn is not as powerful as my informants described, as it isn't powerful enough to change one's brain chemistry the way certain drug addiction can. When sexuality is constructed as corruptible and porn inherently addicting, then it is no wonder my informants were trying to protect themselves, but in the end they reified porn's potential power of them. Another discourse my informants engaged in was that of a "healthy" relationship to porn meaning being in control and critical, but still using it to masturbate, without shame. This discourse then produced an identity, which here is that of the "normal" and "healthy" porn user; who uses it only to help their "natural" needs for sexual satisfaction in the form of masturbation, is critical of the ethics of the porn industry, but isn't ashamed of their porn use. I found this to be an interesting combination, where I situated using porn as tool for "healthy" masturbation as biopower in action again, this time explicitly in the form of one of my informants therapist telling him this; an extension of the institution of psychology which was key in how sexuality has been the site of power the last couple of centuries (Taylor, 2016). Even further, the same informant talked about masturbation as part of helping the health of *society* - does it get any more explicit than this? Now porn was no longer about sexual exploitation or fun or sociality, but instead a result of an idea that sexuality was supposed to be settled; distanced, normal, and in control - no longer the orientated around *the horny teenage(r) boy*. The second trait of criticalness to the porn industry, was important to my informants as this was the way for them to be able to still consume porn (and talk about it); by providing a counter discourse to the mainstream societal idea of uncritical porn users. Finally I situated the notion of shameless being very important for a healthy and normal relationship to porn, in a larger societal importance being put on the concept of sex positivity (Srinivasan, 2021, Smith & Attwood, 2014). Being a modern feminist subject is supposed to be sex positive; with no kink shaming and a let-live attitude as long as consent is there *and* critical of the porn industry - a difficult balance (Smith & Attwood, 2014). I argued that these two discourses made it really hard for someone to actually be someone struggling with porn; as they're supposed to know better, to be on the watch out. It also makes it not possible to consume a lot of porn and be, well, fine - especially if you are a guy. The second discourse of a healthy and normal relationship to porn being distanced and critical yet without shame, left no room for someone of my informants age, or older, to be using porn to explore their sexuality or gender - a person is after all supposed to be settled by then.

I set out for this thesis to contribute to understanding and deconstructing how power operates over sexuality. I now want to briefly discuss my findings all together. Firstly, I found that there is no *one* porn trajectory, and people's relationship to porn change in a myriad of ways as they grow up. And all genders can have all sorts of arousal or lack of it; boys are not the only holders of sexual knowledge and the subjects of desire, with inherent uncontrollable and simple sexuality, and girls and trans folks are not just the

passive objects of desire but sexual and porn consumers as well. It also became even clearer that porn is not just one thing; in fact people actively navigate their lived experiences, desires, fantasies and ethics in relations to the porn they are able to access and are incredibly open to finding other platforms and mediums for porn – though it is hard to do so when late-capitalism works by inciting and capitalizing on people’s desires, fringe or not. People also do not just fall down a porn rabbit hole, but enact agency in ways they are aware of and able to; producing counter discourses and identities to mainstream ones; questioning sexuality as natural, inherent and stable, sex as one thing, fantasies as necessarily reflecting some truth within you, and most importantly, that porn’s impact as inherently bad. But though I have argued that people, especially those existing outside of cis/het societal norms, they cannot be fully outside discourses around porn, as they have to orientate themselves in certain ways. And by doing so can also reify exciting power structures; here I am in particular thinking about how the notion of porn as addictive, and the notion that a healthy porn user has to have some sort of self-discipline, was reified by many of my informants. Either because they felt like they had to talk about porn in certain ways for their porn use to be legitimate, or because they actually believe it. Still, everyone, no matter how far out in the fringes, can still be concerned with being normal (as this is also a matter of safety and acceptance by others), and can also normalize other people – and must always be critical to mainstream discourses of porn, sexuality, sex, ethics, desire, normality and health. As puritanical and capitalist forces seek to control and shame our sexuality and our porn use, we must work harder than ever to enact our agency. But this *is* incredibly hard work; liberating sex from the distortions of oppression, as it is somewhat impossible to fully control – power and discourse and counter discourse spilling out in multiple, and complex ways. But we have to keep it up.

## 7.2 Further implications

As mentioned earlier, my smaller goal for this thesis was to contribute to the field of porn literacy and sex education. Educators often talk about porn as an inherently problematic genre, which young people must be inoculated against - but this ignores the actual nuance of young people’s relationship with porn and isolates porn as something outside of or infringing upon young people’s lives (Goldstein, 2020). Ideally porn literacy could have the ‘[...] the capacity to open up critically productive conversations about the ways popular and institutional discourses define particular forms of sexuality, sexual identity, and sex/gender expression as “legitimate” (or “illegitimate”) knowledge for young people.’ (Albury, 2014:178). I hope that this project can then contribute to a greater understanding of how oppressive powers reinforce binary gender and sexuality stereotypes, but also how young people, especially queer and trans people have agency as well and can critical porn consumers that challenge notions of “legitimate” knowledge. As far as I am aware, this is only the second academic work which treats trans and nonbinary folks as critical porn users. Many of informants, queer or not, trans or not, do treat sexuality as a site of power and discourse, but also as having a myriad of potentialities in who and what is allowed to be desired, wanted, loved and deserving of pleasure.

### 7.3 Limitations of thesis

Finally, I want to briefly talk about the limitations of this thesis. There was much in my data material I have not had the capacity to talk more of, in particular the role of shame. Despite several of my informants being disabled, this was not something I had the capacity to cover as they did not bring it up. I talked briefly with my informants about the blurring of porn consumer and porn creator, with the rise of OnlyFans but also just the commonality of sexting. I got a few interesting answers, but I realized it was beyond my scope. Another limitation is that I do not really talk much of capitalism and the porn industry. I would argue that this project's biggest limitation is in how it does not bring up sexuality and sex/gender as inherently linked to colonisation and processes of racialisation. This topic could then really benefit by more research into how Black and brown queer and trans folks, preferably done by this community themselves, on how they navigate the world of racist and fetishisation porn and carve out a place for themselves.

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## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Interview guide

#### Relationship to porn

If you have watched porn, can you say something about the experience the first time(s) you saw it?

How old were you?

Did you look it up yourself?

What did you see?

What is your relationship with porn now?

Do you have any experience with porn that is not video based or visual?

Do you think there is a standard narrative in porn – if so, what is it?

Is there something you would like to see more of in porn?

#### Desire

If you feel that porn has affected what and how you desire/fantasy/desire, could you tell me a little about that?

Do you feel like porn has affected your sexuality?

Has porn affected how you think about sex?

Do you have any thoughts about gender roles and the "porn fantasy"?

Many people send sexualized content, such as "sexting", - is this something you know about?

If there is something you sent, why would you send it?

What kind of answer did you get?

#### Porn literacy and sex education

What would good sex education look like to you?

In the class room

Outside the classroom

How do you want a) the classroom and b) society at large to deal with porn?

What do you think about the statement: "porn is not real"?

If you met your 15-year-old self, what would you want them to know?

## 9.2 Information to participants w/consent form

### **Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet** *“Hva lærer unge folk om begjær og kjønn gjennom porno, og hvilken rolle kan pornoforståelse ha her?»*

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å forstå nærmere unges relasjon til porno; hvordan det påvirker begjær, spesielt i relasjon til kjønn, og verktøyene unge har og kan utvikle for å forstå dette bedre. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg. Til informasjon bruker prosjektet en veldig bred definisjon av porno, fra det masseprodusert porno til alle slags representasjoner av sex.

#### **Formål**

Porno er et høyst relevant samfunnsmessig tema siden det er overalt nå til dags, i alle slags former, og nesten alle unge personer til lands har sett eller ser på det. Ofte har de sett porno allerede i barndommen eller ungdomstida, altså før de har hatt noen form for seksualundervisning eller “debutert” seksuelt. Tendensen i samfunnet vårt til å enten ignorere eller fordømme dette faktum, gjør oss ingen tjeneste. Tidligere forskning peker ut hvordan mange av ideene rundt sex blir produsert eller reproduisert gjennom (masseprodusert) porno, «på godt og vondt». Ved å intervju unge (mellom 16-30 år) om deres relasjon til porno; hvordan porno eventuelt påvirker begjær, spesielt i relasjon til kjønn, og om verktøyene de har (og kan utvikle) for å forstå sin relasjon til porno, så håper jeg å bidra til forskning som kan hjelpe oss som storsamfunn å utvikle bedre verktøy (både innenfor og utenfor skolen) som er kritiske, men ikke førdømmende og sex-negative når det gjelder å utforske forholdet mellom seksualitet og porno.

Mer spesifikt, skal jeg undersøke problemstillinger som handler om «Hva er unge folks relasjoner til porno og ulike former for representasjoner av sex?», «Hvordan virker porno inn på unges oppfatning av begjær og kjønn?», og «Hvilke verktøy har unge for å “forstå” porno (porn literacy)?»

#### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

NTNU er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Dette masterprosjektet omhandler å intervju 10-15 unge personer med ulike erfaringer, mellom 16 til 30 år, om deres relasjoner til porno, begjær og kjønn, og om deres verktøy for å «forstå» porno (pornoforståelse). Gjennom rekruttering via sosiale medier og bekjente, og kontakt med nøkkelpersoner og organisasjoner (som fokuserer på mangfold

i seksualitet og erfaringer), så har jeg kommet i kontakt med deg som aktuell å intervju på grunn av at du passer kriteriene og er engasjert i tematikken.

## **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du deltar på et intervju, som vil ta ca. 45 minutter. Intervjuet inneholder spørsmål om din relasjon til porno og ulike former for representasjoner av sex, hvordan du tenker porno har/ikke har påvirket din oppfatning av begjær og kjønn, og hvordan du navigerer/forstår ditt forhold til porno.

For de som intervjues som er mellom 16 og 18, kan foresatte få se spørreskjema/intervjuguide etc. på forhånd ved å ta kontakt.

Dine svar fra intervjuet blir lagret på en analog opptaker, anonymisert, og så slettet etter prosjektslutt.

## **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

## **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- *Jeg, som masterstudent, og min veileder er det eneste som vil ha tilgang ved NTNU.*
- *Ingen uvedkommende får tilgang til personopplysningene dine, ved at navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data og datamaterialet som innsamles vil lagres på en kryptert forskningsserver knyttet til NTNU.*

*Målet er at deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes, men det kommer til å bli publisert informasjon om seksualitet og erfaringer med tanke på at dette prosjektet handler om unges relasjoner til porno. Du kommer til å bli spurt om det er noe av informasjonen du deler som kan identifisere deg, og om dette er tilfelle så kan ekstra grep taes for å anonymisere ytterligere.*

## **Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?**

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 20. mai 2023. Under prosjektet, og etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres. Personopplysningene dine vil bli samlet på analog lydopptaker tilknyttet NTNU, og kontaktinformasjon som knytter deg til prosjektet vil lagres på en kryptert sky tilknyttet NTNU som bare jeg har innlogging til, og vil slettes etter prosjektslutt.

## Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra NTNU har Personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- NTNU ved Elisabeth Stubberud, [elisabeth.stubberud@ntnu.no](mailto:elisabeth.stubberud@ntnu.no) & 97167276.
- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen, [thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no](mailto:thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no) & 93079038

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til Personverntjenester sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- Personverntjenester på epost ([personverntjenester@sikt.no](mailto:personverntjenester@sikt.no)) eller på telefon: 53 21 15 00.

Med vennlig hilsen

Elisabeth Stubberud

(Veileder)

Mia Helene Engeskaug

(prosjektleder, masterstudent)

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### Samtykkeerklæring

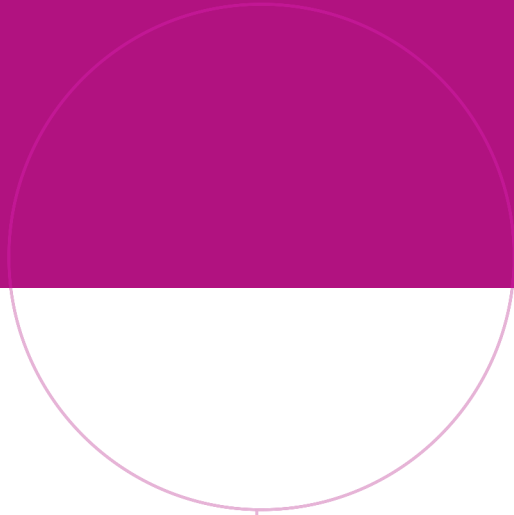
Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet [sett inn tittel], og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)



Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology