Young People's Accounts of their Experiences with Mediated Sexual Content during Childhood and Teenage Life

by

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To Irini, Sophia, Yannis and Liza

for…spoiling me

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Abstract

Discourses about pornography have grown since the diffusion of print communication and the first erotic representations. In the '80s, the so-called 'sex wars' involved intense debates about pornography's liberating or objectifying nature, while in the '90s, the emergence of 'porn studies' offered a more balanced and contextualized analysis of pornography, highlighting the need for researchers to also focus on the audience's understanding of the experience.

Although the majority of research in this field has focused on adults, much of the concern relates to children. To date, however, most of the research relating to children has focused on effects and on potential harm. Audience researchers in Cultural Studies have examined how children understand representations of sex, love and romance, but only in relation to mainstream media. Yet when it comes to pornography in particular, the discussion is to a great extent based on adults' assumptions about what is potentially harmful for children.

My aim is to approach children's use and interpretation of sexual content in the media through an audience reception approach. In a sense, this brackets off the question of possible risk or harm, in favour of focusing on the nature of the experience itself. My research is based on interviews conducted with young adults (18-22 years old) thinking retrospectively about their experiences with sexual content in childhood and early teenage life. Despite the number of disadvantages this approach may have, this thesis aims to focus on how participants themselves report and account for their actual experiences. Using a basic thematic coding, I consider the self-reported nature and context of young people's experiences. Next, I focus on the discourses used to interpret and contextualize their experiences. Finally, through a narrative approach I examine their constructions of identities in talking about sexuality. In these ways, this thesis wishes to offer new insights into the topic through an audience reception approach that until now has been largely missing from the academic agenda.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and outline of the thesis

'If we were living in a society, where all people would be walking naked, then if somebody would post a dressed photo on Facebook it would be very, very weird!'[1] (Boy, 13, EL)

1.1. Campaigns and representations

Media are amongst the biggest campaigners in favour of protecting children from porn, and the topic is rarely absent from the headlines. Over the past couple of years, the UK *Daily Mail* has been conducting a concerted campaign to encourage internet regulation, with headlines like 'Children grow up addicted to online porn sites: Third of 10-year-olds have seen explicit images' (18.04.12). Other newspapers have followed with 'confessional' stories, such as 'Children and the culture of pornography: 'Boys will ask you every day until you say yes' (*Daily Telegraph* 27.01.2013). Ultimately, in mid-2013, the government responded with proposals to prevent children's access to pornography by requiring parental control devices to be fitted as default to all new computers purchased, and threatening further controls on Internet Service Providers – although the final outcomes of these proposals are not yet apparent (*PC Pro* 22.07.2013).

Addiction to pornography, the behavioural effects on children, as well as pornography's violent nature are only some of the issues arising in press coverage. This rather phobic representation is further intensified by the use of photos featuring children captured in front of a screen or looking as though they have been abused in some way. On most occasions journalists seek comments from academics, educators, NGO representatives and other experts that lend further and stronger support to their claims. In the public debate it sometimes seems as though almost any kind of information considered sexual is by default interpreted in relation to childhood, and all children-related issues are seen via the prism of sex (McKee, 2013). Further, although any new medium is associated with related panics upon its arrival in the media universe (Livingstone, 2009), the

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[1] Boy, 13 years old, Greece: data collected as part of the qualitative research Exploring children's Understanding of risk (WP4), EU Kids Online III, London: LSE (Unpublished data from the fieldwork in Greece)

anonymity, easier accessibility, domesticity and privacy that the Internet offers seem to have resulted in it becoming the most terrifying medium for children's exposure to sexual content when compared with any other before it.

In the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in studies examining children's experiences and relationship with the new medium. Experiences with sexual content have been classified as 'risky' and have been also approached by a new kind of mass communication research that seeks to adopt a more nuanced and rigorous approach (Hasebrink et al., 2009, p.95) and that does not exclude children themselves (Livingstone, 2009). This kind of research (discussed in Chapters 2 and 6) examines the risks entailed in children's online experiences and the extent to which they have been 'bothered' by them (Hasebrink et al., 2011). This approach contributes to and intensifies even further the 'risk vs. safety' binary in discussions of children and the Internet. This new academic agenda claims to be informing both EU policy and the wider public debate.

Meanwhile, such concerns have generated another kind of research, in the same way as concerns about violence have done. Researchers representing constructionist approaches have attempted to challenge the basic concepts of 'risk' and 'harm' and turn the focus of the discussion from a risk-based approach to one that focuses more centrally on young people's own perspectives and experiences (Buckingham, 1997/2005, p.63; Barker & Petley, 1997/2005, p.11). However, this kind of research has not extensively discussed the issue of explicit sexual content or of 'pornography', although there has been some work on responses to more 'mainstream' media representations of sex (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004).

Although there is a great deal of information about the potential effects of sexual content on children, and large databases with European (e.g. Livingstone et al., 2011) and American populations (Wolak et al., 2007) providing information about the frequency and extent of children's access to sexual content, what seems to be missing is a critical definition of the object of study ('pornography', 'sexually explicit' material) and any deeper insight into children's experiences (the nature and meaning of the experience as children themselves perceive it). On the other hand, research that goes deeper into children's experiences with media has tended not

to focus on sexual content. As a result, there is still relatively little in-depth research on children's experiences with any kind of content considered 'sexual' or 'pornographic'.

In the following four sections I consider the problematic nature of defining pornography in academic research and the media and public agenda (1.2). I then discuss my personal interest in such a topic and briefly present my own story (1.3). Then I present the aim (1.4) and the structure of this thesis (1.5).

1.2. Discussions about 'pornography'

Mediated representations of sexuality have been labeled in different ways throughout the four decades of academic and public debate on the topic. Pornography, inappropriate/obscene/adult content or sexually explicit material, have been popular terms to describe such representations. Most definitions however claim to be inclusive of all the diverse types of sexual representations. The notion of pornography is historically and culturally located (Smith, 2007a) and thus even the most clear and coherent definitions are subject to certain cultural and social norms. In this study, I will be using the term *sexual content* to describe any kind of mediated representation that my participants consider sexual.

Nudity or sex exposed to the public eye has been catching the public's and experts' attention since the 18th century, when sex became a topic of religious or medical inquiry and was transformed into a taboo subject (Foucault, 1978). Consequently, any publicly exposed form of human sexuality has become equally taboo and inappropriate. As Kendrick (1987, p.95) notes,

> Once pornography was labeled and its threat identified, the methods employed to control it were borrowed unchanged from the long tradition of political and religious persecution that preceded 'pornography' and outlives it.

Debates about 'pornography' have been conducted in a range of different arenas, sometimes in collaboration and sometimes in competition with each other. The 'porn wars' of the 1970s and

1980s for instance saw an intense debate between anti- and pro- pornography feminists. This was a multi-faced debate with ethical and political implications, involving campaigns against the consumption of pornography, regulatory initiatives and activist movements on both sides. Alongside this debate, the effects research tradition claimed to provide evidence about pornography's effects on users. Pornography has been 'fundamentally a term within a discourse of regulation' (Cowie, 1992, p.132), as anti-porn campaigners and effects researchers joined forces in their efforts to restrict public access to it.

Over the last two decades, the broad diffusion of new media has given rise to new terms describing the increasing visibility of sex as the 'pornographication' or 'pornification' of culture. Smith (2010) argues that such terms represent another discursive construction designed to censoriously frame what Attwood calls the 'expansion of sexual discourse, economic and cultural exchange and sexual practice' (Attwood, 2006, p.82) or what McNair terms the 'democratization of desire' (McNair, 2002). These latter arguments derive from a newer research paradigm, sometimes called 'porn studies', which is indicative of a broader shift in researching sexual content in the media. This new agenda has sought to explore the diverse types of content now available to audiences and the growth (or greater visibility) of sexual cultures. This paradigm introduces a new theoretical approach to exploring the meanings of sexual media. Researchers look at how adults construct their identities through using sexual content; studies explore diverse sexual cultures and the consequences of this apparent broadening of the sexual sphere. However, none of this research looks specifically at younger audiences, although there have been significant analyses of a diverse range of audiences for sexual content (e.g. McKee, 2005a; Juffer, 1998; Smith; 2007a).

Once again, therefore, there appears to be a gap in the research regarding children's and young people's sexuality and their engagement with sexual content. Within a context where people are now more open in talking about sex, but at the same time, any mediated sexual representation and children's sexuality are still taboo topics, my research aims to address the following fundamental research question: ***how do young people account for their early experiences of encountering sexual content in the media?***

In my attempt to address this question I adopt three modes of analysis, each of which focuses on a different aspect of this question:

1. *What do young people prioritise in talking about sexuality?* I address this question by examining which themes participants prioritise as salient in talking about pornography and sexuality more broadly. I examine this question in Chapter 7 via a thematic analysis of the data.

2. *How do young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content relate to widely circulated discourses about childhood and sexuality?* Through this question I aim to look closely at how people construct their accounts discursively. I examine this in Chapter 8 of this thesis via a discursive analysis of the data.

3. *How do young people construct their identities through their accounts of how they engage with and respond to pornography or sexual content in the media?* I address this question through a narrative analysis approach in Chapter 9 of this thesis.

1.3. The story of my research

The first question I am always asked about my PhD is 'Sorry? What exactly did you say you're doing for a PhD?' Apparently it sounds strange to be engaged with an academic project about pornography – and this in itself reflects some of the ways in which people often talk about sexuality and sexual representations. Questions often follow: 'so do you really see porn?' or 'how much porn do you see?' When people meet me, they often say 'hey, come meet Despina, she's the one I was telling you, doing a PhD in porn'. Over the years, I have come to fully enjoy this acknowledgement: I am the 'porn girl' – as most people call me - and apparently I must have an interesting story to tell.

I was younger than 11 when I had my first experience with sexual content. It was summer, at midnight, at my grandparents' house. I don't remember staying up late or waking up, but I remember my cousin sitting in my grandfather's armchair - closer to the TV set - and me sitting

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on an armchair further back, in the living room. It was dark, quiet and the movie was on mute. I merely remember a scene of two people having sex. I sneezed: representations of sexual activity, even the thought of people or myself having sex, always made me sneeze until recently. Although I didn't know what sex was, and I didn't know I would be doing it in the future, I knew that I shouldn't be watching it - or at least that it was something I should do in secret. Yet I liked it so much. I felt physically 'excited' (aroused? I don't know) by the sense of something I couldn't understand. I could never understand why people thought it was bad to see, or why my parents shouldn't know that I had seen it.

As a teenager I came across different representations of sex: looking online with my mates, sex chatting with strangers, finding naked photos in adults' computers, watching mainstream soft porn on TV - even call girls' advertisements - were pleasurable. By the time I was in my late teens, I had already seen what is called 'hardcore' pornography. The internet provided a whole new platform to explore sexuality and pornography, alone or with friends – although this was still far away from what exactly I would be doing 'in bed' (or at least so I thought). With whom could I share my secret pleasure then? Open-minded friends were the ones with whom I mainly shared these experiences. I don't remember ever telling anything specific to my parents, although they are very liberal.

I am a grown up now (or, at least, so I'm told); and I use pornography with partners, on my own, and as a researcher. It's hard not to get aroused when watching it – even for research purposes (although I guess deadlines are a very good way of keeping myself turned off). As a teenager I mainly saw representations that I would now label as 'soft' or 'mainstream'. As a grown up I have seen a lot more for my personal pleasure and I have tried things that I haven't even thought I would ever do or like. Is this something unique to me? Is it what I saw when I was younger that made me try or like new things? Is it other people who have introduced me to things that I hadn't done or even thought of before? Is it the fact that I tried things that are thought to be perverse, taboo or not acceptable? I don't think I will ever know, but I am at least interested to ask why people – myself and others - think in the way they do about sexuality and sexual representations. I always wanted to know whether people shared my thoughts, views, concerns, and whether they had had similar experiences. I want to ask what we have in common when it comes to using

sexual media. What stories do we tell about this? Why do we think it's bad, and yet we like it, or we don't? What are we disgusted or excited or even aroused by? What do our 'porn puzzles' and dilemmas look like? My pleasure in porn became a sexual story; it then developed into a research interest, and has eventually become this PhD. Above anything else though, it's my sexual story, your sexual story, their sexual stories.

1.4. Aim of the thesis

This study addresses an ethically sensitive social group. It is an attempt to bridge a gap in research that in much of the public and the academic debate appears to be unbridgeable. I have asked young adults to tell me stories about their encounters with sexual content in the media when they were children. From the point of view of media effects research, this would just be likely to confirm that watching sexual content has implications for their changing attitudes towards sex and relationships and therefore could not serve any other scientific purpose. From a risk and safety point of view, this study would further confirm that experiencing sexual content is indeed risky and potentially harmful.

However, I feel there is a need to make space for young people to talk themselves about their experiences and to examine the kinds of stories they tell. It is crucial to see how they themselves reflect on popular arguments about effects, addiction or risk, how they negotiate with the information provided about sex from other sources, and how this knowledge is applied in their accounts of experiences with mediated sexual content. In the process, this study attempts to challenge established understandings of sexuality - not least as these are used in respondents' accounts - in an effort to unpack the discourses through which young people construct sexuality. I begin from the assumption that categories such as 'pornography' and 'sex' are not given, but socially constructed and defined in different ways. As such, this study will not make the issue less complex, and is unlikely to change anything in the dominant agendas. However, it might contribute to a further understanding of how young people come to understand themselves as sexual beings and the place that the media play in this process.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The thesis comprises eight main chapters, together with a brief conclusion. In chapter 2, I critically review the available literature on children's experiences with sexual content. Rather than an exhaustive review, this is more of a critical discussion of the dominant research paradigms. Via illustrations of the findings, methods and the underlying assumptions about children's experiences, I summarise the gaps in research and indicate the dominant arguments I will be looking to challenge in this study.

Chapter 3 is a theoretical discussion of how pornography and sexual media have been contextualized within feminist thought. After discussing the dominant approaches to pornography, I then discuss the porn studies paradigm, informed by constructionist approaches to audiences, media content and the industry of pornography. I then explain how my research fits in this context.

In chapter 4 I turn to Foucault's analysis of sexuality and introduce his ideas about governmentality and technologies of the self as my main framework for talking about children's sexuality and their experiences of sexual representations. In doing so, I frame my study as an attempt to understand the extent to which young people construct sexuality within a self-regulatory context.

Chapter 5 is my methodological chapter. Here I discuss the ontological and epistemological grounds of my study, the choice of fieldwork methods, the sampling process, the ethical considerations and decisions, and the analytical approaches to my data.

In chapter 6 I develop a second level analysis of part of the dataset built within the EU Kids Online II project, in which I participated as member of the Greek team. It offers a closer look at the most recent data regarding the topic and highlights some of the problems in terms of theory, methodology and findings.

Chapter 7 offers a thematic analysis of my data: I discuss themes and groups of themes that emerged from the interviews, offering a structured discussion firstly of the contexts within which my participants say they encounter sexual content, and secondly of their experiences and interpretations of that content.

Through discourse analysis, chapter 8 focuses more closely on the underlying discourses in respondents' accounts. I here provide deeper insights into the different ethical, cultural and pedagogical assumptions that inform my participants' accounts, and the various ways in which they construct and define both mediated sex (including pornography) and sexuality itself.

Chapter 9 develops a narrative analytical approach to sample stories that participants tell about themselves and explores what kind of identity work lies underneath their personal sexual stories.

Finally, chapter 10 briefly discusses the context of discussing or sharing experiences with sexual content with peers and the role peers play in young people's identity constructions and subject positioning.

This thesis ends by summarising the findings and pinpointing how these findings relate to dominant arguments regarding young people's experiences with sexual content in the media.

Chapter 2. Young people's experiences with sexual content: A review of the existing literature

2.1. Introduction

Academic research about children's encounters with sexual content in the media has been predominantly concerned with the internet, because of its accessibility, affordability and privacy (Cooper, 1998). Here, I present the available research on the topic undertaken from three different perspectives: the effects tradition, the 'communication risk' paradigm and the social constructionist approach. I argue that an effects and associated risk perspective is adopted or implied in the majority of literature, and that this seems to depend upon direct or indirect assumptions about the harmful impact of sexual content on children. In seeking to challenge this approach, I am led to adopt a constructionist approach that prioritises the analysis of children's narratives and accounts of their own experience.

First I briefly introduce the three main paradigms (2.2), summarise empirical data from the existing literature, and continue by providing a detailed map of the reported context and extent of children's experiences with sexual content in the media (2.3). Next, I discuss research in the two dominant paradigms in terms of theory, methodology and research assumptions (2.4). Finally, I summarise my conclusions and suggest an alternative approach to looking at children's experiences with sexual content, that I will develop in more detail in the following chapters (2.5).

2.2. Introducing the paradigms

2.2.1. The effects approach

Research in the effects tradition dominates the research agenda concerning the topic of children and sexual content (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Tsaliki, 2011). By 'effects tradition' I mean here approaches to media research deriving from psychological theories of media influence. The majority of studies within the effects tradition are based on developmental (Boies et al., 2004), cognitive (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; 2007; 2008) and clinical psychological theories (Cline, 1994) which attempt to identify attitudinal, behavioural, cognitive and emotional effects on children (as discussed in the review by Huston, et al., 1998, p.40-42), as well as what are termed 'forbidden-fruit' effects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). To some extent this research has followed the same model applied in research on the adult population, which might imply that assumptions made about adults could possibly be applied directly to childhood.

Sexual content is in this paradigm is framed as a negative consequence of children's media use. For instance, studies suggest that sexual content negatively influences children's attitudes towards romantic relationships or commitment (e.g. Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). They also suggest that there is a possible correlation between violence and sexual content in two ways: on the level of representation – e.g. depicting violent sex (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2003), and on the level of effects (effects of depictions of violence are similar to the effects of sexual content) (e.g. Valkenburg & Soeters, 2001). On these grounds, the content is assumed to impact on children's sexual behaviour and attitudes towards women as sexual objects (e.g. Flood, 2009a; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Recently, Horvath et al. (2013) have published a rigorous rapid evidence assessment on pornography's effects on children. They summarise the main research findings of effects research and point at the gaps in literature and the weaknesses of this tradition. Although they raise questions about the lack of definitions of pornography and highlight problems in methodology, their assessment draws on the same assumptions as most of the studies in this tradition.

2.2.2. The communication risk approach

A second paradigm claims to examine this topic outside of the context of media effects research, in the context of what I am terming the 'communication risk' paradigm (Livingstone et al., 2011). This model provides a more comprehensive and more nuanced picture of the nature and scope of children's encounters with sexual content than is generally available in smaller-scale effects studies. These studies currently provide the richest and most prolific source of data on children's online activities across Europe, and for this reason I will discuss findings of this work in more detail in chapter 6. The EU Kids Online I survey collected and analysed data from 21 participating countries relating to what Hasebrink et al. have identified as potential risks and opportunities for children online (2009, p.7). Risks are related to sexuality, values/ideology, aggression and commercial interests, while children's role in relation to each category has been classified into either being a recipient, a participant or an actor.

The EU Kids Online II survey focuses on children's patterns of online use and experiences with alleged risks such as bullying, sexting, meeting people online and watching sexual content (Livingstone et al., 2011). In relation to sexual content there has been considerable work on children's access in terms of frequency, gender, age and class (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.49-61). Some researchers have addressed the topic either as a main (Tsaliki, 2010; 2011; 2012 with Rovolis) or as a peripheral issue (Wold et al., 2009). Although Wold et al.'s work is mainly descriptive, Tsaliki (2011; 2012 with Rovolis) has been working on a first contextualisation of the available findings by critically reflecting upon theories that conceptualize sexuality within a discursively constructed context of 'risk'. This approach begins to question assumptions about direct effects. However, assumptions about risk, signifying that such content might provoke negative emotions (being 'bothered') or represent unwanted experiences (exposure to unwanted knowledge) for the user, are otherwise consistently apparent in this body of research. Another assumption is that unregulated online use might result in risky experiences, which potentially have negative consequences (harm) (e.g. de Haan & Livingstone, 2009). In this sense, there might also be a notion of real-life behavioural 'effects' underlying the notion of risk here.

2.2.3. The social constructionist approach

Other researchers have approached the topic from a social constructionist perspective. By social constructionist I refer to an approach that entails interpreting research findings as meanings produced within a specific social, cultural, political and historical context (Burr, 1995). I also use the term 'post-structuralist' to refer to an approach through which the researcher makes sense of the data by deconstructing them, by focusing on the signifiers that are deployed to represent and interpret reality (Burr, 1995, p.105). Allen (2006) for example discusses young people's references to pornography in their discussions about sex education, drawing upon theories of identity and engaging critically with feminist work. Sørensen (2007) studied young boys' viewing of male bodies in pornography and draws upon theories relating to the body, masculinity and sexuality, some of which derive from psychological approaches; however, his objective is to account for the performances of masculinity that surround young men's responses to mediated representations of male sexuality. Finally, Bale (2012) examines young people's perceptions of sexualised media in relation to their sexual health, drawing upon theories of sexuality and on social constructionist analytical approaches.

Although it is possible to identify three current research paradigms in this field, the effects and the 'risk communication' approaches very much dominate the research and public agendas. For this reason, what follows focuses mostly on what the majority of research in these two paradigms tells us about the extent and nature of children's encounters with sexual content. The social constructionist paradigm provides alternative approaches to the topic but has not so far focused particularly on children's experiences with such content.

2.3. Access, use or effects?

To date, it seems that research has mostly provided data about access in relation to children's gender, age and class. Most studies reviewed here seek to provide information on who, where, how frequently, through which medium and why children may possibly access sexual content. Some of the studies providing such data claim to belong to the effects tradition while others seem

to discuss their findings broadly within a 'risk communication' context. Yet despite this outwardly descriptive intention, as we shall see, the majority of studies rest on assumptions regarding children's reception and understanding of sexual content and implications about either the risk of the experience or its effects on the user.

2.3.1. Extent of access

Children's access to sexual content has become an even greater issue since the internet became a popular medium for children. According to EU Kids Online II, 23% of children report that they have seen an obviously sexual representation either online or offline. In a survey in the Nordic countries 92% of children report that they have had such an experience (Sørensen & Kjørholt, 2007, p.89). Numbers for the extent of children's encounters differ because of different samples and the time at which studies were conducted. For that reason it is not rare for researchers to disagree on findings - although this itself might be seen to contribute to the overall sense of anxiety and alarm illustrated frequently in media reporting.

The most recent effects studies report that large amounts of sexual imagery are available to children online (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009, p.160; Flood, 2009b, p.135; Mitchell et al., 2003; Wolak et al., 2007; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010), without providing a comparison between the internet and other media. One of the few exceptions is Kolbein's study, reporting that in Iceland 37% of 16-19 year old boys have looked for sexual content in magazines, TV, DVD/VHS or the internet more than once (Kolbein, 2007, p.105). Brown et al. (2006, p.1020) also report young people having examined sexual content deriving from more than one medium; however, no comparisons between different media are provided. This shows that most effects researchers show a particular interest in the internet, and this implies an objective to provide evidence that would result in further internet regulation (I will discuss this argument further in Chapter 6).

In the EU Kids Online survey 14% of children said that they have seen sexual content online and 12% on TV, films or videos (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.49), while 12% report that they have

seen sexual content once or twice a month (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.49). This and other studies report on whether children were 'bothered' (to use the EU Kids Online term), and to what extent, or whether they felt disgust or liked what they saw. Sørensen & Kjørholt (2007, p.113) found that 28% of children felt disgusted by sexual content while another 39% found it fun. Mitchell et al. (2003, p.341) found that 24% of those who reported having seen an x-rated site felt very or extremely upset. Moreover, Von Feilitzen & Carlsson (2000) argue that children often feel embarrassed by such experiences. Measurements of respondents' self-reported emotional responses to sexual content are found in both effects and risk communication studies. In some cases these emotions and other access-related results have been classified as self-reported *harm* by the participants. For instance, the EU Kids Online II project found that 4% of all children who have had such an experience reported being 'bothered', presumably a negative response (although Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012 offer a rather critical view of this finding).

Overall, these findings indicate that what has been measured so far is whether children access sexual content, and it seems to have been proved that they do. Data regarding frequency or the medium of access appear to contribute further to the conclusion that children might come across sexual content in a range of contexts. Yet while this data might provide information about the extent of the experience, it clearly does not represent evidence for assumptions about causal relationships between the use of sexual content and its putative effects.

2.3.2. Access to sexual content by gender

In general, the findings of research in this area appear to concern only heterosexual children. Even if there are in some cases questions about the participants' sexual orientation, it seems fair to assume that existing research largely neglects or does not succeed in collecting data from non-heterosexual participants. Most studies report that more boys than girls use sexual content (e.g. Peter & Valkenburg, 2008; 2009; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2006; Alexy et al., 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011; Livingstone & Bober, 2005b inter alia). In Peter & Valkenburg's studies for instance, it is some times assumed that males' innately 'experimental' nature and their 'natural sex drive' create a need for sexual content especially during their puberty. Younger

children are therefore implicitly presented as a-sexual and not curious to explore sexuality.

Data seem to report big differences between boys and girls regarding frequency and age of use (Cameron et al., 2005; Flood, 2007; Flood & Hamilton, 2003). Nevertheless, the EU Kids Online survey claims that the only observable difference between boys and girls is at the age groups of 9-12 and 13-16 (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012; 24% vs.17%, Livingstone et al., 2011, p.49). These studies report that slightly more teenage boys than girls encounter sexual content (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.50). Tsaliki (2010, p.11) argues that boys are 'more open' than girls in a sense that they feel less uncomfortable to talk about their experiences – which may suggest that there are differences in the reporting of experiences rather than the experiences themselves. The majority of the effects studies are single-country cases although they typically claim to employ representative samples of the population; however, the EU Kids Online study is pan-European, with a significantly larger sample. It seems then that differences in assumptions between cases of the two paradigms might reflect differences between a single-country and a multi-country sample. Differences in findings might also lie in how the questions are phrased, or the range of answers available to the respondents. This might suggest that respondents' answers are influenced by certain cultural indicators, which would in itself point to the need for a constructionist analytical approach.

Findings on other demographic variables are also somewhat uneven and questionable. For example, Peter & Valkenburg argue that religiosity might be an indicator of less sexist beliefs in males (2007, p.386) and that this might result in less use of sexual content. Hardy et al. (2013) also appear to conceive of religiosity as a self-regulatory or protective mechanism against pornography use. Including religiosity in measurement of sexual content effects seems to imply that researchers assume a causal relation between being religious and using more or less sexual content (Brown et al., 2006). Yet as this implies, the inclusion of particular variables in the first place, and the associations between them that seem to be inferred, appear to reflect rather particular assumptions about sexuality.

Moreover, positive effects of sexual content are scarcely addressed. Rogala & Tyden (2003, p.42) report that young Swedish women believe to an extent that sexual content has a positive

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influence on their sexual behaviour in that it helps them enhance their sex life. In current research however, the effects assumed appear to be predominantly negative. There is also a perception that females do not use sexual content, that they are more negative about it than males or even that they reject it as a form of pleasure. Such assumptions make this finding an interesting addition to the existing body of knowledge, as it stresses more prominently the need to examine girls' responses.

In summary, it appears that gender is an important variable in research so date: the differences between boys' and girls' experience with sexual content might imply differences in gender performance or identity. Yet in general there is a lack of theorization of gender in this research: masculinity and femininity (and indeed heterosexuality) appear to be taken as given. There is then clearly a need for a much more rigorous examination of constructions of masculinity and femininity when it comes to sexuality.

2.3.3.Access to sexual content by age

Some studies focus on one age group (children 9-17 or teenagers 13-17) while others examine different age groups comparatively. It is generally agreed that teenagers access sexual content to a greater extent than younger children (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012, Livingstone et al., 2011) - although Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson (2010) for instance report that males appear to look for sexual content online irrespective of their age.

Livingstone et al. (2011, p.52) report that 11% of children aged 11-16 claim to have seen 'images or videos of someone who is naked', while '8% have seen someone having sex'. The least common kind of content seen was 'extreme [...], namely images or movies showing violent sexual content - just 2% of children' (ibid). This contradicts what some effects studies note about children seeing mainly violent sexual content (Flood, 2009b; Alexy et al., 2009; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002; Huston et al., 1998); and it also contradicts arguments made by campaigners who call for greater control of sexual content in the media, which tend to suggest that the majority of pornography is violent in nature. Flood (2007) reports that 38% of 16-17 year old boys and 2%

in Australia had deliberately searched the internet for sex sites. Further, Peter & Valkenburg (2006) report that adolescents look more often for sexual content online than in other media. By contrast, the EU Kids Online research claims that age is not so much related to the medium used, as for example older teenagers' rates of use are almost equal for TV, films or DVDs and the internet (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.50).

Unsurprisingly, age appears to play a significant role in researchers' agenda when studying children's experiences. What remains to be further examined is the extent to which younger and older children have access to sexual knowledge prior to any experience with sexual content in the media; as well as why experiences with sexual content might be of significance for some age groups and not others.

2.3.4. Access to sexual content by class (SES) and ethnicity

In this research, class variables are usually implied via measurements of the socioeconomic status of the participants (parents' level of education, family income) and appear to be implicitly related to assumptions about children's 'digital literacy', including safety skills. For instance, Sonck et al. (2011), discuss the existence of a digital literacy and safety skills gap between lower and higher SES children; while Rovolis & Tsaliki (2012) examine access to sexual content via private devices or in private places in relation to socioeconomic status signifiers and report no significant differences in children's experiences. In relation to ethnicity, Brown et al. (2006) report that white adolescents who have used sexual content are more likely to have engaged in sex earlier than black adolescents: there seem to be implications here of the effects of a 'digital divide', in that white adolescents are seen to be more affected by sexual content than black adolescents, who cannot afford to have the same access.

The findings summarized above are drawn from research in the first two paradigms, namely effects research and risk communication. It should be emphasized that these studies rely on self-reported data (which may be more or less accurate for different social groups); and that (despite the claims that are sometimes made), they rarely provide evidence about the causal effects of

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media use. Next, I develop these and some further criticisms of these kinds of research.

2.4. Problems with existing research

Here, I discuss some of the theoretical and methodological problems of the media effects and risk communication paradigms through a consideration of some symptomatic studies in each paradigm. These are contrasted with the assumptions of a social constructionist approach.

2.4.1. Theoretical frameworks

Studies examining media effects mainly draw upon literature from previous research that has produced the same or similar results (e.g. Peter & Valkenburg, 2009; Cameron et al., 2005; Huston et al., 1998; Löfgren -Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). It is very rare for studies to discuss basic theoretical assumptions in any detail (Aagre, 2007; Sørensen, 2007 are two of those who do so); and critical discussion about other ontological/epistemological traditions is absent. Most studies lack any broader conceptualisation or nuanced critique of the topic, such as discussions about pornography being a topic of moral panic within western society (Cohen, 1972/2002), or about the construction of risk for children online (e.g. Buckingham, 1997/2005; Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). In addition, there is little consideration of the now very large body of work on issues such as sexuality and childhood (Jackson, 1982), children's sexuality in modernity (Egan and Hawkes, 2010), sexuality and culture (Foucault, 1978), the history of pornography (Hunt, 1993) or sexualisation (e.g. Buckingham et al., 2009; Vares et al., 2011). Moral panics about children and sexual content and sexualised culture are only briefly mentioned in Flood's (2007) work on youth and pornography in Australia, but these are cited simply as justification for the need for further research. Consideration of a Cultural Studies (or 'porn studies') perspective is also scarce (although Bonino et al., 2006 and Knudsen et al., 2007 refer to McNair's discussion of pornography). In Horvath et al.'s (2013) rapid evidence assessment, findings from audience reception studies (e.g. Buckingham & Bragg, 2004) or the risk communication approach (e.g. Livingstone et al., 2011) are reported as evidence of the effects of pornography on young people;

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or are discussed within an effects context. Further, it transpires from this assessment that within the effects tradition there is an assumption that all kinds of research on the topic must necessarily justify claims about the problematic influence of sexual content on children.

Bonino et al. (2006) refer to McNair's (1996, p.266-267) critique of effects studies; but it seems that they approach McNair's critical work in psychoanalytical terms, as representing the 'catharsis' approach. The term 'cathartic' comes from the ancient Greek term 'katharsis' (Babiniotis, 2004, p.456) and refers to the spectators' purification through subconscious involvement with the plot of a play. Using the word 'cathartic' to describe McNair's approach to pornography could possibly be seen as an attempt to psychologize other theoretical perspectives. In general, studies from the effects tradition adopt a unidimensional, unproblematised view of the topic, and lack any broader theoretical framing or discussion of theoretical assumptions.

In the case of the EU Kids Online studies, the researchers use mass communication theories to frame the topic, yet retain a risk focused perspective. While they do not claim to offer evidence of actual harm, the concept of risk might be seen to inevitably imply potential harm. However, Rovolis & Tsalki (2012), discuss the EU sample's experiences with sexual content, and stress the need for researchers to consider children/young people as autonomous cultural agents. In doing so, they mainly draw upon childhood theories in cultural studies, as well as audience reception approaches, which tend to question simplistic notions of risk and harm. Clearly, children's sexual agency can be a contested issue; however, as Egan and Hawkes (2009, p.392) argue, childhood sexuality is currently understood within a protective framework 'that pathologizes the sexual subjectivity of children'. By contrast, they suggest a paradigmatic shift in thinking and researching childhood sexuality: one that will acknowledge children's sexual rights and their status as sexual citizens - 'the idea that a child has the right to claim its body, pleasure (homoerotically, heteroerotically or something in between) and knowledge' (2009, p.393). As this implies, discussions about risk and harm inevitably confine debate within a dominant protective, regulatory framework.

By contrast with these dominant approaches, Allen (2006) adopts a social constructionist approach to consider how sexuality and sex education are socially and culturally understood

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within the school context, drawing on theories about gender performativity. She primarily discusses the ways in which masculinities and femininities are asserted in accounts about sexual content, even when this is undertaken as part of a learning process. In a similar way, Bale (2012) uses a constructionist framework to discuss how young people perceive the impact of sexualised media on their sexual health, drawing on sociological theories of sexuality and risk. Both cases critique effects studies for their failure to contextualise children's accounts of sexuality and to explore how sexual and cultural identities are performed. Notably, within both studies, sexual content is considered peripherally, as and when it is raised by participants, and not framed as the central issue for investigation. In this approach, children are offered the chance to elaborate on their own definitions of what is 'sexual'; and this provides richer data on young people's construction of their sexual and gendered selves.

2.4.2. Defining pornography

Definitions of 'pornography' are scarce in most of the literature reviewed, and their cultural and historical significance is neglected. Within effects research, a few studies offer a definition of 'pornography', 'sexual content' or 'sexually explicit material' (Flood, 2007; Brown & L'Engle, 2009), mostly using Malamuth's (2001) definition (e.g. Flood, 2007, p.47; Lo & Wei, 2005). Malamuth (2001, p.11817) defines 'sexually explicit' media as that which is 'primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience'. This definition appears to conflate arousal and sexual explicitness; in other words, it seems inclusive of a broad range of representations, that could either be both sexually explicit and arousing, or one of the two. It discusses intention and not effect, and therefore implications about causality or consequences are not explicit but assumed.

Even when researchers define pornography, it is not always clear if this definition is shared with or by participants. For example, Flood (2007, p.50) notes that 'Participants were asked about their exposure to 'X-rated videos' and 'sex sites on the internet'', which does not seem to include use of the definition taken into consideration in the design and conduct of the survey. This means that the researchers cannot confirm that when they ask about 'pornography' or 'sexually explicit material' the participants are sharing the conceptual staring point. The failure to define the topic

or the inclusion of a specific definition that is not necessarily shared with the participants implies that researchers' values and personal views could possibly interfere in the design and conduct of the research.

The EU Kids Online project adopts a method of enquiry which attempts to be less prescriptive and acknowledge subjectivity: 'In the past year, you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex' (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.19). This definition appears to be more inclusive than the use of the term 'porn' that was used in Livingstone & Bober (2005b); it might imply a recognition of the problematic nature of the term 'pornography' and the different meanings or representations that 'pornography' might entail. Even so, the way in which questions about sexual content are asked in these studies can reveal a specific risk perspective. Children are asked to say if this content 'bothered' them in some way and how they coped with it – assuming therefore that they will be (or perhaps should be) bothered. The study also asks numerous prior questions which imply nasty or problematic behaviour before this; and this in itself may predispose children to respond in particular ways or to offer socially acceptable answers (Cornwell, 1984).

Equally, the lack of definition of terms such as 'romantic relationship', 'loving relationship' (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) or 'intimacy' also raises questions about respondents' and researchers' predispositions. For example, Peter & Valkenburg (2007, p.389) ask: 'Are you currently in a romantic relationship?'. As Bale (2010) argues, these terms carry social and cultural meanings which align the research with a view of sex as being socially and morally acceptable only within a normative/heterosexual, monogamous 'romantic' relationship - or as Rubin (1984) describes, within a charmed inner circle. Possibly, having one partner implies engagement - from an ethical perspective – as well as romance and intimacy. If the respondents use such ethical codes to interpret the questions, then they might by default understand pornography as being opposed to romantic relationships and thus as problematic. As Burr (1995) argues, researchers' values inevitably play a part, not only in the interpretation of the findings but in framing the enquiry and/or the research questions. In that sense, differences in how a term like 'romantic' is understood and asserted in different cases, possibly makes it difficult for

researchers to argue about their samples' degree of developmental maturity (Rubin, 1984, p.386).

By contrast, Bale (2012) appears to refrain from defining terms like 'sexually explicit' or 'pornographic'. She prioritises children's voices and gathers accounts about media via the way her participants describe sexual content - thematically analysing these accounts in terms of discourses about sexuality, pornography, masculinity and femininity. Likewise, Sørensen focuses on body aesthetics and signifiers of masculinity and femininity in an attempt to collect similar accounts from his participants (2007, p.206). He uses popular representations of semi naked males as prompts to discuss with his participants their perceptions about what the male body stands for, and how masculinities and femininities are understood and performed in contemporary youth culture. These examples reflect different ways of discussing pornography (or sexual content/media) and the value of prioritising participants' accounts: asking people to explain what exactly they mean by the terms they use, or examining the representations they align with categories like 'pornography' or 'sexually explicit', avoids the danger of merely taking these things for granted.

2.4.3. Research methodology

These theoretical problems are also manifested in research methodology. Peter & Valkenburg argue that questionnaires are appropriate tools for researching a sensitive topic, partly on the grounds that they can be anonymous (2008, p.586; Mustanski, 2001). However, given the constructed nature of sensitive topics in particular, questionnaires might not prove effective in unpacking complex perceptions. A questionnaire can provide useful data for a representative sample of the population in most cases, but it generally cannot provide detailed information regarding people's actual experiences or the rationale behind their use of sexual content. Also, surveys do not show an accurate picture of a phenomenon or its progress. For example, Sørensen & Kjørholt's (2007, p.89) assertion that 92% of children in the Nordic countries have seen sexual content merely raises further questions about the kind of representations they came across, or their nature of the experience. The same issue appears in the EU Kids Online projects, but attempts to mitigate this methodological limitation were made by using lengthier questionnaires

and follow up face-to-face interviews (Livingstone & Bober, 2005b; Tsaliki, 2011) and focus groups, to facilitate the collection of more in depth information. However, information about why and how children come to make the choices they do still remains largely unclear. Overall, as McKee (2013) notes, statistics do not necessarily provide more objective data in comparison to qualitative research, partly because researchers ask particular questions to which they want answers.

Another issue is the process of completing the questionnaires. Large sample studies have in some cases been contracted out to market research institutions and researchers might have been unable to supervise the process (e.g. Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Flood, 2007; Livingstone et al., 2011). In other studies researchers partly supervised the process and their physical presence might have helped children to better understand what the survey was about (Allen, 2006). Nevertheless, the presence of an adult academic - especially if research is conducted in the school context - could be considered as a form of intrusion, or at least to create an impression of adult supervision.

Moreover, the truth of participants' answers is a critical issue. Self-reporting may be especially unreliable when it comes to taboo topics, even in the context of an anonymous questionnaire. Of course this also applies to interviews, but a key difference between them is that in qualitative research the researcher is in a position to collect richer information and to some extent check responses. Bale (2012) or Sørensen (2007) managed to collect richer accounts in that respect, while the flexibility of the method possibly allowed them to ask the same questions in different ways and hence to triangulate across the data.

2.4.4. Underlying assumptions and results

As I have suggested throughout, assumptions about the topic are very significant in researching sexual content as they reflect discursive constructions of sexuality (be they societal or subjective). As Bragg & Buckingham argue, in effects studies children are perceived either as asexual, and threatened by the unidentified power of pornography and sexualised culture, or as tech-savvy individuals thirsty for sex (2009, p.130). So, for example, Peter & Valkenburg

(2006) argue that adolescents who are less satisfied with their lives are likely to be more interested in sex, and that those with younger friends and with fast internet connections are more likely to have had experiences with sexual content (cited also in Brown & L'Engle, 2009, p.131). These assumptions reflect established constructions of sexual content in the media as morally corrupting and socially unacceptable, and of children as lacking sexual agency. Starting from the assumption that sexual content contaminates children's development inevitably frames the findings of research in particular ways.

However, similar assumptions can be found in qualitative approaches. Månsson & Löfgren-Mårtenson's (2007) study of children talking about porn attempts to identify effects on children's ideas about sexuality. The researchers assume that harmful effects of pornography exist simply because of its increasing visibility in children's everyday life. In their findings, extensive use of sexual content and certain responses are aligned to a broader cultural notion that sexual content is a negative influence on a significant proportion of children (2007, p.242). Further, the researchers report the emotional responses of the participants but do not discuss or analyse what the participants actually say. For example, the description of something as 'bothersome' or 'disgusting' is socially defined and as such the ways these terms are used should be unpacked further in reference to what they culturally signify. Similarly, the EU Kids Online II study asks children if they 'do dangerous things for fun or do exciting things, even if they are dangerous' (Livingstone et al., 2010b). On these grounds the researchers make an assumption that watching sexual content online is a form of 'sensation seeking', that it is potentially 'dangerous', and that it is likely to have harmful consequences (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012).

As I have noted, research studies to date have generally reported on the extent and patterns of access, rather than giving definitive evidence about effects. In some instances, there is a blurring of the important distinction between correlation (or association between variables) and causality. And in cases where researchers' structural equation modelling provides opportunities to argue about causality, there is still the issue of how much the results are generalizable and representative. There is also a tendency for studies to 'snowball' results. A number of widely cited studies adopt and claim to confirm previous research findings, arguing that this confirms the validity and accuracy of their own research (e.g. Peter & Valkenburg, 2008; Braun-Courville

& Rojas, 2009). In small-scale studies this approach appears to serve as proof of validity in itself (e.g. Kolbein 2007).

Although the EU Kids Online studies employ the concept of risk, this in itself clearly implies potential harm: without providing evidence about effects, the studies clearly imply that access to experiences defined as 'risky' will in some instances lead inevitably to harmful effects. While recognizing that access results in different reactions (see Livingstone et al., 2011), the available reports are largely descriptive and do not get into further detail concerning how children account for the experience, whether they might define it as 'risky', or what they might mean by this. In Tsaliki's work (2011) the findings are discussed further; she appears to be testing established hypotheses about risk (for instance the hypothesis that privatised use increases access to sexual content) to discuss whether the results could possibly support arguments about causality. An interesting addition to the current EU database will be the qualitative data gathered by EU Kids Online network during Spring 2013, which concerns children's understanding of risk. However, given the prior assumption/adoption of a risk-centered approach it is unlikely this will lead to a different approach.

The issues addressed here – to do with theoretical frameworks, definitions of terms, methodology, assumptions and results - are clearly inter-related. The theoretical framework predetermines the method used, the definition of terminology and the assumptions made. The issue of defining or not defining the topic of study influences the planning and conduct of fieldwork and consequently the findings of the study. The method used also affects the findings and sets the boundaries on the interpretation. Last but not least, the underlying assumptions affect the choice of the theoretical framework chosen, the interpretations of the findings and the implications that researchers seek to draw.

2.5. The effects and communication risk paradigms: three sample studies

2.5.1. Peter & Valkenburg's 'Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit material'

I have chosen Peter & Valkenburg's (2006) widely-cited study about adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit material online in Netherlands, as representative of the approach of effects research. This large scale study draws upon or 'snowballs' previous studies of the same nature that indicate increasing exposure of youngsters (13-18 years old) to sexual content online. 'Sexually explicit material' is defined using Kelley et al.'s (1989, p.58) definition as depictions of 'sexual activity in obvious, unconcealed ways' (although the term 'sexual' is not defined here). The researchers examine the relation between indicators such as demographics, pubertal status, sexual experience, parental mediation, religiosity, relations with peers and relationship status with the use of such material. Their results show that boys' use of sexually explicit material is more extensive than girls' and that content is likely to be pictures or movies showing genitals, people having sex or erotic contact sites. They also report that when asked, girls believe more boys will report exposing themselves to sexual content than girls, when asked. Based on such findings the study concludes that age affects exposure, but there is no correlation with pubertal status. Rather, only male teenagers of advanced pubertal status seemed to have watched more sexual content. Moreover, hypotheses about parental control, religiosity or the status of the relationship affecting the use of sexual content were not confirmed (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006, p.194). Finally, personality characteristics (defined as 'sensation seeking') are claimed to show that participants with higher need for sensation were exposed to sexual content more than others, while the same applied to those with faster internet connections (media use variables).

The definition used within this study substantially frames the content which the researchers intend to investigate. 'Sexually explicit' material may potentially include many things, given the considerable diversity of taste in sexual content (Attwood, 2007). Equally important is the nature of the terms 'obvious', 'unconcealed' and 'explicit', which imply that sex should be kept in privacy. It is not clear if this definition was shared with the participants. Even if the researchers had shared this definition with children, there is a question of what is included in it: the categories chosen to classify sexually explicit material (i.e. movies/pictures showing genitals,

with people having sex or erotic contact sites, and so on) include many things, from photography and art, mainstream movies, cartoon representations of love, or soap operas, right through to extremely violent pornography, or even illegal representations. In most of the existing research there is a considerable diversity in terms of what each group (researchers, participants) might potentially include in the given definition.

Moving onto the study hypotheses, the researchers assume a correlation between exposure and social, developmental and cultural background factors. However, the hypothesis that 'with increasing sexual experience adolescents will expose themselves to sexually explicit material online more frequently' (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006, p.182) contradicts the one that 'adolescents who are not in a romantic relationship will expose themselves to online sexually explicit material more often than adolescents who are in a romantic relationship' (ibid, p.183). An implicit moral imperative - that sex is only acceptable within a romantic relationship, and that a romantic relationship is a singular thing - is illustrated here. However, somebody may be in a 'romantic' relationship and yet use sexual content to enhance his/her sexual life within this relationship; or somebody may be in a loving relationship, and yet find pleasure in both masturbating and having sex. Indeed, more detailed analysis might offer an insight into how 'romance' is understood, and why it is presented in opposition to using sexual content.

In terms of methodology, the published account of the study does not provide sufficient detail about the questions asked. It seems that the researchers used a multiple-choice questionnaire that did not include enough alternative answers for the participants to describe their experiences sufficiently thoroughly. The results are only in the form of numbers describing a reality as defined by the researchers. For example, 18% of males have seen pictures of 'exposed genitals' (ibid, p.191) 1 to 3 times per month, but there is no data on the kind of pictures seen, if this was accidental (e.g. pop up adverts) or if it was a habit (every month 1 to 3 times I visit specific sites with relevant pictures). As a result the data provided by this questionnaire might not be enough to explain the correlations researchers are looking for between the use of sexual content and teenagers' demographic, developmental or personality characteristics.

The authors mention that although expected, neither participants' advanced pubertal status nor

their sexual experience 'would boost exposure to sexually explicit material online' (ibid, p.195), and that a negative correlation was found between pubertal status (at least for girls) and exposure. Sexual experiences are also found to be unrelated to increased exposure to online content. However, it seems to be assumed that young people may become less interested in using sexual content once they get to experience real sex. Their argument assumes a possible correlation between pubertal status and sexual activity and a negative correlation between sexual content and sexual activity. Yet either way, their findings do not show evidence of the *influence* of the content on teenagers or on their developmental status. Peer-to-peer dynamics might also be interpreted as a logical consequence of the developmental process instead of being discussed as a negative outcome. On the other hand, the concepts of religiosity, physical or mental maturity and initiation of sex are defined and understood in different ways by different people of different ages. Yet in this study (and in others by Peter & Valkenburg previously cited), these concepts seem to be oversimplified without any further contextualization; for example about how religiosity is regarded in a highly secularised contemporary society (Bruce, 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2004) and whether this is related to how sexual identities are performed.

The authors' starting point is that teenagers use the internet extensively and are highly skilled online. Arguably they assume that the more skilled the children are, the more likely they are to access sexual content. According to Hasebrink et al. however, the older the children, the broader the range of activities they are likely to experience (2011, p.29); and if we were to think of sexual content as a risk, the same survey has shown that the more skilled the child, the more efficient they are in coping with what is thought as risky (Tsaliki, 2011).

Finally, this study found that teenagers who are less 'satisfied with their lives' expose themselves to pornographic material more frequently (also in Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005; Wolak et al., 2007) and this is discussed as 'worrying' (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006, p.200). The constructed 'riskiness' in this statement needs further examination. Why are these teenagers are not satisfied with their lives? Their dissatisfaction may have to do with their family background or schooling, or with their changing physical appearance, problems with their boyfriend/girlfriend, or even their difficulty in moving from childhood to early adulthood: yet the source of dissatisfaction clearly makes a significant difference.

The statistics provided here seem to be more about effects of sexual content on participants as about factors leading to increasing use. The fact that more boys use sexual content than girls and more frequently, tells us that something is happening - but not necessarily what motivates them to do so, let alone what effects this might have. Secondly, the finding that some personality characteristics, like sensation seeking, are related to the use of sexual content does not mean that they lead to the consumption of this material. It might instead imply that because the experience overall is socially condemned, using pornography is constructed as a norm-breaking activity, and this is what makes it attractive to those seeking a kind of sensation: doing adult or forbidden stuff is, after all, often seen as 'cool'.

To conclude, many studies belonging to the effects tradition follow more or less the same approaches in defining the subject of study, testing the hypotheses and discussing the results. Their findings undoubtedly confirm the fact that children access sexual content but they have not managed to show a causal relationship between this and any developmental, cognitive or behavioural factors. What is signally lacking is any deeper examination of what these experiences mean and how children themselves interpret them.

2.5.2. Tsaliki's work on children's experiences with sexual content

Tsaliki's work is an example of how research funding influences research design. I consider this matter in more detail in chapter 6. Here I discuss two examples of her work. The first is about Greek children's explorations with pornography (Tsaliki, 2011) drawing on the findings from Greek Children Go Online Project (a project I have been involved with too), which is an example of the 'risk communication' approach. The second (2012 with Rovolis) considers European children's access to pornography, and draws on findings from the EU Kids Online II survey. This second piece has been published in Livingstone et al.'s (2012) *Children, Risk and Safety on the Internet* where all the findings of the research are discussed. As a deliverable of an EC funded programme, this book reflects the overall risk-perspective of the EU Kids Online projects.

Tsaliki's (2011) work on Greek children's explorations of pornography provides a mapping of children's access to sexual content and compares data gathered from children's and parents' responses. She suggests that children's experiences with sexual content should not be exaggerated, as their actual experiences are not statistically as significant as campaigners tend to suggest. Also she argues that children do not necessarily see these experiences as harmful, and that those who are bothered report awareness of coping strategies to deal with what causes them discomfort.

She begins by discussing how children and the media have been considered in research as an issue of effects; and that most research defines children's experiences online (especially when it comes to sexual content) in terms of what is or can be harmful for them (Tsaliki, 2011, p.293). She also problematizes the term 'harm', suggesting that it is a term frequently invoked in regulation to imply a problematic situation; however, the extent to which sexual content is problematic to the extent of harm - her argument goes - remains unclear (2011, p.294). Tsaliki attempts a balanced approach to findings produced within a 'risk communication' study. However, in her discussion she does not go so far as to ask broader questions about the social and cultural constructions of children's sexuality or about the fixed classifications within which childhood is understood (e.g. as 'others', 'asexual', 'innocent') (Lesko, 2001).

Overall, her findings indicate that children access sexual content and this might change for children of different sex or age. She reports low numbers of children accessing sexual content, and compares these with numbers for other indicators of allegedly risky behaviour like smoking, drinking alcohol or having sex, that are also low for Greek children. Her argument is that Greek children do not engage particularly with what is assumed as risky. However, such a suggestion implies that Tsaliki nevertheless assumes childhood to be a fixed category, defined in terms of what children should not do, but also as a category at risk of doing things inappropriate for its kind (Lesko, 2001).

She concludes that in general the numbers indicate that there is no reason for particular concern about children's experiences with sexual content (Tsaliki, 2011, p.299). However, by stating that,

she is clearly responding to the risk agenda, albeit by attempting to prove that risk is overestimated. From a more critical perspective, however, the issue is not whether it is less or more risky for children to access sexual content, but what that implies about the ways we think about children's sexuality and about childhood. Alanen (1992) argued that children are not able to actively participate in public discussions about their condition in the same way as women or ethnic minorities have done. In this sense, they form a different social category subject to adults' understandings, but also subject to adults' regulation of their situation. It is this kind of problematisation of childhood that Tsaliki's analysis is missing. Even so, her study overall suggests that research about children's experiences with sexual content has so far provided unclear and inconsistent evidence about whether the experience is risky or harmful and argues that more a nuanced approach is needed.

2.5.3. Rovolis & Tsaliki's (2012) *Pornography*

Rovolis & Tsaliki provide a mapping of the extent of children's access to sexual content (in terms of frequency and medium of access and age) based on the EU Kids Online II statistics. Again, they highlight that relatively few children have experienced sexual content, and argue that this indicates that concerns about children's experiences are overstated (2012, p.11). The degree of feeling upset is also included in their analysis; this implies an interest in whether sexual content has an impact on respondents, arguably a negative one. To this extent their work remains within a risk perspective, invoking concerns about effects.

The authors state that childhood is an era of contested conceptualisations, for example that children are considered both asexual and inherently sexual (2012, p.1). They suggest that effects research has defined childhood in terms of harm, yet that harm is not only difficult to address but also difficult to prove (Millwood-Hargrave & Livingstone, 2006). The way media represent children's experiences online as overtly risky and harmful (Haddon & Stald, 2009) is also assumed to contribute to framing children and the internet within a context of panic. In this sense there is an underlying assumption that participants' responses about harm are influenced by their awareness that adults think of them as constantly at risk of being harmed. The authors draw upon

an assumption that harm cannot occur without the incidence of risk, an assumption 'in line with how EU Kids Online network contextualises the relationship between risk and harm' (2012, p.4). This implies that if sexual content is proved risky then this proves that it is potentially harmful too.

In terms of their method, the authors note that they follow Livingstone & Görzig's (2012) usage, risk migration and vulnerability hypotheses, a methodological approach largely followed in the analysis of the wider project's findings (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.136). Such hypotheses imply an assumption that individuals' psychological traits play a role in their experiences with sexual content, either by motivating them to access it or by making them more susceptible to its influence. Underlying this is a notion of childhood sexuality needing to be constantly under control and regulation (Egan & Hawkes, 2010). This analytical approach implies that children should then be regulated in order to avoid such situations – and indeed this is illustrative of the objectives of the EC 'safer internet' funding that supports the EU Kids Online project.

The authors processed the data through logistic regression analysis (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012, p.5). For example, to examine the vulnerability hypothesis they calculated self-reported experiences of harm with watching sexual content. I suggest that this would provide a picture of a linear relationship between the experience itself and any possible harm, but would not prove causality between the two, as the dataset lacks detailed accounts about the context of the experience. Another example is their speculation that sensation-seekers will be encountering more sexual content. Underlying this is an idea that some children will show some sort of problematic behaviour, and that this is assumed to be part of the developmental process. In Lesko's (2001) terms, sensation-seeking is a psychologically defined classification in popular understandings of adolescence. This assumption signifies how some behaviours have been normalised – a process, according to Foucault (1978), through which people are regulated and self-regulated in modernity. Such notions are further implied in the examination of privatised use and engagement in risky activities, considered here as independent variables.

Their findings indicate that the more children engage in risky online activities, the more sexual content they encounter; the same applies for those who are more confident or higher sensation

seekers (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012, p.8). The authors argue that this shows children's resilience to encountering sexual content. Therefore they assume that sexual content is a problematic activity; but that if respondents are confident, then they can cope with situations of this kind. However, the exact nature of the experience (e.g. what they saw and had to cope with) remains unclear; also it is unclear whether the definition of what researchers call 'confidence' and 'effective coping' is shared with children. Moreover, the authors examined the likelihood of harm via those who mentioned being upset (2012, p.9). However, what exactly was upsetting in the experience and why it was upsetting remains unclear; and there is no information about what respondents mean by upsetting or 'bothersome'. Without such data one cannot prove a causal relationship between harm and experiencing sexual content. Lack of such data suggests even further that using terms like 'upset' or 'bothered' in research is problematic both in data collection and analysis.

In concluding, the authors engage fairly critically with public concerns about effects and argue that these are overstated (2012, p.10). However, they do not go further to discuss why we talk about effects and regulation when it comes to children's sexuality in the first place. They inevitably follow the project's theoretical rationale that risks go hand in hand with opportunities, and arguably engage with the discussions on the topic from a risk perspective. Also, in providing policy recommendations, for instance about filtering software in schools and advocacy about age-appropriate online use, one can detect the authors' inclination to conform to the broader policy initiatives that the EU Kids Online network serves.

So far I hope to have shown how current research constructs and defines the object of its concern, namely children's experiences of sexual content online. I argue that both the effects tradition and the mass communication approaches mostly target adults, and also seek to feed public concerns about how to regulate childhood and the media. This kind of research essentially defines childhood in terms of regulation and self-regulation: childhood becomes an 'other' category, that adult society constantly needs to observe, understand and control.

2.6. Conclusions

Buckingham (2000; 2006, p.10) argues that there is a polarization in views of new media, as a vehicle of both opportunities and risks for children. While mainstream research using the effects and risk communication perspectives has to some extent already mapped children's access to sexual content online, there remains a need to focus on the social and cultural context in which the experience takes place and how it is understood as a social practice by children themselves.

Through the literature review thus far, I have raised questions about the nature of the effects that researchers claim to have identified so far, and about the nature of the risk and harm embedded in the experience. There is a kind of circularity in the research, which is sustained by its failure to question the definition and social construction of its key terms. In that respect, research hypotheses are almost bound to be confirmed, as children will probably be responding to the questions using similar (if not the same) socially acceptable or dominant codes deriving from shared constructions of risk. Unless there is an attempt to unpack the meanings of all these constructed terms and to explore how they are deployed in young people's accounts, it is likely that the nature of these findings will remain largely uncontested and under-theorised. The fluidity of the term 'pornography', alongside the diversity of norms and values that form the boundaries of personal ethics, has implications for how researchers should define their topic of study when it comes to sexuality.

In the latter respect, Attwood's (2002) work illustrates the shift in researching pornography that has been under way since the late 1980s, in arguing for a reconceptualization of pornography in terms of representations, texts and audiences as well as 'the location of pornography in relation to cultural hierarchy and form' (2002, p.91). Until now researchers' definitions of pornography have either been inclusive, or vague or even non-existent; and the extent to which participants share the same definition with researchers has been far from clear. Without implying that young participants' accounts should by default be taken at face value, a possible approach might allow respondents to elaborate on their own understanding of what 'sexual' means for them and how this might be illustrated in media representations of sexuality. As I hope to show in what follows, a constructionist approach to analyzing participants' narratives and accounts might offer a more

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holistic and nuanced perspective, and provide a more constructive starting point for debate.

The regulatory perspective on children's experiences of sexual content in the media takes for granted that children's explorations of sexuality are potentially problematic and should be somehow controlled. Current research paradigms fail to challenge the stereotypical and binary view of children as inherently sexual and yet at the same time asexual, and in danger of being harmed by encounters with mediated sexual representations. An alternative approach would need to begin by exploring how and why sex has been framed as something problematic: in doing this in the following chapter, I will utilise approaches drawn from second wave feminism and post-feminism. However, it is also necessary to explore how sex comes to be constructed in discourse in the first place; and in doing this, in my fourth chapter, I will make use of Foucault's approach to governmentality. Taken together, these approaches offer the theoretical basis for a very different investigation of children's engagements with mediated sexual content.

2.7. Audience reception studies and the study of children as media audiences

So far in this chapter I have critically discussed a large body of research about children's experiences with sexual content drawn from psychological and mass communication approaches. I have addressed gaps and issues regarding their epistemological approach, methodological choices and findings. In this section I will discuss the audience reception approach, within which I would argue this study fits. I will first present the rise and progress of audience reception studies – an approach developed within the broader field of cultural studies - chronologically and epistemologically, and then I will discuss research on children's use of media in this field more specifically. Then I will discuss the literature on children and sexual and sexualised content and in the end I will attempt to explain how my research potentially fills gaps and contributes to the available body of research within this field.

2.7.1. Audiences in historical perspective

In this section I will provide a brief historical overview of audience reception studies, highlighting the differences between critical reception studies and behaviourist paradigms such as that of 'media effects'. Media audience research goes back to the 1920s and 1930s when the first studies about the influence of the media on people were conducted. The effects and uses and gratifications paradigms as well as the encoding/decoding model have been identified as paradigms that eventually led to the shaping of reception studies as we understand them today. In fact, Hall's (1973/1981) critique of both the effects and the uses and gratifications models of studying audiences and his consequent work on the 'encoding/decoding' model introduced researchers to the concept of the ideologically defined interaction between media production, the text and the audience.

Broadly speaking, research on people's use of media began with the overarching assumption that media 'do something' to people, and even further, that this motivates them to behave in a particular way. Such a behaviourist model of analysis has particularly been applied in relation to sensitive topics such as sexuality, violence, politics, gender and race, under the assumption that some social groups and individuals could be influenced by media messages, especially of this nature. In general, such concerns have been expressed about groups other than elites (political, economic) and the literate or well-educated. Given the time when the first audience studies were conducted, women as a social group were considered as more susceptible to the influence of media; but this concern has also extended to working-class audiences, non-whites, and especially children and young people. Researchers hypothesized a linear relationship between the media message and the audience's response to it. Researchers assumed that there were fairly direct and unmediated effects on masses (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998) and a direct response of the receiver to the message (McQuail 1994, p. 338). Of course, in such a linear relationship the complexity of factors like power, SES, identity, or culture and their influence on people's media use was not considered.

The earliest critiques of the effects paradigm included arguments about media audiences being complex, interacting groups and individuals, who do not simply respond to media messages but

engage with them via meaning-making processes. It was also argued that messages are not straightforward either; they carry particular meanings or symbolisms with which audiences interact and engage. Effects researchers moved towards a more 'sophisticated' kind of research (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, p. 6), attempting to conceptualise media effects into short- or long-term, cumulative or non-cumulative, behavioural, attitudinal or cognitive. Nevertheless, they still claim that the relation between media and audiences can best be conceptualized in terms of one-way effects, and that the most appropriate way to prove these effects is by quantitative empirical research based on experimental studies or the correlation of variables (McLeod et al., 1991). An example of this shift of the paradigm to more sophisticated research is the cultivation analysis model developed in the 1960s by George Gerbner, focusing on the 'relationships between exposure to television messages and audience beliefs and behaviours' (Morgan & Signorelli 1990, p. 15).

Later on, the uses and gratifications approach, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, emerged as an alternative to the stance of effects research. Drawing upon social and psychological notions of audience *needs*, such researchers assume that needs create expectations of the mass media and this leads to diverse media practices which result in need *gratifications*, of which some may be unintended (Katz et al 1974, p.20). The audience is seen here as active and researchers rely on respondents reporting accurately both on their needs and on their judgments about media use (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). However, this approach has also been criticized as fairly inadequate to approach the volatility, diversity and complexity of the audience-media relationship: according to Elliot (1974), for example, uses and gratifications research focuses on people's individual mental state, its empiricist nature lacks a framing of social theory and consequently there is not an acknowledgement of media use as a social process.

Through a critical approach to both effects and uses and gratifications models, Stuart Hall conceptualized the shift from what he called 'behaviourist' approaches to a more critical analysis of media audiences. He outlined an ideologically defined model of the relationship between the audience, the text and its production, known as the encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1973/1981). Hall stressed the need for audience researchers to acknowledge broader social factors such as economic processes, class structures and power relations. One of his basic assumptions is that if

media are representing and not reflecting reality, then media carry and create meanings (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998); yet media messages are polysemic, operating as spaces where struggles over meaning take place. From a Marxist perspective, Hall argues that media messages are encoded by powerful institutions with particular dominant – or 'preferred'- meanings, but they are decoded by audiences in diverse ways. Decoding may involve the acceptance or incorporation of messages, but also negotiation or resistance to messages; and it is this shift in the approach to audiences that leads to what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) call the incorporation/resistance paradigm (or IRP).

Essentially, the incorporation/resistance paradigm examines the extent to which audiences engage with or resist the dominant ideology via their media practices. As Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998, p. 15) put it, the focus is more on the debate between the two, rather than on 'the endorsement of one of them'. Studies using the IRP model are based on the assumption of the 'active audience', and researchers pay attention to the complexity of the identity formation process of audiences in the process of meaning making. However, subsequent critics have pointed out that there is a risk of assuming that an active audience is completely in control of media messages and neglecting the fact that texts are also framed or at least encoded with some sort of meaning.

Morley's (1980) study of the *Nationwide* audience – a representative study in this paradigm - considers audience responses to the *Nationwide* programme through an examination of the variable of class. Morley shows the complexity of people's responses to media messages by suggesting that different social groups position themselves towards the programme either in opposition, in negotiation or in accordance with the hegemonic framing of the content, in relation to their class. However, this is not a linear process; their position depends on a range of socio-economic, political, cultural and social factors that define their lives, and is also determined by variables like age, gender and ethnicity. Power is thus embedded in Morley's argumentation, and is intrinsic within the IRP.

In principle, the IRP balances between two extreme positions, that of the Dominant Audience and the Dominant Text. In the first case, the audience is in control of the text, engaging critically

with it and free to negotiate or reject it; while in the second, the audience is less active, almost bound to accept the preferred, hegemonic meaning encoded in the text. Most researchers, like Livingstone (1990), adopt a middle ground position, arguing that the interaction between the audience and the text is 'a site of negotiation between *two* semi-powerful sources' (1990, p. 23); while Fiske (1989) suggests that it is audiences who make popular culture, but always within the constraint of social forces and of the text itself. This process of negotiation is apparent in several of the early key texts of audience reception studies. For example, Willis' (1990) study of young people's use of media focuses on identity formation as a result of their symbolic cultural work; Radway (1984) argues that in women's reading of romance, identification works both at the level of resistance and of incorporation, and at the intersection between fantasy and reality; while Buckingham (1987) explores audiences' critical reading and engagement with the text of the soap opera *EastEnders*. Despite the differences between them, the binary of incorporation/resistance – in a more or less strict sense – continues to exist in all these studies.

Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) point to the inability of the IRP model to adjust to the real social changes that led to changes in audiences, to their becoming much more skilled, and to the increasing diversification of their responses towards media content (1998, p. 33). They also point to its inability to relate to a strong social theory of hegemony because of its reliance on mostly small-scale empirical studies; and to its one-way approach to power as oppressive. Instead, they suggest an alternative paradigm, which they call Spectacle/Performance, based upon the acknowledgement of what they term the diffused audience, which implies that people are constantly members of different audiences, and this is a constitutive process of everyday life (1998, p. 69). Becoming part of an audience is both a public and private process, and takes place within what Kershaw (1994, p.46) terms 'a performative society', implying that performance in the context of contemporary everyday media use 'embraces a much wider range of human behaviours' that are the result of the mediated provision of ever more resources for everyday performance (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, p. 74).

Abercrombie & Longhurst suggest that this model can explain sociologically the complex interactions in everyday life between different audience forms (1998, p. 160). To achieve this empirically, the authors suggest that researchers should apply both quantitative and qualitative

(ethnographic) methodologies, so as to grasp people's practices of media use in the everyday context in the most effective way. Identity is also a key concept in this approach, in the sense that the complex interactions of the diffused audience play a role in the construction of contemporary identities (ibid, p. 171). Alongside identity, the very nature of 'audiencing' - in the sense of being included in or excluded from an audience - is also important to this paradigm, especially when it comes to the ways people position themselves towards particular cultural products.

In this first section I have briefly sketched the historical progress of audience reception studies, based on particular – primarily epistemologically defined - paradigms. In what follows, I will provide an outline of core studies about children and the media within this field.

2.7.2. Children and the media in audience reception studies

The study of childhood within audience reception studies, and cultural studies more broadly, is rather recent. Although the interest in how people process media messages has long been explored within cultural studies, children as a distinct media audience for investigation have been relatively neglected (Buckingham, 2008a) – although there is a body of work on youth culture by key scholars such as Hall (1975 with Jefferson), Willis (1990) and McRobbie (1991).

Work on children's use of media within reception studies has largely followed the ontological and epistemological approach of cultural studies more broadly. In the same way as audience researchers did in their work with adult groups, those working with children as audiences have challenged dominant approaches that tend to regard media as one of the perils of childhood in today's society. Reception researchers have extensively critiqued mainstream psychological approaches that neglect the agency of marginalized social groups like children, and their 'one-way influence' methodology and epistemological stance (Bragg & Buckingham, 2002). They have also challenged the normative narratives of childhood appearing in these studies. Such critiques can be found in several scholars' work, including Buckingham (e.g. 1993a; 2004 with Bragg), Barker & Petley (1997/2005) and Livingstone (e.g. 2009; 2001 with Bovill). To a certain extent my critique of the dominant paradigms in researching childhood and sexuality (above),

draws upon those researchers' work, although it is much more focused on children's encounters with sexual content.

Overall, researchers within cultural studies 'seek to understand children's media practices in their own terms and from their own perspectives, rather than comparing them with those of adults' (Buckingham 2008a, p. 221). Indeed, studies that are representative examples of this paradigm typically focus on children's own accounts gathered using qualitative and narrative methods, such as interviews or scrap books and diaries (e.g. Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002; Fleming, 2008). In terms of their theoretical perspective, most studies draw upon social constructionism, the sociology of childhood, social psychology and poststructuralist theory; and this combination of different approaches creates a fluid epistemological platform upon which overarching assumptions about childhood are explored and interrogated.

This perspective differs from purely behaviourist, cognitivist or attitudinal approaches partly in its emphasis on audiences' agency and its use of methodologies that allow audiences' own accounts of meaning-making to be heard. However, it also seeks to develop a socially contextualized analysis of media interpretation and use, following epistemological paradigms like social constructionism, discursive psychology, feminist research and poststructuralism, which are largely dependent upon the assumption that people's everyday practices and lived experiences should be seen as forms of social practice.

One of the earliest studies using this approach was Hodge and Tripp's *Children and Television* (1986), which used a semiotic approach to analyzing children's perceptions of television as well as children's programming as text, focussing particularly on the dynamic construction of meaning in children's talk. Buckingham's studies of children's talk about television (e.g. 1993a; 1996; 2004 with Bragg) have also engaged with children's critical reading of media messages in the process of meaning making: he particularly focuses on practices of literacy, children's work on the self and the self-regulatory processes that take place in relating experiences in the media to children's lived experiences. Furthermore, context-based studies represent a more 'ethnographic' approach to the topic (Buckingham, 2008a): the contexts of family/home (e.g.

Richards, 1993; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002), school (e.g. Bragg, 2000), and peer group (Sefton-Green, 1998) and their influence on children's media use have also been of particular interest to researchers. Finally, a more critical perspective on the extent to which children's agency is fully and actively asserted in using the media, has appeared in works like that of Tobin (2004), where there is an acknowledgement and consideration of the overall process of meaning-making which involves a dynamic between the producer, the audience and the text itself.

Through the discussion so far, I attempted to provide a brief overview of the paradigm within which my own study is located. Research about children and the media within cultural studies derives from particular assumptions about childhood, employs methodological strategies usually of a qualitative nature that allow researchers to work on children's own accounts, and explores the ethical, social, cultural and ideological dimensions of children's media practices. To this end, my own study embraces key elements of this paradigm that will be addressed more explicitly in the following chapters.

In the following section I consider different kinds of research about childhood, media and sexuality and discuss in more detail three sample studies.

2.7.3. Children and sexuality within audience reception research

Having briefly reviewed the field of audience reception studies historically and in relation to children as audiences I will now move to a more detailed discussion of representative studies about young people and sexuality, and will then explain how my study contributes to this body of research. The study of young people and sexuality within this perspective could be classified in three categories: a) young people's sexualisation; b) young people's experiences with mainstream content featuring sex, love and romance; and c) young people's experiences with pornography. In what follows, I discuss these three categories separately and provide a more detailed account of Clare Bale's (2012) study about young people's perceptions of the impact of sexualized media on their sexual health, David Buckingham's & Sara Bragg's (2004) study about children's responses to mainstream representations of sex, love and romance, and Lena

Berg's (2007) analysis of young girls' ambivalent attitudes towards pornography. Through a discussion of reception studies in general, and of these three sample studies, I intend to situate my own study within the field.

2.7.3.1. Young people's sexualisation

Alongside the debate about children's experiences with sexual content, there has been an increasing interest in children's position within a broader sexualized or what some call 'pornified' culture (e.g. Paul, 2005; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). Most of the debate concerns worries about the impact of sexualized culture and the effects of commercial marketing of sexualized products on children (Bragg et al, 2011). Following broader public concerns and in response to political calls, much of the published research derives from a psychological perspective and is built on assumptions about the negative impact that sexualized products have on children's development and on their attitudes and behaviour towards sexuality.

The political context of this work has largely been set by four reports, coming from the US, Australia and the UK, which have been published in the last few years. In 2006, the Australia Institute produced a report entitled 'Corporate Paedophilia' (Rush & LaNauze, 2006), addressing the topic of children's sexualisation at a public policy level. The American Psychological Association subsequently published a report on children's sexualisation (American Psychological Association, 2007) which provides a summary of psychological studies, claiming to offer evidence about the negative effects of sexualized culture on girls. Following these two publications the UK government commissioned celebrity psychologist Linda Papadopoulos (2010) to conduct a review of evidence about young girls' sexualisation in the UK. Finally, the most recent Bailey review (2011) reported on the commercialization and sexualisation of childhood, with the focus on children as consumers of sexualized products, on the definition of particular products as sexualized/sexualizing and on parental views on the matter. These reports, alongside political and public campaigns and initiatives seeking to protect children from the sexualized nature of society, have intensified alarmist discourses about the perils of childhood within a society that is seen by some to be increasingly deprived of morality.

These reports, public campaigns and policy initiatives, and the research on which they are based, have received extensive critique by scholars within cultural studies. For example, Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith (2011), Clare Bale (2010, 2011), David Buckingham and Sara Bragg with their colleagues (2009), Liesbet van Zoonen and Linda Duits (2011) and Danielle Egan (2013) have conceptualized the topic from different perspectives. Attwood and Smith (2011) point to the need for a more thorough examination of young people's sexual cultures within this increasingly heated debate about the sexualisation of culture. Bale (2011; 2012) has rigorously approached young people's perceptions of the impact of sexualized products on their sexual health. Buckingham and Bragg and their colleagues (Buckingham et al, 2009) have approached the relationship between discourses about children's sexualisation the marketization of childhood. Van Zoonen & Duits' (2011) account draws upon feminist analysis, while Egan (2013; 2008 with Hawkes) builds upon a historical account of sexualisation to provide a post-structuralist, feminist investigation of the issue. Jackson and Westrupp (2010) examine pre-teen girls' responses to sexual information provided in teen magazines, focusing on girls' assertions of literacy and agency in talk about sexuality. All these researchers have identified a number of problems with mainstream research on children's sexualisation and the development of the public and policy debate on the matter.

Some of the main limitations of dominant discussions about sexualisation identified here concern problems with the definition of the term, and the predominant focus of the discussion on girls and the absence of boys from the agenda (Buckingham et al., 2009). Other issues concern the underlying moral assumptions about sexualisation's impact on young people's sexual health, and the lack of research on the wider social and cultural context of sexuality (Bale, 2012). Furthermore, there is a critique of an 'older' radical feminist approach to the topic – also regenerated in policy discourses - as one that misconstrues girls' agency to engage freely and critically with sexuality or sexualized culture (van Zoonen & Duits, 2011). In principle, as Buckingham (2011) argues, concerns about 'sexualization' reflect wider concerns about the blurring of boundaries between children and adults. In this sense, most of the discussion dominating the agenda so far fails to acknowledge children's active and critical engagement with what is termed a sexualized culture, or their right to engage with sexuality and position themselves as social and cultural agents.

Clare Bale's (2011; 2012) study of young people's perceptions of the impact of sexualized media on their sexual health is in my view a representative example of empirical research in audience reception studies, engaging critically with the policy, public and academic debate around sexualisation. I have chosen to discuss this study because – as the author argues - it is 'situated at the intersection between public health, and media and cultural studies' (2010, p. 304) and provides a rigorous account of how young people's sexual agency is neglected – or at best negatively framed - in the public and academic agenda. This is a common space between Bale's and my study, as we both pay particular attention to how young people's sexual agency is neglected in the public agenda but actively asserted in our participants' accounts. However, my study differs in that it focuses specifically on experiences with mediated sexual representations and with what is termed 'pornography', rather than with products or material that are characterized as sexualized/sexualizing.

Bale's study was conducted with 22 young people aged 16-19 years old, attending a further education college in an area of high deprivation and with high teenage pregnancy levels (Bale 2011, p. 305). In this respect her sample is quite specific and fairly homogenous both in terms of class and in terms of the assumptions about young people's relationship and understanding of sexual health. Her findings draw upon in-depth interviews that have been analysed thematically in relation to three topics: what issues participants prioritise in talking about media and sexuality, how they engage with media, and their perceptions of media effects. Within these three categories she argues that young people engage actively with different forms of media and consider them critically when it comes to their own lifestyle choices. She also argues that her participants deny that the media have effects upon themselves, but assume or acknowledge their effects on others, usually younger people. Their experiences of such material appear, according to her argument, to be both accidental and intentional, and happen for a number of reasons (2011, p. 178) - although, as the author suggests, there is a thin line between how participants talk about unwanted or wanted material. In this context, accidental experiences included 'spam' emails and pop-ups, sexual images appearing on Internet searches, Facebook or other social networking platforms or even in magazines (ibid, p.105). On the other hand, intentional experiences have been the result of curiosity to see sexual content, learn about sex or get to know

about sexually related information, at least initially as a rite of passage (ibid, p.107).   Finally, what is new about Bale's study is her account of how young people talk about their sexual activity in relation to what is heteronormative, normal and normalized, and of the self-regulatory ways in which they seek to protect themselves in their relationships (ibid).

Bale points to inconsistencies between current policy and public discourses in the UK (that are seen to constrict young people's sexual agency) and the World Health Organization's working definition of sexual health. She argues that these inconsistencies have implications for sex educators, health practitioners and policy makers (Bale 2011, p. 304). On these grounds, her suggestion is that the relationship between young people's sexual health and sexualized culture should be 'considered within a pleasure and rights based definition of sexual health' (ibid). She also challenges the view of children as a distinct social group that is susceptible to risk from engaging 'with risky lifestyle choices' (Bale 2012, p.54) and therefore at risk of being influenced by sexualisation - a view which appears in both public health literature and the sociology of childhood.

Her empirical research is conceptualized within a 'broadly constructivist interpretive paradigm' (2012, p. 61) acknowledging young people's multiple constructions of reality and equal projections of sexual subjectivities. Theoretically, she begins with a rigorous review of the existing literature in public health research on the impact of media on young people's sexual health. After identifying problems and limitations in research and public policy she moves into explaining how young people's perceptions of sexualized culture in relation to their sexual health are more effectively contextualized within a socio-cultural approach to sexuality.

In the course of her study, she raises questions about the meaning of the concepts of childhood and of sexualized media; about the role of the context in understanding sexualized media, and associated notions of appropriateness and inappropriateness; and about researchers' definitions of terms like promiscuity, and their approach to the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. In each of these areas, she identifies a need for more rigorously conceptualised research on children's sexuality. Such questions about adults' understanding of childhood, young people's understanding of sexuality and the framing of the wider debate are ones I will also be

considering in my study, albeit from a different angle and methodological perspective. My study differs significantly, first regarding the focus of study, which is representations of sexual activity (and primarily what is termed 'pornographic'), but also in terms of the sample (I interviewed young people aged 18-22) and the analytical process (I chose to examine participants' responses mainly at the level of the individual, but also at the level of the group).

In what follows I consider the second category of audience research on children and sexuality, one that examines young people's relationship to mainstream representations of love, sex and romance.

2.7.3.2. Young people's experiences with mainstream representations of sex, love and romance

There is a body of research within cultural studies focusing on young people's responses to mainstream representations of sexuality, primarily on TV and other mainstream media. In general, there is little attention to pornography specifically within these studies. Through these relatively early works, audience reception researchers have attempted to respond primarily to the effects tradition, and throw light on unseen or neglected areas of people's negotiations with sexuality in the media in terms of identity, subjectivity and self-work. Among other questions, researchers have been interested in how young people interpret representations of sexuality on TV or mainstream media in the course of shaping their sexual identities, how they construct or position themselves in relation to such representations, and finally, how they make sense of their own lives through engaging with such content (Bragg & Buckingham, 2002). In this respect, both audience researchers and psychologists who have turned to a more constructivist approach to young people's use of the media, have argued that audiences produce meanings from their experiences and are not passive victims of media messages (e.g. Arnett et al., 1995).

As it will become evident from the following discussion my study shares many questions and assumptions with this body of research and in some cases I employed similar methodological and analytical techniques. However, what is different in my study is that the sexual content under

consideration is mostly what other researchers would term sexually explicit or pornographic; and as such, it is rather different from more mainstream sexual representations appearing on TV.

Such studies have mostly been conducted in the Anglophone world between 1990 and 2004. With the broader diffusion of the internet, there has subsequently been a shift of attention towards children's online experiences with sexual content (usually pornography and sexting) because of the greater availability of such content, and its greater explicitness. Some researchers represent a social-psychological paradigm, for example, Thompson, Walsh-Childers and Brown (1993) who look at late adolescents' understandings of sexuality in Madonna's music videos. The researchers examine variables like race and gender, and argue that young people think and talk about sexuality in the media in deeper and more diverse ways than tends to be suggested in mainstream psychological research. From another, more ethnographic perspective, Brown, White and Nickopoulou (1993) look at 11-15 years-old girls' use of sexual content in mainstream media in the US and through in-depth interviews and observations of the girls' bedrooms attempt to understand more fully how girls interpret and engage with mediated sexuality; while Steele (1999) also explores teenagers' media use in relation to their emerging sexuality, using a set of qualitative methodological tools to explore teenagers' identity work regarding their sexual selves in engaging with media use. Finally, also from a social-psychological perspective, Sørensen (2007) explores young boys' perceptions about heterosexuality and homosexuality in responses to representations of male nudity. His aim is to understand how masculinities and femininities are understood and represented in contemporary youth culture.

There is, however, a parallel body of work that is more representative of audience reception studies. In his work about how boys talk about popular television, Buckingham (1993a) explores the self-regulatory practices of masculinity in the peer group when discussions about romance and sexuality in less 'masculine' programmes or genres occur. Kehily (1999) examines young people's (14-15) interpretations of sexuality- related content in teen magazines, and suggests how youngsters' literacy in this respect might more effectively inform sexuality education curricula.

The most substantial study here, however, is Buckingham & Bragg's (2004) work on young

people's reading of mainstream representations of sex, love and romance. I want to elaborate in more detail upon their assumptions, methodology and findings and explain how I draw upon them in my own study, but also how my own study differs. To begin with, the researchers start from the assumption that the media themselves offer diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings, and should not be seen merely as vehicles of 'messages' that are either 'good' or 'bad' (Buckingham & Bragg 2004, p. 15). They also assume that through the use of media, young people form and shift between identities, and that identity formation itself is a fluid –'under construction'- process. Finally, they argue that young people engage actively and critically with media, and in this process they make judgments and statements about themselves and others (ibid, p. 12). Their overall approach to the topic is thus clearly situated within qualitative research on media audiences (Buckingham, 2000). However, their analytical approach is also influenced by social constructionism, discursive psychology and 'psychoanalytically informed' theory (e.g. Butler) (Buckingham & Bragg 2004, p. 13). In this respect, the study borrows from different perspectives to explore the complex ways in which young people engage with issues at the intersection of the public and private.

This combination of different epistemological approaches inevitably results in different methodological choices too, and for this reason the researchers mainly conducted interviews and focus groups, and asked participants to write personal 'diaries'. They also surveyed a sample of almost 800 young people in the UK, aged 9-17. Their sample for the qualitative part of the study consisted of 120 young people and 70 parents (ibid, p. 17). This methodological decision allowed them to explore both the levels of the individual and the collective (peer group), and to look in detail at participants' personal expressions. Parents' perceptions seemed to work more as a contextual factor within the study and for this reason I will focus on their findings about children.

Among other things, Buckingham and Bragg looked at key issues regarding the relationship between audiences, media texts and the production process; for instance their responses to bodies in sexual representations (e.g. pin ups, advertising, music videos), and to sexuality issues as presented in talk shows, or magazines' problem pages - which the researchers term 'confessional genres' (ibid, p. 128) - and as presented in television drama. Last but not least, they focus in

more detail on the particular work on the self that participants do in talking about sexuality in the media.

In exploring these issues, the researchers reach a set of concluding findings that they use to make recommendations oriented towards the policy and sexuality education agendas. Among the first findings concern the gendered ways in which boys and girls respond to sexual content in mainstream media, but also the role of the context (e.g. family) in mediating the influence of the media (ibid, p. 241). They also suggest that there is a need to acknowledge that children encounter a range of different forms of sexual content in the media, which are diverse in nature and format (ibid, p. 237). Young people are seen to consider media critically: they acknowledge them as a valuable source of information about sexuality, but at the same time they filter and critically engage with what they hear, see, or read. Young people are seen to be literate in terms of their understanding of media production as well as media regulation, and they make their own moral judgments in interpreting and engaging with what they watch. Finally, Buckingham and Bragg suggest that sexual connotations are not necessarily understood by young children, and that children and adults do not necessarily interpret sexual meanings in the same ways (ibid, p. 240).

As mentioned earlier, my own study shares some common space with Buckingham & Bragg's, particularly when it comes to assumptions, epistemology and (to some extent) methodology. However, it differs substantially in terms of the sample (I recruited young adults 18-22 talking retrospectively about childhood), the analytical process (I employed a threefold analytical process to data gathered with only one method) and most importantly the focus of the study. I explore young people's understanding of any kind of explicit sexual representation, irrespective of the medium in which it appears. Although I term such material 'sexual content', my study explores content that would be characterized by most readers as pornographic or explicit.

In what follows I discuss the available reception studies literature on young people's experiences with pornography and explore another representative study of this kind in more detail.

2.7.3.3.Young people's encounters with pornography

This third section discusses the few qualitative studies available on young people's encounters with pornography. I consider the studies that are available on the topic, commenting on their epistemology and methodology, assumptions and findings. After a brief overview of the field I discuss one of these in more detail, exploring its epistemology, methodology, initial assumptions and findings. In the course of the discussion I also explain the grounds my own study shares with these studies but more significantly, how it is different from them.

The debate about young people and pornography is also part of the wider debate about childhood sexuality sketched above and a topic that is attracting growing academic, policy and public concern. I have already mapped the public debate in the UK and also discussed explicitly the dominant academic agenda on the topic. I have also commented on the alliance between mainstream researchers and policy makers, and will elaborate on this issue further in Chapter 6.

The studies that I discuss in the following paragraphs draw upon a number of perspectives, primarily feminist, social psychological and post-structuralist. The accounts discussed here derive primarily from a constructionist approach to young people's interpretations of pornography; some are small-scale studies, while others discuss qualitative data gathered within large-scale quantitative surveys. Much of the research available – also reviewed in this section - comes from the Scandinavian countries and is not available in English, and in some cases has not even been published. Therefore, I will here discuss research available in English – mainly as published in an edited volume about youth, gender and pornography in the Scandinavian context (Knudsen, Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2007).

All these studies differ from mainstream research in that they contextualise their findings within particular critical approaches, and offer more detailed accounts of the discursive nature of young people's talk. Issues like identity, gender performance and positioning, but also concepts of heteronormativity, normality and appropriateness are crucial to their analyses - or are implied and demand further contextualisation. Furthermore, in all studies but one, researchers have used ethnographic methods. While the aforementioned studies of Bale and Buckingham & Bragg also

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discuss some data about children's encounters with pornography, the focus here is on studies that focus primarily on pornography, even if their data are extracted from bigger projects.

Allen (2006) conducted a large-scale survey about young people aged 16-19 and sex education in Australia. Her data included some open ended questions, which boys answered with statements concerning - among other things - the inclusion of pornography in sex education classes. Drawing upon a feminist perspective – particularly upon Butler's and Connell's work on gender performance - she discusses how young boys construct their male/masculine identities in considering the matter of including pornography or even seminars from porn actors in sex education. Mulholland (2013) conducted research with young people aged 13-16 in South Australia, examining their negotiations of 'pornification' discourses through discussion-based activities (2013, p.15). Mulholland draws mainly upon a constructionist perspective, and explores how young people engage with these discourses, through their understanding and engagement with key terms such as the normal, the perverse and the illicit.

As aforementioned, there is a range of work within a Scandinavian context, both quantitative and qualitative. Given the more liberal stance of Scandinavian culture towards sexuality, this research balances between the effects tradition and more constructionist approaches without necessarily taking a clear position on effects or the agency of young people in using pornography. For example, Månsson & Löfgren-Mårtenson (2007) argue that their increasing exposure to pornography requires young people's reflexivity and strategic positioning (2007, p. 242). This in part, might be implying a concern about the harmful nature of young people's encounters with sexual content; yet the researchers recognise the complexity of children's experiences and their negotiations of them, and consider how knowledge about real life sex and its representation in the media could be incorporated in sex education classes in order to increase their effectiveness (see also Graugaard & Roien, 2007). Sørensen (2007) conducted a single-gender study, examining 15-16 year-old middle class boys' discourses about heterosexuality in encounters with semi-nude male bodies. He draws upon Butler's (1990) approach to gender performativity to examine how young boys interpret the representation and function of male bodies in pornography and how they position themselves within a context of dominant heteronormativity (where discourses about femininity are also included).

Månsson & Löfgren-Mårtenson (2007, p. 241) conducted interviews and focus groups with young people aged 14-20 in Sweden, aiming to 'listen' alternatively for differences and similarities between girls' talk and boys' talk when it comes to experiences with pornography. The researchers draw upon mainstream sociological accounts of sexuality and desire (Bauman, 2003) and of gender and sexuality (Kimmel, 2005) in their approach to data. Their main focus is on gendered sexual scripts and the examination of differences in boys' and girls' discourses about the sexual, sex and the pornographic, and the social norms upon which these are dependent (to do with appropriateness, normality, intimacy, love).

Nigård (2007) conducted a qualitative study with young men aged 18-25 in Sweden, focusing on attitudes towards and interpretations of using pornography. Deriving from a feminist perspective, Nigård attempts to explain her participants' responses and interpretations by engaging critically with the feminist argumentation about resistance and acceptance of attitudes to do with sexuality. She then turns to constructionist and poststructuralist sociological accounts, such as work by Foucault, Giddens and Bauman, to explain her findings, especially those concerning the taboo nature of pornography, shame in using such content and the binary between relationship and intimacy vs. sexual arousal.

The study I wish to consider in more detail here is based on Swedish research by Berg (2007), who interviewed 15 year-old girls, seeking to examine their negotiations of pornography within an ethical context. Berg draws upon social constructionism to consider the ethical and cultural dimensions of girls' accounts of their bodily reactions to pornography, and the ways in which girls discursively define the balance between real life sex and arousal from pornography. Berg's main interest is in how these teenage girls create meaning from pornography, especially in relation to bodily reactions. She starts from the assumption that bodily reactions are important because pornography's overall purpose is to get the viewer sexually aroused (Berg, 1997) and that this vicarious arousal 'can be understood as a phenomenon closely connected to bodily practice' (Berg 2007, p. 294). She considers similarities and differences between the girls' accounts of sexual descriptions in pornography and 'their own expectations, conceptions and experiences of sexual practice' (ibid). In this sense, there is an interest in how girls discuss the

relation between reality and fiction when it comes to sexuality, and possibly an implicit assumption that researchers should keep in mind that there might be possible effects of pornography on girls' attitudes about sexuality in real life. Nevertheless, Berg acknowledges that girls' conceptualization of pornography is a complex issue, incorporating ambivalent narratives about sexuality on and off screen.

Berg begins her analysis by providing a definition of pornography as 'explicit pictures of naked people performing various sexual acts for the purpose of getting the viewers sexually aroused' (ibid, p. 296) – borrowed from Diamond (1997). However, it is not clear whether she shared this definition with her participants. After a brief discussion of the context of girls' encounters with pornography, she moves to an analysis of girls' positioning as heterosexual and their statements about the cultural and ethical connotations of pornography. In her analysis, there are interesting possibilities to examine the fluidity of identities and how participants shift between the 'respectable' and the 'cool' girl when it comes to sexuality (ibid, p. 299). A concept of idealized girlhood (one that is both aware of mediated sexuality, but also in favour of romance and intimacy within a relationship) is one that is implicitly sketched but not explored further.

On a second level, Berg compares her findings about how girls position themselves towards pornography with previous research – again within the Scandinavian context (Svedin & Åkerman 2006; Sørensen & Knudsen 2006). She suggests that although pornography is increasingly 'normalized' (the author's term), mostly because of its increased visibility within Scandinavian society and young people's apparent ease with it, the use of such content is still socially unacceptable, and it is exactly this binary that makes young people's interpretations of pornography a complex issue and leads to young girls' ambivalent attitudes towards coping with it (ibid, p. 305). This at the same time is one of her main conclusions, alongside her argument that the relationship between body reactions and 'readings' of pornography 'should be seen as part of a life-long process that intersects with social and psychological processes, which are both sexualized and gendered at the same time' (ibid).

This study appears to have a lot of similarities with my own study, in the sense that my participants also take account of what is or is not socially acceptable, or what is natural or

normal/normalized. Berg adopts a sociological approach to girls' accounts and her analysis is primarily thematic with elements of discourse analysis. She also draws from mainstream research conducted in the Scandinavian countries to consider how her own findings explain or agree with previous research findings about young people's experiences with pornography. However, as I have already mentioned, this study does not go into more detail about girls' discursive strategies in talking about sexual content, the sample is single-gendered and there is a particular focus on discourses of normality and acceptability.

In this section I have reviewed the available studies about young people's encounters with what is generally termed pornographic. The literature on the topic is not extensive and there are a lot of studies that are not accessible in English, or publicly available. These studies mostly derive from constructionist perspectives and acknowledge issues about gender performance, identity construction and subject positioning in young people's experiences. To make their case, researchers employ qualitative methods of research that offer a deeper understanding of their participants' experiences; and focus on rather tight age groups (and usually on a specific social class), which pretty much ensures their sample's homogeneity. Some of them are single-gender studies while others are about both boys and girls. In terms of their analytical methods, researchers have focused on the complexity of young people's engagement with pornography and have examined participants' discursive strategies in negotiating with key concepts surrounding the topic like pornification, normalization, appropriateness, and ethics. Some of them have also touched upon participants' identity building, or implied that the role of the group is significant in how people report about such experiences.

Taking all this into account, my study could certainly be located within this group of studies. However, it also differs in some particular respects. First, for reasons I have explained, I have generally replaced the word 'pornography' with the more neutral and inclusive term 'sexual content'. I believe the term 'pornography' has particular connotations and yet it is also a vague term that only participants themselves can define; and as such, my study does not begin by taking the category for granted, but rather seeks to explore the various ways in which it is defined and used. Second, my sample consists of both girls and boys aged 17-22 talking retrospectively about childhood, which means that in many instances the identity formation

process but also their subject positioning might be assumed to be different from that of younger children. Third, I decided to look at a small sample of participants from three different analytical perspectives (a thematic, a discourse and a narrative one), each of which focuses on different aspects of the act of 'telling sexual stories' (Plummer, 2005). Again, the combination of these analytical approaches allows me to explore the discursive processes that are at stake in talking about sexual content (or indeed constructing categories like 'pornography'), rather than merely identifying how certain discursive patterns (e.g. appropriateness, pornification or sexualisation) appear in my participants' stories.

Before moving on the discuss the detail of my own research, however, I need to explain more about its theoretical underpinnings. This is the focus of the following two chapters, which look respectively at feminist and Foucauldian perspectives.

2.7.4. Conclusion

With this section I have completed the literature review of the field in what concerns children's experiences with sexual content. I reviewed the field of audience reception within cultural studies at the end of this chapter in order to show more clearly how my study fits in this context and how it might contribute further to the existing knowledge. Through a historical and epistemological approach to the existing paradigms and a more detailed discussion of sample studies within the field of children's sexuality I showed why I consider a constructionist approach to the issue more effective than what the effects and mass communication researchers propose. In what follows I discuss the emergence of porn studies, and the feminist perspectives on pornography.

Chapter 3. Feminist perspectives on pornography: anti- and pro-pornography feminists and the emergence of 'porn studies'

3.1. Introduction

Pornography, the political economy of the sex industry and women's sexual agency have been extensively problematised and analysed by feminist thinkers and researchers. As I will argue here, both anti- and pro- pornography feminist analysis and campaigning have also addressed the question of effects; and anti-pornography feminists in particular appear to have used effects research to argue for further legislation against pornography production and the sex industry at large. By contrast, pro-pornography feminists have - to some extent - built their argumentation on a critique of effects research and the theories that inform it (Segal, 1998); and in challenging notions of effects, they argue that women might gain sexual agency in turning pornography into a technology to their benefit, or by building sexual resilience against the image of the objectified female body.

In this chapter I briefly discuss the progress of the feminist movement from the late 18th century to date in order to introduce the key ideas and justify the terms I will use in the thesis when discussing different groups of feminist thinkers (3.1). Next I provide a critical overview of how the pornography debate within second wave feminism developed (3.2). Finally, I discuss the rise of 'porn studies' as a paradigm that problematizes dominant feminist and effects approaches to pornography and prioritises a research focus on audiences and the appearance of diverse forms of sexual culture and sexual politics (3.3).

I will use the terminology suggested by the *Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, that divides the history of feminism into 'first' and 'second' waves and 'postfeminism' (third wave) (Gamble, 2006a). I will also refer to 'anti-pornography' and 'pro-pornography' feminists when talking about the pornography debate within second wave feminism (ibid; Boyle, 2000), while also using the terms 'radical', 'liberal' and 'socialist' feminism as borrowed again from the same source and other key texts (e.g. Somekh & Lewin,

2011; Olesen, 2005). Although one could define these stages chronologically, theoretically or ideologically, I choose to use the ideological because it fits better with the political nature of the pornography debate. In this respect, the term 'radical' is attributed to feminists who have been 'concerned with social criticism rather than with progress or improvement in the position of women in an otherwise more or less unaltered social order' (McRobbie, 2009, p.14). On the other hand, 'liberal' is attributed to feminists who argue for an egalitarian society, realised via social reform in favour of women's equality in status and opportunities with men (Gamble, 2006b, p.239). Finally, 'socialist' is attributed to feminists who approach the issue of women's position within society from a broadly Marxist or socialist perspective, in which the issue of social class is considered alongside patriarchy as a source of oppression (Gamble, 2006b, p. 299). For feminists like Jaggar (1983) and Mitchell (1971) such a perspective on socialism offers the opportunity to develop a unified theory of feminism. Clearly, these are simplified terms: there are several overlaps between these perspectives, and nuances and debates within them. Nevertheless, this broad categorization is generally accepted within the field.

3.2. The historical and political progress of the feminist movement: first and second wave feminism and post-feminism (third wave)

3.2.1. Early and first wave feminism

Feminism can broadly be defined as a movement that seeks to achieve women's social wellbeing and equality between men and women (Hodgson-Wright, 2006). All feminist movements appear to have adapted over time, according to different political and societal transformations, in seeking to continue the 'struggle' towards enhancing women's social position. Early feminism is generally dated back to the late 18th and early 19th century when women started writing and campaigning in favour of the protection of women's property and their civil rights and against male oppression in everyday life (ibid). As such, first wave feminism – the first phase of an established movement - was principally concerned with women's civil rights (the rights to education and employment) and their right to vote (Carbone & Brinig, 1991). The early feminist writers generated the first influential discussions about women's position within society and the

family; while activists succeeded in establishing several 'female' careers (see Walters' (2005) brief discussion about the suffragists and the suffragettes, who played an important role in the progress of the movement (Sanders, 2006)). Issues regarding women's social and political status thus became 'matters of public interest', signifying the official formation of the feminist movement (Sanders, 2006, p.24).

3.2.2. Second wave feminism

Once women had managed to gain civil rights and succeeded in generating legislation to achieve financial and political security, feminism was considered by many to have achieved its goal (Thornham, 2006, p.25). During the late 1960s, and then the 1970s, however, a 'new feminism' appeared, characterised by a more radical feminist consciousness (Rowbotham, 1972 in Thornham ibid, p.33). Building on the achievements of first wave feminism, the second wave is said to have begun with the foundation of NOW in the US in 1966 (Thornham, 2006). Feminist activity during this period focused mostly on 'consciousness-raising' (Koedt, 1973), and attention focused on the political analysis of women's personal experiences, as taking place within the family and marriage. Thornham (2006, p.26) discusses Morgan's argument that the 1968 demonstration against the Miss America Beauty contest was a public challenge to women's social role, as 'unoffending, passive, delicate (but delighted by drudgery) things'. British feminists also demonstrated against the 1970 Miss World competition in London. However, the feminists' attempt to build a political and public agenda required a theoretical framework (Thornham, 2006). The rise of feminist theory beginning in the 1970s (Firestone, 1970; Morgan, 1970; Figes, 1970) was primarily concerned with the cultural construction of femininity. Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/1997) *The Second Sex*, and her analysis of men's claim on the 'self' - leaving women to be constructed as the 'other' - proved, according to Thornham (2006, p.29), very influential for 1970s feminists. Along the way the feminist theoretical movement also considered the relations between gender and other forms of social inequality and oppression. In the US the movement also focused on black women's rights; therefore, race-related issues and the notion of 'sistserhood' were addressed (Hayden et al., 1971). In Europe, by contrast, issues of class have been a more prominent concern (Thornham, 2006).

The emergence of the liberal feminist approach towards the end of the 1970s drew upon a problematisation of de Beauvoir's critique towards women. Theorists like Friedan (1981) wrote about the transition from 'feminine' into 'feminist', signifying the active role of women in fighting for their rights and for social, political and sexual equality. The issue of rape and of 'its cultural equivalent, pornography' (Thornham, 2006, p.32) emerged in the context of a growing ideological conflict between radicals (supporters of the argument that women's oppression could only be overthrown by fundamental social change) and liberals (arguing that women should have equal opportunities with men in the context of existing capitalist societies). These issues were mainly brought to public attention by the radical feminists, requiring liberal feminists to address them in response. The radical arguments about rape and pornography derived from critiques of patriarchy as a 'total ideology'. As this implies, the debate about these issues was always overtly politicised. Debates about pornography have generated a range of political activism, with feminists such as Dworkin and MacKinnon fighting for legislation against pornography through ordinances and policies, as well as forms of 'direct action' such as the Reclaim the Night demonstrations of the 1970s and 1980s. The cohort of feminists that did not belong to the anti-pornography lobby were variously termed anti-censorship, pro-pornography or anti-anti-pornography. In Britain, the terms of the debate thus reflect different, politically defined, ideologies. French feminism followed this paradigm, while also applying a psychoanalytic (Lacanian) approach: from this perspective, differences in sex are embedded in language and culture, manifestations of phallocentricity, the law of the Father, and the 'Symbolic Order' (e.g. Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1982).

Finally, socialist feminism mainly developed in Britain during the early 1970s. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter this strand of feminist thinking draws upon socialist and Marxist perspectives, but these are often combined with elements of radical feminism and psychoanalysis. The issue of class is therefore central to the analysis of the position of women in society (Gamble, 2006b, p. 299). Socialist feminists see women's position within society mainly as an issue of class and as Rowbotham (1973) suggests, what is needed is a broader revolution within language and culture and material structures to approach the issue of women's oppression. For example, thinkers like Delphy and Hartmann draw upon Marxist analyses of capitalism

(focusing on males' exploitation of women's domestic work) to situate patriarchy within materialist relations (Delphy, 1984). According to Wajcman (2007), while radical feminism has focused on women's bodies and sexuality, socialist feminism has been concerned with the machinery of production (2007, p. 290). Although radical feminists have considered the negative impact of technology on women's work, socialist feminists analyse this in terms of the intersection between the capitalist division of labour and sexual divisions: masculinity is seen to be embedded in mechanical production, and technology is therefore seen as a key source of male power (Wajcman, 1991). However, the emergence of 'cyberfeminism' provides a rather more optimistic perspective on the part of feminists like Wajcman (2006, p.11), who argues that the virtuality of the Internet signals the end of the 'embodied basis for sex difference' and establishes a more liberating status for women. Although she acknowledges that labour market is still defined 'by a hierarchical sexual division of IT skills and expertise' (2006, p. 14), she nonetheless suggests that cyberspace facilitates women's projections of innovative subjectivities.

As I have noted, there are some significant overlaps between these perspectives. While the distinction between liberal and radical feminists has been quite starkly defined in some contexts, socialist feminism has been particularly influential in Britain (Thornham, 2006). Three decades ago, Ann Ferguson (1984) suggested that the polarisation between radical and liberal feminists was making it difficult to see sexual activity, consent and pornography within a broader social and political context; and she suggested that socialist feminism might provide a means of moving beyond the contradictions of the two camps and identifying new possible forms of feminist fantasy production. While this study will not pursue these possibilities any further, these different perspectives – and the tensions and contradictions within and between them – continue to provide an essential context for understanding current debates around sexual representation.

3.2.3. Post-feminism (third wave)

Third wave or postfeminism is a strand that revisits traditional feminist concerns while also seeking to shift the feminist agenda towards a stronger focus on the issue of the cultural construction of femininity. Gill (2007) argues that there is still no agreement as to what post-feminism exactly is. To an extent, it describes a new, sexually and socially dynamic, independent woman, albeit developing within what is still, according to some feminist thinkers, a patriarchal society. On the one hand, it is claimed that it has 'challenged academic culture's modernist discourses' (Sarikakis & Tsaliki, 2011, p.110) and 'stalks attempts to move beyond received and unproductive oppositions' (Lumby 2011, p.96). McRobbie's (2009) *Aftermath of Feminism* unpacks how a new iconic female figure is rejecting feminist ideas as old-fashioned - if not threatening - to its celebration of women's social and sexual agency, and how such representations in popular culture are 'the cultural space for post-feminism' (McRobbie, 2009, p.257). Her argument has been influential in defining the grounds of post-feminism and in introducing a new epistemological agenda in feminist research (Gill, 2008a; Gill & Scharff, 2011), although McRobbie is also critical of what she sees as a kind of dilution or diversion of key feminist struggles.

However, there has been a rather polarised and polemical debate about whether post-feminism benefits or damages the movement, and whether it is a continuation of the second wave or a kind of backlash against traditional feminism. Brooks (1997, p.4), for example, argues that post-feminism represents a conceptual shift in feminism 'from debates around equality to a focus on debates about difference', and draws upon postmodernist, poststructuralist and post-colonialist theories - a move that is also apparent in Stacey's (1990) and Alice's (1995) work. Others use post-feminism as the basis for critiques of primarily second wave feminism, arguing that 'old' feminism was an extremist theoretical and activist movement (Denfeld, 1995) prioritising an agenda about 'female victimization at the hands of an all-powerful patriarchal system' (Gamble, 2006b, p.39). Issues like 'sexuality', 'patriarchy' and 'oppression' as used by second wave feminists – whom Barrett (1992) argues are predominantly white and middle class - have been challenged for their monolithic stance towards women.

According to McRobbie, some post-colonialist feminists (Spivak, 1988; Trinh, 1989; Mohanty, 1995), and theorists like Butler (1990) and Haraway (1987), have 'interrogated' the representational claims of second wave feminism (McRobbie, 2004, p.256) and also signified the shift in focus from institutions of power (the disciplinary society) to power embedded in specific discourses. This suggests a connection between 'third wave' or 'post-feminism' and Foucault's work on biopolitics and the Panopticon, discussed in chapter 4. As I shall discuss in the following chapter, Foucault's work has been critically discussed, even rejected by some feminists (Weedon, 1987); while others (Gill, 2003; Harvey & Gill, 2011; Lazar, 2011) have used it as an analytical platform to discuss the power/knowledge relationship that defines the 'agency' of the new sexually, financially and politically independent women. The neoliberal framework within which some of these thinkers locate this new female agency has been also addressed from the Foucauldian perspective of governmentality, as a set of technologies that according to Gill & Scharff (2011, p.8) 'constitute our subjectivities'.

Post-feminist thought also encompasses new discussions about the body. Foucault's significance here is located in his contextualisation of 'discourse', which enables researchers to understand how relations with the body are constructed within a particular socio-historical context (Brooks, 1997). His work on how the modern body and subjectivity have been constructed are significant for feminist work on the performance of gender (Nash, 1994); although it is Butler's approach to gender/sex and the idea of performativity – informed by Foucauldian, Lacanian and Hegelian approaches to subjectivity - that has come to dominate the postfeminist agenda in this respect. 'Gender performativity' is both 'the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning, […] of a gendered essence [in this case], producing that which it posits as outside itself', and a repetitive act, 'which achieves its effects through its naturalisation' (Butler, 1990, p.xiv-xv). In other words, certain authoritative meanings provide existence to gender: they make it either male or female. These social and cultural meanings and processes (e.g. a woman becomes a mother, a woman needs a man to rely on) do not take place once but are repeated in time, within societies and in the individual's life. Nevertheless, Butler's (1990) approach to the social, instead of the biological, nature of gender highlights the discursive plurality of women's lives and implies diversity in issues around 'subjectivity', 'identity' and 'difference'. Butler (1990) draws on Foucault's notion of governmentality in her argument about the performativity of a range of

identities other than the heterosexual; exploring a range of sexual identities helps to expose 'the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence' (1990, p.137).

 In McRobbie's (2004, p.256) discussion of Butler's position, she argues that certain 'cultural forms and interpellations call women into being, produce them as subjects', pointing towards a focus on the problematic 'she' instead of the unproblematic 'we' (ibid). She argues that this indicates the emerging individualistic politics of post-feminism, and it is where she locates the 'undoing' of feminism. Significantly in this context, she points to 'the ironic normalisation of pornography' (2004, p.259), as an aspect of the new post-feminist female figure. However, her work draws on Giddens' (1991) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's work (2002), which does not prioritise the endogenous power within relationships as a driving force of conduct, as Rose (1999) does from a more Foucauldian perspective. According to McRobbie (2009), their approach to 'reflexive modernisation' (Beck et al., 1994) encompassing the dynamics of social change, provides a platform to understand on a social and cultural level the fact that young women are ' 'dis-embedded' from communities where their roles were fixed' (McRobbie, 2009, p.18). Here is then the link with discussions of how social changes 'call women into being', and how their subjectivities are reformulated in different contexts, such as that of neoliberalism (as discussed by authors such as Gill: see below). However, a link with Foucault can be traced in her argument about individuals 'being compelled to be the kind of subject that makes the right choices' (McRobbie, 2004, p.258). As I discuss in chapter 4, governmentality refers to the process whereby individuals are increasingly required to make rational choices in order to ensure their wellbeing (Foucault, 1986). This status implies neither power-free nor power-full relationships; in this respect, McRobbie's approach to the post-feminist paradigm could also be seen from the governmentality perspective, as a reflection of the individual's responsive adaptation to contemporary social and cultural 'apparatuses'.

Neoliberalism can also be seen as an element of the 'reflexive modernization' that McRobbie discusses. Gill draws on this approach and on Butler's idea of performativity and the subject, in arguing that post-feminism discusses the body as a 'property' and a source of identity rather than focusing on social structural or psychological aspects of identity (Gill, 2007, p.6). She explores how notions about the commodification of body and beauty are invoked in representations of the

new iconic young woman, but within a neoliberal – and still patriarchal - context (Gill, 2008b; Kim, 2001). Gill (2008a) and Gill & Scharff (2011) find that neoliberalism has certain commonalities with post-feminism when it comes to how subjects are constructed: both regard rationality and self-regulation as inherent elements of a subject making deliberative choices about itself (Gill, 2008a, p.436). This – the argument goes - works on the level of representation through depictions of women 'as unconstrained and freely choosing' (ibid), for example in popular advertisements. Such representations in popular culture are thought to construct a new subject, 'a new femininity' (ibid, p.p, 438), understood in an individualistic, self-regulatory context. As Sarikakis & Tsaliki (2011, p.111) note, Gill (2008a, p.436) identifies 'an obsessive preoccupation with the body' and with sexuality in seeking to define this new femininity. She also assesses sexualisation as a deliberative choice and points to the new understanding of sexiness that has moved subjectivity from object to subject.

Feminists like Modleski have been sceptical about the term 'post-feminism' as representative of an entire theoretical movement (Modleski, 1991; Whelehan, 1995). Indeed, more than two decades ago, Faludi (1991) argued that the postfeminist critique is merely 'pseudo-intellectual'. However, McRobbie (2004, p.255) challenges the idea that post-feminism is merely an ideological or epistemological backlash against feminism, and suggests the idea of 'double entanglement', in a way that complexifies rather than just condemns post-feminism. She argues that post-feminism positively invokes feminism as something 'to be taken into account' – even as it signifies that once its main objectives are achieved (i.e. equality) it is no longer needed. In this respect, she sees postfeminism as an 'undoing' of feminism and a response to feminism at the same time. Her idea of double entanglement rests on an association between 'neo-conservative values' about gender and sexuality and 'processes of liberalisation of choice and diversity in domestic kinship relations', which she locates in particular political and policy acts (2009, p.12). Her well-known example of Bridget Jones illustrates the double entanglement model, as it represents a financially and sexually independent, well-educated young woman leading a life driven by the aim of finding the iconic male partner to marry. In McRobbie's account, values to do with marriage and proper motherhood have now become the focus for groups with new characteristics (well educated, financially independent and sexually active single women, gay and lesbian people). These reformed groups signal the 'processes of

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liberalisation of choice' and together with traditional ('neo-conservative') values form the double entanglement that she sees at the heart of post-feminism.

It is in the new context of post-feminist thought discussed in this section that we can see the emergence of porn studies (discussed later in this chapter), as a field examining how identities and sexual agency are asserted and how subjectivities are produced and performed in relation to using sexual content. In this respect, my study could also be understood as being located within this specific context, in that it seeks to identify and unpack normative aspects of young people's sexual identities and performed subjectivities. The next section moves on more specficially to the issue of pornography, and further unpacks the key aspects of the pornography debate, its engagement with effects research and the criticisms it has generated.

3.3. Feminism and the pornography debate: the 'sex wars' of the 1980s

3.3.1. The anti- pornography movement

One of the core debates in feminist enquiry has been the conflict between anti- (Dworkin, 2000; Griffin, 1981; Jeffreys, 1990) and pro-pornography feminists and theorists (Rubin, 1993; Carol, 1994) - or what has been coined the 'sex wars' of the 1980s (Smith, 2007a, p.32). The issue here is essentially whether pornography is degrading or liberating for women. The debate developed within the broader political and ideological framework I have briefly sketched above (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995; Hunt, 1993); although the need for some feminists to find a theoretical framework and some evidence to support their campaigning against pornography has also led to an association with very different research traditions and perspectives. Such evidence derives not only from 'personal testimonies by rapists and victims of sexual violence' (Bryson, 1999, p.188), but also from laboratory experiments, and mostly, psychological and sociological research with college students. Such arguments have in turn generated considerable criticism from anti-anti-pornography feminists who critique, for example, the inability of anti-pornography feminists to distinguish reality from fantasy, or to prove causal relationships between sex offences and pornography use. In this respect, revisiting the pornography debates of the 1980s becomes an

interesting platform from which to consider more contemporary concerns and controversies in the field.

The discussions about pornography were initiated by the so-called radical feminists, 'the most militant campaigners against pornography' (Bryson, 1999, p.176). Essentially, according to them, pornography presents women as sexual objects, submissive, and willing to accept rape or rape-like sexual intercourse. Dworkin and MacKinnon are the most well known anti-pornography feminists, whose political activity is clearly located within second wave feminism. For them, the existence of (and indeed the increase in) pornography reflects the continuing lack of wider changes in women's social and professional status: it is an indication of how they are considered as inferior individuals within a patriarchal context, it promotes sexism, eroticises 'subordination and violence', and is the primary cause of women's oppression (Bryson, 1999, p.179). This view was built into a legal definition, thereafter used in their campaigns and in most anti-pornography campaigning. Appearing for the first time in the 1983 Minneapolis Ordinance (cited in Itzin, 1992, p.435-436), this definition seems to have influenced most of the anti-pornography argumentation since that time. It is worth citing in full here:

> Pornography is the <u>graphic sexually explicit</u> subordination of women through <u>pictures</u> and/or <u>words</u> that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects <u>who experience sexual pleasure</u> in being raped; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) <u>women's body parts</u>----including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks----are exhibited such that women <u>are reduced to those parts</u>; or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or (viii) women are presented being <u>penetrated</u> by objects or animals; or (ix) woman are presented in <u>scenarios</u> of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual. <u>The use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women</u> in [the paragraph] above is also pornography (*my emphases*).

Firstly, one might well argue that this account of the way women are presented could also apply to the majority of action movies, thrillers or even dramas. For instance in James Bond films or even series like the American Horror Story, women are depicted pretty much like those described in parts of this definition. Furthermore, the same could be argued for the claim (in the final sentence) that this definition could apply to any human being in this position; in this respect, then, almost any depiction of such activity falls within the above legal framework.

In some respects, this might represent an attempt to define something obvious, yet not easily defined (see Smith, 2007a, p.35 for a critique of Dworkin's approach to pornography as something trans-historical and instantly recognizable). Having said that, this definition clearly reflects broader political arguments, related to the perception of unrealized changes in women's lives after first wave feminism. According to Whelehan (1995, p.4), second wave feminism to a certain extent sought to raise awareness of women's continuing oppression, on the grounds that 'that the system has an inbuilt propensity for institutionalizing gender inequality'. From this perspective, pornography might have been seen merely as a reflection of this status of inequality. Yet it was also a useful platform for anti-porn feminists to establish their struggle (Dworkin, 1988, p.201). Not all radical feminists shared these ideas, and many were more concerned with issues of personal relationships and female sexuality; but as Whelehan (1995, p.156) mentions, 'the anti-pornography lobby became a powerful [and thus, influential] arm of the women's movement'. Over time, however, feminists came to consider this view of female sexuality as simplistic and this led to a broader analysis of female sexual identity, rather than examining it within the 'old patriarchal analysis of feminine 'weakness' ' (p.165).

Going back to the ordinance above, the underlined words seem to draw a generic picture of different kinds of sexual representations: all these elements combined possibly form the basic structure of any sexual representation, rather than pornography specifically. However, these words also point the reader towards the political nature of their argument: women in such representations are subordinated, humiliated, dehumanized and degraded. Such depictions, the argument goes, make women look like whores and as enjoying pain and humiliation. While this is the rationale of the radical feminist argument, it reflects at the same time an influential and

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more widely held discursive framework within which pornography is discussed: the idea that pornography is about showing women in submissive positions, or encouraging men's unrealistic expectations of women in sex, appear as popular discourses in people's accounts of pornography, as I will discuss in my data analysis.

However, this definition also signifies the problematic nature of both mediated and real female sexuality. Once out in public view, pornography (re)presents the abuse of women in sex: this is a reflection of women as lacking any kind of sexual agency, in the same way Foucault (1978) discusses the status of bourgeois women's sexuality. During the 18th and 19th centuries, he argues, female sexuality came to be considered only as a means to reproduction, and therefore any indication of sexual pleasure was considered problematic (a form of hysteria). In this sense, this definition reflects the perception of women as lacking any kind of sexual consciousness, and the implication that it is this that makes them subject to abusive behaviour. Williams summarises the social significance of female a-sexuality as follows: 'the nonsexual woman is the credible, 'good' woman' (Williams, 1989, p.xi). This 'good', asexual woman also appears to be the iconic female figure for some anti-pornography feminists. This binary, which feeds the either/or debate on pornography, seems to contain a fundamental contradiction: for how will a 'good'-iconic female figure be able to preserve her virtue while at the same time resisting the male oppression that has established what a 'good woman' stands for in the first place?

By contrast with the Dworkin-MacKinnon definition, UK and US legislation has focused on defining 'obscenity' rather than 'pornography'. According to the 1973 Miller ruling in the US, 'obscenity is something that appeals to the prurient interest in sex [and] lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value' (MacKinnon, 1984). This definition addresses the aesthetic value and aims of production, pointing to the low cultural quality of 'obscene' products. British legislation has also incorporated the terms 'depraving and corrupting', adding a moral angle to the overall discourse (in the 1959 Obscene Publication Act); while in 1986, another ruling defined indecent material as 'that which an ordinary decent man or woman would find to be shocking, disgusting or revolting' (Merck, 1992). This last definition addresses the emotions that might be caused when experiencing such material; and the interesting point here is the causal link between decency (a moral discourse) and the social emotions that could be triggered by this

material. Yet again, these definitions seem to be inclusive: they are generic definitions that could apply to many types of content that according to certain cultural or moral criteria could be defined as shocking, revolting or corrupting.

So far, it appears that there are certain conceptual alliances embedded in the definitions given, as, according to Hunt (1993), 'the political and the moral were inseparable in the response to pornographic representations of women' (cited in Smith, 2007a, p.33). To this extent, the Dworkin-MacKinnon definition appears to be political with moral implications, while legal definitions appear to draw on moral discourses with a political bearing. However generic all definitions might be, they seem to provide a discursive conceptualization of sexuality (and hence the representation of sexuality) as something inherently problematic, unless contextualized in a particular way. Even so, the problem of definition still remains: and here, then, is where the question 'can art be pornographic?' could also be raised. For example, the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* undoubtedly falls within all the above definitions of sexual content (Dworkin, 1981), most notably within the feminist one, yet many would argue that it fulfills all requirements of a literary masterpiece. As this suggests, representations of sexuality seem to be divided into acceptable and non-acceptable forms of expression, although the boundaries between the two remain blurred.

3.3.2. Critiques of the radical anti-pornography feminists, and the alliance with effects research

Once the case against pornography was established, a whole system of political, cultural and economic dynamics was built around pornography and the sex industry, involving institutions like academia, political parties and commercial companies. The transformation of the porn debate into a political one framed pornography in terms of regulation (Cowie, 1992, p.132; Perse, 2001). Republican governments of the time in the US and the Labour Party in the UK supported legal action advocated by anti-porn feminists and moral conservatives (Wilson, 1992) in an attempt to regulate in favour of 'family values' as well as women's well-being (Wilson, 1992). This kind of feminist activism, along with wider concerns about morality articulated by

the conservative Right and religious lobbies have played a key role in establishing a public agenda and in creating a suitable climate for research funding. In this respect, funded research on how pornography might affect people's views about relationships, marriage and the family and their attitudes and behaviour has proliferated and been employed in several cases in anti-porn feminist campaigning (Hardy, 1998, p.10-13; Boyle, 2000, p.187).

'Liberal' feminists tended to employ more permissive arguments in their discussion of pornography, drawing mainly from John Stuart Mill's (1991) *On Liberty* in arguing that society should not be allowed to restrict individual liberty of expression unless it was deemed harmful to others. Along these lines, Strossen (1996) argued that banning pornography would be a violation of the First Amendment Guarantee of Free Speech. She suggested that feminists should continue discussions of women's sexuality, and work towards the development of a woman's erotica that would confront the dominant images of the female body in pornography. Conversely, Segal (1987) focused on the political economy of the media industry, which is seen to result in the production of content that represents women in a specific way (Bryson, 1999, p.177) and argued that while pornography might be 'distressing' for most women, in that it appears to be 'celebrating sexist and dehumanizing images of women' (1987, p.108, 112), that does not mean that romantic fiction is less dangerous (ibid, p.113). Her position thus is that a woman's representation as a sexual being is inherently problematic. Other researchers like Lorde (1984), though, suggest that pornography should be distinguished from erotica as the latter might involve power, knowledge and joy and not necessarily a dehumanizing or subordinating view of women.

Representatives of more liberal perspectives have also criticized anti-pornography feminists for being racist, not addressing issues of class, and not considering sex workers as a distinct category in the industry (e.g. Segal & McIntosh, 1992). Moreover, the selection and use of some particularly violent pornographic representations that would support the anti-porn case, along with the way they ignored diverse sexual orientations and the right of many women to sadomasochistic sexuality, met serious criticism (Vance, 1992), as did the anti-porn feminists' reluctance to engage - even critically - with any kind of production that was targeted at women or gay men (Gubar, 1987). Other researchers take this position even further, arguing that even the fact that sex is discussed primarily by men with other men, excludes the consideration of sex

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itself from the feminist discussion (Snitow et al., 1983). This argument links to Williams' (1989, p.17) argument that for anti-porn feminists, violence is an inherent element of male heterosexual normativity, turning women who might get pleasure from rape fantasies into 'guilty victims of false consciousness'. This part of the critique, where the denial of women's sexual agency becomes apparent in anti-porn feminist discourse, is the key issue for Williams. Such ideological restrictions might be a reason why binaries such as 'pro/anti' have established such a dominant position – in a way that has made it 'difficult to examine pornography and other representations of sexuality from a different perspective' (Attwood, 2002, p.92).

In her attempt to test the assumption of anti-pornography campaigners that there is a direct link between what is shown, what is said and behaviour, Williams (1989, p.x) ends up arguing that after examining a wide range of pornographic texts, she did not find any profound illustration of women's 'objectification'. However, some anti-porn feminists were keen to use media effects research to support their position about women's abuse in pornography, and push for further legislation. Talking about the 1986 Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, Williams (1989) argues that the interested parties (feminists and regulatory bodies) had different interpretations of the meanings of sexuality and pornography. In this collaboration, the use of effects evidence to argue against pornography appears as a means to a (political) end, rather than an alliance on the base of common ideologies.

As I have already mentioned, the data upon which the anti-porn argumentation developed includes personal testimonies, laboratory experiments, and psychological and sociological research about attitudes towards sexual violence (Segal, 1993, p.6) – with much of the latter having received large amounts of public funding and publicity (Boyle, 2000, p.187). Between the end of 1970s and the early 1990s, research focused on the psychological and behavioural effects of pornography: laboratory experiments led by US researchers which sought to prove the existence of attitudinal and behavioural post-exposure effects on adults (e.g. Donnerstein et al., 1987; Linz, 1989; Allen, et al., 1995; Allen, Emmers et al., 1995) are well documented. In their review on the effects of pornography, Linz & Malamuth (1993) argue that the pornography debate has been largely defined by three approaches, which they term conservative-moralist, liberal and feminist. The proliferation of media and the fragmentation and diversification of

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media audiences subsequently motivated media effects researchers to move into the examination of more specific characteristics of media products, such as depictions of sexualised violence. However, in this case as research about the harmful effects of mainstream pornography has been inconclusive, researchers have turned to the examination of violent depictions to find more fruitful ground for their case. As a result, there has been a turn towards 'pornographic material which does depict violence against women' (Segal, 1993, p.6), however untypical such material may be (Boyle, 2000; Segal, 1993). In this respect too, it would seem that academic research has been feeding the feminist anti-pornography agenda and vice versa (in that feminist analysis has been generating more research about pornography effects).

Nevertheless, critics have argued that the evidence as regards the association between aggression and pornography is not sufficient to justify regulation of pornography. In fact, some thinkers suggest that growing evidence points in the opposite direction (Segal, 1993; Henry, 1988; Boyle, 2005). By contrast, anti-porn feminists argue that effects research shows a causal relationship between pornography and male violence against women (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988); while Linz & Malamuth (1993, p.44) argue that the effect may be primarily at an attitudinal level, and that research should address how porn may promote 'sexually abusive and discriminatory behaviours, rather than limiting its concerns to direct, specific physical harms'. Such an assumption is reflected in the famous slogan 'pornography is the theory, rape is the practice' (Morgan, 1978), incorporating Dworkin's foundational argument that all heterosexual relationships are another form of rape as women never consent in them.

Self-perceived effects of pornography consumption (Paul, 2005; Hald & Malamuth, 2008) have also attracted effects researchers' and anti-porn feminists' interest. Interestingly, a few studies have examined how abused women are affected by pornography (Hinson Hope, 2004) – and this type of study is rare, as studies focusing on women's consumption of pornography are limited. Meanwhile, feminist notions about sexism and objectification – as incorporated in effects research - seem to be still pertinent in current studies of children's experiences with sexual content. This is the case, for example, with Peter & Valkenburg (2007) study on the impact of sexualized media on children's perceptions of women as sex objects, discussed in the previous chapter. Possibly drawing on the desensitization hypothesis (Zilmann, 1986), this study claims

that notions of women as sex objects appear to correlate in different ways to exposure to semi-explicit or explicit sexual content.

To sum up, the issue of pornography was taken up by radical feminists in the context of political debate, with political implications for women's civil rights as well as for media regulation. The feminist anti-censorship argument emerged largely in response to this, in a context where the terms of the debate had already been well established. However, the anti-censorship approach drew attention to questions about women's agency, their rights in negotiating their sexual identities and the complexity and diversity of the uses of pornography. These latter issues came to be acknowledged and addressed in more detail by a new cohort of researchers, from what is now beginning to be called 'porn studies'.

3.4. Porn studies and the pornography debate

3.4.1. A critique of the 'Sex Wars' and the rise of porn studies

Both anti-pornography and pro-pornography feminists and theorists have been criticized (Smith, 2007a; Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995) for merely adding fuel to a monolithic debate around pornography (Myers, 1987). As Smith (2007a, p.47) puts it: 'One side blames sexual representations for the promulgation of sexism and the continuing oppression of women, while the other emphasizes the positive possibilities of those same representations to inspire and contribute to women's increasing freedom to express their sexual desires'. Following Smith's rationale, it appears that pornography both as content and as an industry is seen by default as a patriarchal 'technology' by both sides. The anti-porn side appears to be discussing pornography as a technology of patriarchal society that is used against women's sexual agency, while the pro-porn side appears to be discussing it as a technology of patriarchal society that should nevertheless be appropriated by women to establish their own independent sexual agency.

Attwood (2002, p.91) argues that 'speaking about sex has been the subject of great academic and political enquiry'. Since the 1990s though, attention has moved away from the polarized debates

of the 'sex wars' towards the developing field of porn studies (Williams, 2004). Pornography is here discussed from a range of socio-cultural, post structuralist and psychoanalytical - and occasionally political economy - perspectives, but in a 'less censorious way' (Kirkham & Skeggs, 1996, p.106) – and possibly less polarized way - than was the case within earlier feminist debates.

A key distinction between porn studies and other approaches (most notably that of effects research) is the exploration of the *social construction* of sexuality and of representations of sexuality. Smith (2007a, p.51) notes that 'there is no coherent 'pornography' to be defined, instead we must look to the historical and social locatedness of all particular instances of sexually explicit materials'. Broadly speaking, porn studies is concerned to address the historical and cultural fluidity of the term 'pornography' and its different functions in individuals' sexual cultures and experiences. Having said that, another key distinction is the critical assessment of the focus on risk and harm (Attwood, 2002, p.91; McKee, 2005a, p.3). Researchers within this paradigm position themselves critically towards both the effects approach and the radical feminist argument that pornography has to be understood primarily in terms of what it 'does' to its users. In several instances, as I will shortly discuss, there is work attempting to challenge popular arguments about the negative attitudinal effects of pornography or its objectifying view of women, by revisiting and testing the same hypotheses as mainstream effects studies.

Ultimately, however, researchers in this tradition are more interested in addressing the complexity of how pornography and its use are discursively constructed and of how we engage with it, rather than in providing evidence of positive, rather than negative, effects. For example, Williams, unpacks the ways in which non-heterosexual or non-heteronormative forms of representation, such as gay, lesbian or sadomasochistic representations, come to be perceived as transgressive, and therefore less acceptable than mainstream heterosexual activity (Williams, 1989). She brings together the Freudian and the Foucauldian approaches to sexuality as a field for the exercise of power in her analysis of the cultural connotations of gay homosexual activity as a threat to dominant masculine heterosexuality (Williams, 1989). Her objective is to highlight that engaging with sexual content is probably not so much an issue of gender, as an issue of how sexual agency is discursively asserted and how this has historically and culturally developed.

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Other studies from this perspective draw attention to the diversity of contemporary sexual cultures and how these are reflected in mediated representations. For example, Attwood (2007) analyses new forms of pornography and new sexual taste cultures by cross-comparing an 'alt-porn' site and a 'smart smut' magazine. Paasonen (2010) examines the 'centrality of user-generated content' via amateur and alt porn sites. Maddison (2009) explores 'gonzo' online, one way in which the Internet has mainstreamed hardcore sexual content (gonzo sex is supposed to be one of the most extreme types of content, usually depicting sexual activity including humiliation). Finally, Moorman (2010, p.155) examines the 'diversity of sexual expression in online LGBTQ porn'.

As Attwood (2002, p.93) points out, this new paradigm incorporates, 'many of the theoretical perspectives and preoccupations which have become central within Cultural Studies, particularly in relation to the polysemic nature of cultural texts, the potential fluidity of readings, the status of popular culture, the significance of 'taste' as a form of cultural distinction and the relevance of ethnographic accounts for an understanding of the place of cultural consumption in everyday life'. In this sense, researchers adopt a broader perspective when discussing the texts and audiences of sexual content, one that might also allow a reassessment of the established feminist debates around pornography. This broader contextualization of pornography (Attwood, 2002, p.92) is likely over the longer term to offer further insight into what is referred to as its more 'immediate embodied affects' (a perspective discussed in Williams, 1989; Church Gibson, 2004). Academics within this paradigm thus stress the need for research into the continuously changing nature of pornographic material and its distribution, as well as of its uses within a society where the aestheticization of sex (Attwood, 2005) is evident in many areas of commerce and popular culture (Juffer, 1998). In this respect, porn studies researchers re-examine the textual nature of the pornographic genre, and its meanings, uses and pleasures for users; and they allow us to re-visit key debates about pornography from a more holistic perspective where audiences (defined by sex, gender and class), representations and production interplay in both the private and public spheres (Attwood, 2002, p.93).

Until recently, most research conducted in this field has revolved around pornographic

representation (Williams, 1989; Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2008; Portugues, 2000), although there has also been some work on the political economy of the porn industry (Arnberg, 2008; Attwood, 2005; Neely, 2009). By contrast, research about the uses and audiences of pornography is less well developed (McKee, 2005a; Smith, 2007a; Juffer, 1998). As Williams (1989, p.5) notes, '[s]ince [pornography] does exist, we should be asking what it does for viewers'. In line with this argument, researchers stress the need to examine the use of sexual representations in the broader context of how people explore and develop their sexual, social and cultural identities. This may be particularly pertinent in light of contemporary media developments, not least the rise in online sexual communities, and the fact that some porn seeks 'audiences beyond the straight male market' (Attwood, 2002, p.94). Within a framework of the 'democratization of desire' (McNair, 2002), academics argue for the voices of pornography consumers to be heard (McKee et al., 2008) and seek to explore users' tastes and patterns in using mediated sex in particular socio-cultural contexts. In doing so, they avoid a narrow focus on the sociological, psychological or political implications of this use or the alleged harm of pornography (Attwood, 2007; Smith, 2007a).

For example, McKee, Albury and Lumby (2008; McKee, 2005a,b; 2006a,b; 2007,a,b,c) have studied pornography audiences and production in Australia. Following the same rationale, the ongoing Greek Porn Project (in which I have been involved myself) has attempted to map the field of pornography production and consumption in Greece (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2013a; Chronaki & Tsaliki, 2013). Another large-scale audience study is currently being conducted in the UK by Smith, Attwood and Barker (2012, p.1), again proceeds from the recognition that 'to date the 'silenced voice' has been the users'.

The above projects follow a research path paved by smaller scale qualitative projects with a focus on audience engagement with pornography, which are either informed by porn studies or audience reception approaches; and I will discuss them in more detail below. Their shared objective might be summarized in what Attwood (2002, p.103) describes as the attempt to examine how pornography 'functions within sexual discourse at the level of the individual… [and] the ways in which sex and sexuality are spoken about, seen and experienced in everyday life'. Thus, from an audience reception perspective, Juffer (1998) has conducted an influential

study on the domestication of pornography and its female audiences. Nikunen (2007) studied the responses to pornography of young girls who participate in the Cosmopolitan online forum, employing conversation analysis of girls' discussions. Smith (2007a) examined the use of pornographic material by women; while Wilson-Kovacs (2009, p.148) studied women's accounts of pornography and erotica and their engagement with these genres in the context of 'pleasures and restrictions'. Finally, adopting a feminist social psychology perspective, Ciclitira (2004, p.288) has studied women's responses to pornography, in relation to how they define it, whether its consumption has had any impact on their fantasies, behaviour and self-image. As this implies, porn studies researchers by no means condemn feminism nor deny its conceptual usefulness to the new research agenda. However, as Attwood (2002, p.93) notes, there is an interest in women's sexual pleasures and sexual agency (in line with Williams's argument mentioned above), pointing towards a 'range of feminisms' through which researchers question the monolithic view of the radical anti-pornography position.

To sum up, the shift in pornography research, signified by the rise of porn studies, is characterized by a much more nuanced and contextualized analysis of the complexity of pornography's meanings, uses and pleasures (Williams, 1989; Attwood, 2002). This draws upon cultural studies approaches in the sense that it is interested in exploring the identities produced and performed when experiencing sexual content, the discursive constructions of the texts and the diverse gratifications they might fulfill. This provides a different theoretical platform to understand the power relations enmeshed in the context of the porn experience, especially in terms of the agency of users or audiences (Attwood, 2002). In the following section I briefly discuss the three large-scale projects so far undertaken in this paradigm; I chose to discuss these as they provide a more holistic view of how audiences, texts and production are interrelated. In that respect, although my project is focusing only on a particular audience and does not examine texts or the industry, this discussion will provide a broader explanatory context.

3.4.2. Studying the audiences of pornography

McKee (2005a) argues that pornography audiences are predominantly considered as passive subjects of effects and highlights the need to deal with audiences as 'thinking agents' (2005a, p.3) or meaning-makers, performing and negotiating different sexual identities during their complex engagement with sexual content. Significantly, the three projects I shall discuss here treat pornography as a genre like others (news, soap operas, reality shows), rather than treating pornography audiences as the odd ones out (McKee et al., 2008). In what follows I discuss these projects in terms of their theoretical standpoint and methodology, and explain how my study fits within the same context at the end of the section.

3.4.2.1. The UK Porn Research

The UK Porn Research is a large-scale project that seeks to gather stories of how people use pornography and how they account for it and for the way this contributes to their sexual life. With the project still under way, a theoretical framework and a fully-fledged qualitative analysis is not yet available; nonetheless, all three investigators come from a cultural studies perspective and have already elaborated extensively on the shift in researching pornography (Attwood, 2002; 2013; Smith, 2007a). Methodologically, they have employed a challenging path by distributing an open ended questionnaire via online mailing lists, blogs and websites and managed to collect almost 5500 responses.

70% of the respondents report that they are heterosexual, 3% gay and 1% lesbian, while 7% is bisexual, 6% queer and 3% unsure of their sexual orientation (Smith et al., 2012). Most of the respondents fall between 18-25 and 26-35 years of age, with smaller participation from older age groups. A cross-tabulation between age and responses about the peak period of viewing sexual content, show that those aged 26-35 consider the use of pornography more important than those between 18 and 25. Open-ended questions mostly aim to map different sexual cultures. The responses that came up vary: 'sex keeps you healthy physically and emotionally', 'good sex requires communication with your partner(s)', 'real sex isn't like porn sex', and 'sex works best

when there's feelings, especially love'. In line with these kinds of responses, in Chapters 4 and 8 I will also seek to explore how real and mediated sex are constructed today, and how people construct their identities and position themselves in this respect.

3.4.2.2. The GR Porn Project

In the GR porn project, a three-phase project (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2013a) we investigated audiences' porn practices, criteria for choosing content and characteristics of sexual taste in the consumption of pornography. As researchers, we have positioned our work within the field of porn studies, following a Foucauldian and social constructionist approach to study how sexuality is talked about or performed through discussions of pornography (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2013a).

Thus far, the research suggests that heterosexual males between 17-35 years of age, of higher educational level (tertiary education) are the most extensive users of pornographic content (Chronaki & Tsaliki, 2013). Respondents mostly seem to be using such content when aroused, when they want to masturbate, or when bored. They also seem to choose the content they use on the basis of financial and aesthetic criteria, along with criteria of pleasure (fulfilling fantasies). They mostly seem to prefer heterosexual or lesbian types of sexual content, as well as multi-partner types of activity.

The open-ended questions of the questionnaire, concentrating on the choice of certain sexual practices, favourite scenarios or fantasies, and other issues, provide some qualitative insights (Chronaki & Tsaliki, 2013). We argue that audience choices do not necessarily reflect a problematic sexual culture; instead, they are seen as an illustration of the complexity of sexual taste and of changing sexual culture(s). Here again, the initial findings of the research point to the paramount need for further unpacking of the discursive construction of sex and the progressive pluralisation of desire.

3.4.2.3. The Australian Porn Research

McKee, Albury and Lumby conducted a project with a sample of 1023 participants (McKee et al., 2008), combining qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to map the production, consumption and representation of pornography in Australia. For reasons of economy, I am focusing here on the project findings on audiences, which largely reflect the paradigmatic shift described above.

The Australian report shows that the average participant profile does not fit the stereotype of the lonely middle aged male user (McKee et al., 2008, p.24-25); on the contrary, the sample seems to also include well-educated individuals, with well-established professional, social and sexual lives, and a wide range of political ideas and religious beliefs. One of their major findings is that both men and women use sexual content for different purposes, ranging from spicing up their sexual lives, masturbation, or learning more about sex. Participants also commented on the media they use to access porn, and their reasons for buying and using such material (ibid, p.33), as well as their sexual taste in pornographic content (ibid, p.37). Critically assessing discussions about effects both in academic and public agendas, McKee et al. (2008) provide an analysis of issues of concern for consumers using an anthropological and exegetical approach (McKee, 2005a, p.10). Consumers seem to reflect on the expectations pornography might create; and there are contradictory accounts concerning the popular argument about pornography leading to sex offences.

On the other hand, consumers also comment on pornography's educational role, and its positive effect on the way they negotiate their sexual identity (2007a). Analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data from the project, McKee reports that more respondents report positive rather than negative effects of pornography (2007a, p.5), and calls for more research in this area. Of course, the fact that McKee asks his respondents about self-reported effects does not make him an effects researcher. In fact he is critically engaging with the effects discourse by asking the respondents themselves to identify any possible effects of pornography in order to address the inconclusiveness and one-dimensional nature of this approach. Finally, in another paper, he reflects on the argument about pornography influencing attitudes towards women via the

quantitative data gathered from the survey (2007b). The findings draw on responses to questions deriving from a feminist perspective (2007b, p.13) - and the analysis suggests that participants are 'overwhelmingly feminist in their attitudes' (2007b, p.15).

Three more papers offer further insight into users' responses regarding dominant frameworks of pornography: the aesthetics of pornography (2006a), their accounts of censorship (2006b) and reflective accounts of their use of pornography when very young (2007c). The first paper 'suggests that users employ a complex set of criteria when making aesthetic judgments about content (2006a, p.5), and these intersect with cultural discourses concerning production and gratification (pleasures, fantasies), ethical discourses (realism of body figures, romance) and the gendered nature of using pornography. Along the same lines, participants also provide accounts of the place of pornography within the context of relationships. McKee (2006b) also discusses the issue of consent in respondents' accounts of the censorship of pornography, suggesting that they hold quite nuanced and thoughtful views on issues such as children's exposure to pornography, the control of illegal pornography and the public debate itself. This work also highlights the complex discursive nature of pornography when it comes to consent and censorship (ibid, p.9) and the interplay between ethical and political discourses – issues that will also be discussed in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

A further output concerns users' retrospective accounts of the role of pornography in learning about sex. This paper has been influential for my own study in a number of ways: it sees pornography as a genre that requires and generates its own social and cultural knowledge, thereby moving away from the notion of media literacy as a tool for protection from accessing porn (2007c, p.1), towards a view of it as a means to recognize the conventions of the genre. McKee's research seems to illustrate the existence of other kinds of discourses (pedagogical, ethical) as opposed to ones that are primarily concerned with harmful effects; and this opens up the space for different interpretations of pornography and consequently for different performances of sexual identity (ibid, p.6-7). He also describes how participants' discussions of children's protection from pornography, on the grounds of its inappropriateness and possibly harmful nature, reflect certain discursive constructions of children's sexuality and of participants' subject positioning (me vs. the other; child vs. adult) (ibid, p.8-9). In this sense, this

last paper seems to lend support to one of the starting points of this thesis, that children's experiences with sexual content are most probably far more complex than current research presents them.

Overall, the Australian study offers an overview of the consumption and production of pornography in Australia, but also a more analytical discussion of key points in the pornography debate. However, what might require further investigation is the causal relationship (or lack of it) between political or religious views and the use of pornography. The authors of the report wish to argue that people use pornography irrespective of their political or religious views – views which are usually considered to provide an individual with specific values (not least in relation to sex and relationships). Indeed, one could argue that people regulate themselves in reference to sexuality through 'technologies' (Foucault, 1978) such as political or religious beliefs. This would appear to be an issue that is in need of further investigation.

Another question one could raise regards the use of free sexual content. Though 45% of participants said they use free pornographic content and the majority of them download it from the Internet, video was an equally popular medium (44%) (McKee, et al., 2008, p.33). This point might need further clarification as to whether those using porn videos buy them (in a VHS form) or download them from the internet, and whether the term 'video' refers to videos that are freely shared online or to DVDs. Clearly, one significant difference that has resulted from technological change is the easy availability of free video content online – and of course it is this that currently provokes so much concern, especially in relation to children.

My own study could be located within the context of the projects mentioned so far. One of the overarching aims of all three studies is the attempt to unpack the complexity of audiences' engagements with pornography beyond a reporting of who and how many people use it. All appear to share a cultural studies approach, analysing audiences' accounts as reflections of certain cultural understandings of sexuality. Finally, in all three studies there are general assumptions about the complexity of accounting for mediated sex, about discourses underlying these accounts, and consequently, about identity construction through the experience of sexual content.

However, my thesis is different from all three: my thesis comprises a small-scale project, and not a national one; and it examines a specific audience of young people only, without looking into issues of production or content. The focus on young people in particular implies different assumptions about sexuality (childhood sexuality), a different sample (a less diverse age group), and a focus on different imperatives running through the public and academic agendas (concerns with children's innocence, developmental effects, risk and harm, and so on). Having said that, this study adopts a wider range of analytical methods, including a thematic analysis of young people's sexual agendas, a discursive analysis of the identities asserted and negotiated in accounts, and finally a narrative analysis relating to the nature of the projected sexual self.

All three projects address what Attwood (2002, p.100) highlights as the need to examine 'reader and text, real and representational, producer and consumer, that may be ceasing to function in familiar ways'; all three suggest that texts, audiences and production work in a dynamic relationship. The implication for my own study in this respect is that I will be looking at how and where discourses on texts and on production appear in my participants' accounts, for they seem, after all, to play a significant role in how participants discursively construct themselves as sexual beings.

To sum up, porn studies seems to be introducing a new agenda in research on sexuality. The researchers writing within this area critically engage with different kinds of cultural approaches in order to address the complexity of using or producing pornographic texts, as well as the complexity of representations. They also address and examine the complexity of issues of identity and subjectivity, and how these appear as expressions of taste, pleasure or sexual culture. In this respect, my thesis is intended as a contribution to this emerging field, given that it attempts to introduce such an approach to examining a young, contested and under-researched age group.

3.5. Conclusion

In a thesis about experiences with mediated sex, a lot of the issues arising are concerned with gender, sexual identity and sexual agency; these are also issues that second wave feminists, postfeminists and porn studies theorists have addressed to a large extent. The feminist movement brought to light issues about women's representation within popular culture and highlighted the need to understand how gender is socially constructed. Although it appears that the objectives behind the theoretical approaches of feminism have been primarily political or policy-related, the theoretical legacy that is available to contemporary researchers is important in cultural studies analysis. This is possibly related with Segal's (1994) and Juffer's (1998) argument – as discussed by Attwood (2002) - that in any analysis of audiences of pornography, the diverse nature of the semiotic context of representations needs to be taken into serious consideration. In that respect, issues of representation, audiences and production in pornography are more complex than the 80s feminist and the effects tradition have suggested, and imply assumptions about meanings and identities which need to be more fully explored by cultural studies approaches.

Although one can draw important conclusions from the debate between anti- and pro-pornography feminists, this thesis fits primarily within the porn studies field. My standpoint derives from the need to focus on the audiences of mediated sexual representations and examine the nature of their experiences, while also exploring the contemporary social construction of gender and sexuality. Irrespective of what one might see in contemporary sexual representations in the media (whether a pornographic movie or an erotic or an artistic representation of sex), there is need to examine how the respondents construct their feminine or masculine identities. It is also important to see how they position themselves towards any sexual representation and what kind of discursive repertoires they use to talk about their experiences and their views. The aim then is not to refute well-established ideas about the effects of pornography, about sex or about masculinity and femininity, but rather to analyse the structures and technologies that lead to these ideas and the ways in which they are reproduced and constantly reconstructed by individuals.

Chapter 4. A Foucauldian approach to children's sexuality

4.1. Introduction

Foucault's work has been extensively analysed, usually as a supporting theory to thinkers' argumentation (O' Farrell, 2005). It has been difficult to group and critically discuss work on Foucault's theory on sexuality, as in many cases this work has served to polarise the debate further. For example, his work often appears in both anti- and pro-pornography thinkers' approach to power; while a range of feminist researchers have criticised Foucault's androcentricism. In this chapter, I first present the key terms in his thought (4.1). This is followed by a discussion of the implementation of Foucauldian approaches in feminist writing about gender, power and sexuality (4.2). Finally, I provide a more detailed discussion of Foucault's account of the way sexuality has been constructed in relation to children (4.3) and in relation to masturbation (4.4).

I am not attempting another re-reading of Foucault's analysis of sexuality, as it has already been exhaustively discussed. However, his genealogical unpacking of sex as a construction and his challenging of easy historical narratives of sex and sexuality provide a good analytical platform for this study. Ramazanoglu & Holland (1993, p.244) argue that his work disturbed the 'truths' of the dominant discourses of Western sexuality; and it achieved this not by developing a theory of truth but by analyzing the relations of power and knowledge 'that underpin certain understandings of truth and rationality' (Sawicki, 1991, p.5). If we seek to understand children's sexuality within a (self-) regulatory context, Foucault's account of power and subjectivity is especially relevant. In this respect, there are four key points from Foucault that are applicable to my research: Firstly, his notion of childhood and sexuality as socially constructed discourses; secondly, his biopolitical analysis of children's sexuality in modernity; thirdly, his conceptualization of children's sexuality within an ethical framework of health and morality; and finally, his understanding of the regulation of children's sexuality, and of technologies that operate to define their sexual conduct within the boundaries of what is rational and not instinctive. These points will be clarified and analysed further as the chapter proceeds.

4.2. Power, discourse and governmentality

4.2.1. The concept of power

As O'Farrell (2005, p.101) notes, 'power [*for Foucault*] is productive. By this he means that it generates particular types of knowledge and cultural order'. Middleton (1998, p.88) argues that, according to Foucault, 'the technologies of surveillance and discipline in families, schools, the medical profession and so on, gave form to desires' instead of being repressive of sex. To this extent, power produces knowledge and has led to the generation of discourses about sex (see also Carabine, 2001). Although Foucault begins from a repression hypothesis about sexuality, he rejects this hypothesis, offering a different approach that entails 'looking at theories of the self and society and… reevaluating them' (Sawicki, 1991, p.11). The idea that power produces knowledge and knowledge produces power is just one of the key elements in Foucault's thought. It is nevertheless, the core element in his analysis of social relations between individuals and between individuals and institutions, and also the core argument running through his analysis of sexuality.

Genealogy is the main methodological tool in Foucault's socio-historical analysis of sexuality. Through a comparative discussion of different historical resources he identifies the socio-political or socio-economic changes of the time and how they influenced the ways in which sexuality came to be 'spoken of' (Foucault, 1978; Williams, 1989). According to O'Farrell's critique, though, Foucault's approach is based on an analysis of 'patterns once they have already occurred, and it is not possible to apply the orders discovered to future events' (O' Farrell, 2005, p.63). Equally, it can be argued that the scientific and religious texts that form the basis of his analysis were available only to a limited audience (see Giddens, 1992). Yet irrespective of the disadvantages this methodology might have, it does offer a persuasive account of why sexuality came progressively to be talked about in the way it is today.

4.2.2. The idea of Discourse

Key to Foucault's work is the notion of discourse, which as McHoul & Grace (1993) argue, has changed in the course of his work. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1969/2002, p.120) he provides a broadly political definition; however, in the *History of Sexuality* he links discourse to power, exactly where power and knowledge meet (O'Farrell, 2005). Discourse is 'a group of statements, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence' (Foucault, 1969/2002, p.120). To come to this definition, Foucault draws on socio-linguistics to define statements. A statement is formed via groups of sentences (but not necessarily a sentence), and is 'the modality of existence, proper to a group of signs'; 'modality allows it [the sequence of signs] […] to be in relation with a domain of objects, to prescribe a definite position to any possible subject' (ibid, p.120). A sentence is a group of verbal performances linked with rules of grammar, and constructed in a particular way to conform to rules of 'acceptability' (correctness). So discourse is a sequence of signs, in so far as they are statements (1969/2002, p.121).

In this sense statements carry meanings and are identified in relation to their historical and social locations. McHoul and Grace (1993) suggest that Foucault's statements have three characteristics: They have to be functional, to 'bring effects' instead of merely representing 'states of affairs' (1993, p.37). Secondly, they are not necessarily formed according to particular syntactic or grammatical rules, but they should be 'parts of knowledge' (ibid). Third, they '"accomplish" events and create effects' (1993, p.38) but are not the same as speech acts. For McHoul & Grace (ibid) 'statements should be part of a technique for the production of human subjects and institutions'. This makes the definition of discourse political; for example, in considering how regulation is exerted via the discourse of sexuality. This applies to the first part of his work on sexuality where he deconstructs the repression hypothesis, according to which individuals are regulated via institutions when it comes to sexuality. It also applies to his later hypothesis about governmentality, a technology though which individuals produce and regulate themselves. Foucault (1969/2002, p.122) suggests that to describe a statement, one is actually 'concerned with the existence of different groups of signifiers' (they 'bring effects', as McHoul & Grace state). In this sense, analyzing statements does not mean focusing on what is actually said, but how they exist; what particular cause or purpose they fulfill, at a particular social and

historical moment (Foucault, 1969/2002, p.123). If statements signify something that is connected to a particular moment in history, discourses are also connected with particular moments in history and have a social existence, because they 'bring effects' within society.

For Foucault (1982/2000, p.356) 'nothing is fundamental [and] that is what is interesting in the analysis of the society'. If nothing is fundamental, then notions like sexuality are under continuous change and contestation. For example, we might still understand sexuality through medical or moral discourses; however, the circumstantial existence of other phenomena (e.g. technological developments, changes in global political and economic affairs) lead to a considerable fluidity in how we construct the idea of sexuality overall. As a result, the idea of truth that one meets in Foucault's work should be read as relatively as Foucault himself uses it: there are multiple truths defined by particular social, political or economic circumstances, which contextualise people's conduct in different ways. These circumstances form different 'apparatuses', 'the strategic relationship between diverse elements' (O' Farrell, 2005, p.66) such as 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions' (Foucault, 1977/1980, p.194). Within these apparatuses, power-knowledge relationships are the moving force through which individuals learn how to govern their conduct.

Changes in societies are understood at two levels: the first level concerns the relation of the individual to the self and the other, while the second concerns the relation of the individual to the institution. The individual constructs itself in relation to the other and in relation to the institution that frames its social existence. Through this analysis of how power is exercised on the basis of the knowledge produced, the notion of governmentality arises. Foucault is trying to understand how 'technologies of the self' that arise as a result of changes in societies form 'discursive practices that suggest certain conditions of possibility for self-making' (Champagne, 1991, p.187). In other words, how individuals develop and regulate their conduct in a particular context reflects a discursive construction of the self. This is how Foucault 'problematizes' (Foucault, 2001, p.171-2) the notion of sexuality, and the narratives that are reproduced when talking about it or when experiencing it. As Carabine (2001, p.275) notes, he is questioning the 'popular belief of sexuality as 'natural' fixed and/or biologically determined'; he then seems to be challenging

the normative account of sexuality, where 'reproduction is the common goal of all sexual drives' (Williams, 1992, p.239).

4.2.3. The emergence of governmentality

The *History of Sexuality* was written during a shift in Foucault's approach to power (O'Farrell, 2005; Lemke, 2002). Foucault distinguishes between three kinds of power: the disciplinary society, biopolitics and governmentality. He gradually focused more on the idea of governmentality to explain how modern society works both on the level of the individual (in relation to the self, within marriage and the family) and the level of society (the individual within the wider group). He moves from a 'techniques of domination' approach to one that is based on the idea of 'technologies of the self' (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p.55).

The idea of the disciplinary society was based on the argument that forbidden activity by the individual might result in punishment and restriction as a method of control (Foucault, 1975/1991). According to Foucault (1975/1991) the ineffectiveness of methods of punishment and discipline such as death or public humiliation led to a shift of approach into one in which citizens were to be educated (trained) against breaking any kind of human or divine laws. At first sight, laws for pornography use and production and the regulation of sexual conduct (e.g. the proscription on having sex in public), could be considered within the context of a disciplinary society. The fact that brothels and strip clubs are in most cases gathered in specific areas could also be considered from the same point of view. Foucault's idea of a disciplinary society was developed upon the idea of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon – an arrangement where citizens would constantly be under the impression that they are being watched. In the *History of Sexuality*, he refers to all kinds of establishments (e.g. schools) that are designed in such a way to make the individual constantly feel under surveillance, and subject to the rules of the administrators (public administrators, regulators, courts, employers, family). In other words, although he begins by examining a 'juridico-discursive' model of power, his analysis effectively becomes an account of how culture and institutions *produce* individuals (Sawicki, 1991, p.20).

Gradual social and institutional changes led to the development of new technologies for managing the population and it is these technologies that Foucault calls biopolitics (Foucault, 1978). Biopolitics involve techniques that are used to manage and control the population, for example through technologies of hygiene and sexual reproduction (O'Farrell, 2005, p.106). For instance, he discusses the medicalisation of sexuality and its practice within the state, religion or the family. In the case of the family, we see the transformation of sex into an activity to do with fertility and reproduction which - among other things - has moved into the parents' bedroom (Foucault, 1978, p.46). This move he suggests arises as a result of capitalism aiming to increase the effectiveness of the labour force (ibid, p.37).

One of the key case studies here is that of Catholicism and the process of obligatory confession. From this point, everyone had to speak out loud their sexual activity and acknowledge their actions and desires. As Foucault (1978, p.20) argues, it is this acknowledgement of the activity, the transformation of thoughts, dreams and actions into words, required to fulfill the process of confession, that - among other procedures - enabled a broader discursive transformation of sex. Further, he argues, the examination of sins leads to an intense focus on the body (Foucault, 1975/2003, p.188). There is a very specific explanation - and interrogation from the side of the priest - of the acts included in the sexual activity. Certain acts are classified as less normal, less accepted, wrong; and it is pleasure – the argument goes - that becomes not acceptable rather than relationships (1975/2003, p.189): it is the pleasure itself that becomes perverse and then the relationships or the individuals. This development might have contributed to his argument that sexual conduct cannot be controlled via an external authority, but has to be controlled by the individual itself.

Carabine (2001, p.276) mentions that confession is for Foucault an 'important ritual of power in which a specific technology of power is forged'. His argument is that it effectively led to the medicalisation of sex. This brought 'the psychiatrisation of the perverse', 'the hysterization of women', the 'pedagogisation of children's sexuality', and 'the socialisation of procreative behaviour' to social attention (Foucault, 1978, p.105) and transformed sex into a discursive idea. This change leads Foucault to discuss sex in Western societies of the 19th century within a framework of *scientia sexualis*; this science of sex was produced by a 'veritable discursive

explosion', as Biddy (1982, p.46) argues. The functioning of *scientia sexualis* - the argument goes - depends on the 'demand that people be induced to speak (to tell their symptoms, to recount their memories, to make free associations) and also on the subsequent 'interpretation' of the problem' (ibid). It is also *scientia sexualis* that generates the existence of peripheral sexualities (Foucault, 1978, p.36) or heretical sexualities (ibid, p.49), which among others included homosexuality and children's sexuality.

The discussion of peripheral sexualities as a case of the abnormal introduces normalization as another key concept of Foucauldian thought. Elden (2001, p.103) argues that in Foucault's perspective ' 'normal' is often defined by what it is not'. This is what Egan & Hawkes (2010) mean when talking about the normalization of childhood in modernity, and how incomprehensible (wild) children were put under the microscope in order to be rendered comprehensible, and hence controllable. Brownlie (2001) considers accounts of children as sexual abusers in the same context that Foucault discusses the rise of the abnormal, which includes the figure of the masturbating child. The process of normalization largely includes the acknowledgement of the abnormality and the attempt to be cured. However, as Dollimore (1990) argues, this might confirm that what is non-normal (perversion) is inherently embedded in a normative context. The process of normalization forms a distinct apparatus for Foucault and is another example of how he understands the production of power through knowledge and vice versa. It is interesting then that the norm that defines what is not normal is 'always linked to a positive technology of transformation' (cure, improvement), a normative project as Foucault calls it (Foucault, 1975/2003; Elden, 2001, p.104).

Finally, the notion of power as governmentality is developed further in Foucault's later work. As Elden (2001, p.95) argues, the formation of a knowledge about illnesses, for example, led to their inclusion rather than exclusion from the social body's knowledge, implying 'an invention of the positive technologies of power; [...] these strategies might be thought of as an art of governing'. Within this framework, technologies defining people's life within the social body incorporate the freedoms they are supposed to have; and part of these technologies of knowledge concerns sexuality and the way in which it came to be spoken of (Carabine, 2001; Williams, 1992). 'Government' for Foucault is the 'techniques and procedures that govern people's conduct'

(O'Farrell, 2005, p.106), or 'the conduct of conduct' (Rose, 1999, p.xxi). Again, this appears to include not so much the authoritative regulation described as characteristic of the biopolitical society but rather how people learn to regulate themselves (see Foucault, 1986). This new approach – as I shall discuss later - is based around Foucault's analysis of ancient Greek and Roman societies: the notion of citizenship in these cases was defined by a moderate lifestyle summarized in the ancient Greek concept of 'a healthy mind in a healthy body' ('νους υγιής, εν σώματι υγιή' in the original Greek).

The concept of governmentality is therefore central to Foucault's account of subjectivity. Rose argues that subjectivities can be ontological (the soul, the consciousness or the emotions), epistemological (arising from testing or observation), ethical (the virtues that one should seek to have), and technical (practices leading towards freedom and autonomy or improvement of the self) (1999, p.xii). The idea of governmentality also focuses attention on the 'technologies' through which government is realised: technologies are assumed to be the 'technical assembly of means of judgment, the techniques of reformation and cure, and the apparatuses where intervention takes place' (Rose, 1999, p.xi). Within this idea of how we govern ourselves, of how family and society govern our construction of identities and production of the self, it is possible to develop an account of the production of sexual subjectivities, not least through the role of discourse.

Egan & Hawkes (2010) argue that childhood is defined through adults' construction of this period of the life-course. It certainly seems that contemporary research is designed and conducted from an adult point of view and might therefore to some extent ignore children's construction of childhood (see also Jackson & Scott, 2010, p.102). It is possible that my own study - although conducted with young adults and not with children - is looking at the topic from the same point of view. Nevertheless, my aim is to collect young people's narratives of childhood and to look as much as possible through their eyes. Although I will elaborate further in my methodology chapter, this is one of the reasons why I chose to analyse my data from a discursive perspective. In all these respects, therefore, Foucault's account appears to provide the most appropriate theoretical and methodological perspective for my own investigation.

4.3. The argument about power: Foucault and the feminists

Foucauldian views about power, the body, masculinity and femininity have been exhaustively analysed by feminist theorists either to support their argumentation about male power over female sexuality, or as a critique of Foucault's view of the gender order. As Cahill (2000, p.43) mentions 'the theoretical possibilities and pitfalls that Foucault's work presents for feminists are well documented (if not exhausted)'. Nevertheless, depending on one's theoretical and ideological standpoint, different analyses and re-readings are available. For example, second wave radical feminists have often condemned Foucault as a phallocratic theorist who analyses gendered power relations from a white intellectual male's point of view and ignores core issues concerning women's social existence. By contrast, liberal feminists have attempted to apply Foucault's ideas in analysing women's everyday life issues, and in producing more effective arguments for a feminist research and policy agenda. Post-structuralist feminists have used the disciplinary model of power to explain the construction of contemporary gender relationships defined within popular contexts, such as the context of debates about sexualisation. There would appear to be as many 'Foucaults' as there are 'feminisms'. On another level, as we have seen, there is a strand of feminists discussing gender and sexuality through a post-feminist lens who have drawn on Foucault in their discussions about new femininity encompassing elements of agency, albeit within a self-regulatory (thus power oriented) context (e.g. Butler, 1990; Harvey & Gill, 2011).

4.3.1. A feminist Foucault?

I here wish to present briefly the agreements and disagreements between Foucauldian and various strands of feminist thought concerning women and the 'truth' of (sexual) bodies. Sawicki (1991, p.5) argues that Foucault wrote stories and has not produced arguments. Indeed, some feminist theorists suggest is that he is not offering any reasoning for how 'bodies and sexuality become endowed with some meanings rather than others' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993, p.243) or acknowledging how these 'historical discourses [are] systematically produced by men and in men's interests' (ibid, p.255). From one point of view, one might say that through their

critiques some feminists are looking for a feminist Foucault; a Foucault that would analyse the power relations between males and females through a primarily feminist disciplinary approach. This is invoked in critiques of Foucault's androcentrism (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p.5): many feminist researchers argue that Foucault conducts his analysis from a white intellectual male's point of view (Sawicki, 1991, p.18; 106). Soper (1993, p.40) suggests that Foucault's account of history is determined by the way in which he - as a male subject - 'experiences his desires and conceives his purposes in life'. It appears, though, that this eagerness to prove that Foucault's gender influences his analysis might distract feminist argumentation from its original cause (to prove the disciplinary power of male over female). Sawicki (1991, p.14) argues that some feminist thinkers 'isolate disciplinary technologies of women's bodies that are dominating', while others 'acknowledge domination but focus on cultures of resistance to hegemonic power/knowledge'. It is likely the definitive use of the terms 'disciplinary', 'dominating', 'resistance' might imply a 'constructed' discussion, a discussion that is trapped within what Foucault analysed as relations of power. In other words, instead of getting out of the box of power relations, these thinkers appear to be doing their analysis in the exact context that Foucault analyses as discursively constructed.

Another point of critique against Foucault is his reliance on authoritative discourse. Sawicki (1991, p.7) mentions that although he attempts to 'efface his authority', he fails to do it; as a gay man - the argument goes - he was also a product of the disciplinary technologies 'that constituted notions of authority and sexual identity' (1991, p.100). For some feminists, Foucault generates another discourse deriving from the contradiction between his real life and his analysis: the argument is that, although he was actively politically engaged, his theory undermines the possibility of a standpoint for those who attempt to take political action. In most feminist analysis, women are seen to live and perform socially within a context of male dominance. Yet in both second wave and post-feminist accounts, Foucault has often been criticized for a reluctance to make political recommendations (Sawicki, 1991, p.11) despite being politically engaged himself (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p.12). Questions like 'who exercises power, and how?' (ibid, p.9), as well as concerns about his focus on 'the aesthetics of the self' instead of the 'structural determinants of women's lives' (Soper, 1993, p.37), are seen to imply that Foucault fails to take a political stance in his analysis of power/knowledge relations. Nonetheless,

Ramazanoglu & Holland (1993, p.242) argue that not only Foucault, but feminists as well, have failed to specify the 'middle ground' of power, where links between 'the micro-politics of the exercise of power at the level of relations between people' and the wider exercise of power within society need to be traced. Again it appears that some thinkers have attempted to make Foucauldian ideas fit into their agendas rather than examine under what circumstances their own concerns could have been approached within a Foucauldian context.

4.3.2. Assumptions about patriarchy, or what Foucault did not examine

Other feminists appear to focus on the patriarchal formation of gender relations to explain men's power over female sexuality, an approach that is clearly different from Foucault's. For example Alcoff (1990) and Hartsock (1987) argue that Foucault's discourses on subjectivity, power and resistance 'threaten to undermine the emancipatory project of feminism' (Sawicki, 1991, p.96). Nevertheless, as Ramazanoglu (1993, p.4) argues, Foucault 'upsets key assumptions' about subordination, separation or devaluation of the female, and it is this methodology that may lead to a misunderstanding of the concept of power relations in his work. Similarly, the understanding of bodies as social constructions in Foucault's analysis has led feminists that to divide over 'how to take account of the natural differences between the sexes and the social construction of sexuality' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993, p.246). For Foucault, bodies are not original facts but historical constructs (Bailey, 1993, p.108). However, some feminists argue in favour of a condemnation of male sexuality as 'naturally or intrinsically aggressive' (Biddy, 1982, p.11); and here again, instead of using Foucault's problematisation of the narrative of power and sexuality to unpack dominant perceptions of male sexuality, they rather take it for granted.

Although feminists agree and disagree with Foucault on a number of important issues regarding power/knowledge relations, some of them find useful implications in Foucault's analyses for the future of feminisms (both political and theoretical). For example Sawicki (1991, p.10) argues that Foucault's analysis of power 'supported feminists' insights about the need to analyse the politics of personal relations and everyday life'. Along the same lines, Ramazanoglu (1993, p.4) argues that feminism cannot ignore Foucault as he problematises existing theories and their

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'political consequences', which are important 'in and for feminism'. Similarly, Bailey (1993, p.117) argues that new feminist politics 'should embody a new understanding of the self. This will mean a new truth and knowledge about one's identity and its possibilities'.

4.3.3. Foucault in Porn Studies

Foucault's work on biopolitics and the Panopticon for example has been critically discussed by some feminists in terms of its implications for postructuralist feminism (Weedon, 1987); others (Gill, 2003; McRobbie 2009; Harvey & Gill, 2011; Lazar, 2011) however, have used it as an analytical platform to discuss the power/knowledge relationships that define the agency of the new sexually, financially and politically independent woman.

Porn studies, which is to some extent influenced by this wider postfeminist climate, also borrows elements of the Foucauldian approach to sexuality. These researchers attempt to unpack the constructed nature of certain sexual tastes and cultures mostly labeled as perverse pleasures, as well as to contribute to a better understanding of the overall sexual landscape. For example, Attwood (2011) unpacks female sexual agency and the objectification/subjectification binary in looking at how women produce themselves as sexual beings via camgirl.com and alternative porn sites. Her discussion draws on Foucault's notion of technologies of the self and Butler's theory of performativity. In quoting Butler (1990, p.145 cited in Attwood, 2011, p.211) to the effect that agency is 'located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition of norms', Attwood is making a case about women asserting an active sexual agency, expressed in choosing to re-produce their sexual subjectivities via the technological advantages of production that online technologies offer them. Moreover, Williams (1992) turns to Foucault's (1978; 1986) analysis of perverse sexualities in her discussion of homosexual and sadomasochistic narratives in pornography. She argues that what is lacking in the feminist agenda is an analysis of why and how sex has moved from 'obscenity' to 'onscenity' and what that means for the sexual agency of the user. Her suggestion here is to turn both to the Freudian psychoanalytic model and to the Foucauldian approach to sexuality as discourse, in an attempt to unpack not only the implications

about gender but also about what constitutes normative sexuality in the new 'on/scene' context of mediated sexuality.

Likewise, JanMohamed (1992) adapts Foucault's analysis of bourgeois sexuality to develop his account of racialised sexuality. He provides a comparison between the deployment of sexuality in Foucault's observation of bourgeois society and the 'deployment of race' (1992, p.94) in the United States, to discuss how sexual power relations are directly linked to issues of class and race. In an edited volume that brings Foucauldian and Freudian concepts into the debate about the politics of sexuality (Stanton, 1992) some of the chapters again highlight Foucault's androcentricism (Dean-Jones, 1992). However, there is considerable emphasis on the importance of Foucault's analysis of subjectivity for the feminist agenda (Hunt, 1992), as well as a historical assessment of the relations between sexual desire and the market economy in the industrial revolution that also adopts Foucault's analytical framework (Laqueur, 1992).

This attempt to establish a different research agenda about pornography has influenced more recent work in the field, of the kind discussed in the previous chapter. However, it seems that researchers have not so far addressed how the extension of public sexual cultures, the sophistication of audiences' tastes or even the graphic representations of certain forms of sexuality might be approached from the perspective of governmentality as it appears in Foucault's work. In particular, what still seems to be missing is a discussion of how these constructions are conceptualized in audiences' perceptions of sexuality, which is one primary focus of my analysis in this thesis..

4.4. The construction of children's sexuality

The transformation of sex into a group of discourses, something to be discussed, has characterised perceptions of sex since the 17th century (Foucault, 1978, p.17). Until then, according to Foucault, sex was a biological activity, happening without necessarily aiming at reproduction; the change in how individuals and institutions started talking about it, even the use of the word 'sex' itself, led to a different way of understanding and managing sexuality. Both

words or gestures and movements that implied sex, and silences or pauses during discussions about sex, have been according to Foucault the proof of how and to what extent sex was censored (ibid). His argument is that since sex became something to be talked within a specific context it became a field for exercising power. Foucault (1978, p.18) argues that sex-related words have been framed as negative over time, and have often been used to abuse or offend ('swearing'). In relation to childhood, it is 'the emergence of the innocent child and the increasing concern with sexual propriety that gave rise to vocabularies [...] that created conditions that made it possible to keep children in ignorance' (Jackson & Scott, 2010, p.104). Furthermore, he argues, sexuality 'was introduced to serve the positive role of differentiating the bourgeoisie from the naturally degenerate lower classes' (Foucault, 1978, p.123-4). In this respect he discussed how the bourgeois family could afford to have different bedrooms for children and parents; and this is how, bourgeois children in particular could be kept away from sexual knowledge.

Therefore, the signifiers of the term sex changed gradually, as the topic of interest became the examination of specific acts included in sexual activity. In the process, sex took on a mysterious and secret dimension: it became something that could not be talked about unless there was a specific (usually moral or medical) reason for it to be thoroughly examined, under certain circumstances. Sex and sexual activity become subject to regulation by institutions such as the Church (or the state and medicine) but also become matters of self-regulation, as people learned not to talk about it unless in front of the priest; in that way, discretion in regard to discourse around sex was introduced.

4.4.1. Investigating children's sexuality

As Egan and Hawkes argue, children and sexuality (or children's sexuality) is a seriously under-researched field (2010, p.6). Benzaquén (2006, p.110) notes that children became objects 'of knowledge and intervention' in this respect during the 19th century. Today, both on a theoretical and an empirical basis, research and policy generally target parents, public bodies and other agencies, but not children (e.g. de Haan & Livingstone, 2009). Children's sexuality was put

under the medical microscope from the 19th century onwards in order to raise parents' awareness of children's safety; although safety in this context implies the regulation of children's behavior, and of childhood itself. Since the responsibility for children's regulation moved to the family, the majority of research and policy seems to have ignored children's agency and focused on parental mediation. The same applies to parental mediation of children's use of new media today: parents, it is argued, have to be alert and literate enough to train their children - and at the same time supervise them - when using new technologies. As Jackson & Scott (2010, p.106) argue, 'ideas about children's competencies inform the adult decisions about the degree of surveillance children require and the degree of autonomy they can be permitted'. Nevertheless, this autonomy might also imply that the responsibility for children's well-being is shared: children as much as parents are expected to regulate themselves via technologies of media literacy and safety strategies in relation to media use, for example.

The 'pedagogization of children's sex' (Foucault, 1978, p.105) is according to Foucault one of the dominant discursive strategies defining the construction of sexuality during the 18th and 19th centuries. At this time, children's sexuality was considered to be contrary to nature: 'the pedagogization was especially evident in the war against onanism, which in the West lasted nearly two centuries' (1978, p.104). The child as masturbator is discussed and examined within medicine or religion as abnormal, as the 'individual to correct' (Elden, 2001, p.95), along with the human monster (such as the hermaphrodites of the classical age) (ibid) and the homosexual ('the abnormal defined by the norms that reject him' (Biddy, 1982, p.44)). Children's sexuality was used as a boundary to distinguish between normal and abnormal and thus between what is rational (and therefore in accordance with a human being's social nature) and irrational (and thus instinctive and lacking social existence).

Children came to be considered to be inherently sexual during Victorian times (Kehily & Montgomery, 2004). As a result, children's sexuality - especially the sexuality of the schoolboy (Foucault, 1978, p.28) - became a topic of increased concern in public debate and therefore a public problem. Even in the 18th century, children's sexuality was problematised in educational and religious contexts (Foucault, 1975/2003, p.117). Children in schools were taught to be both autonomous and governable (Middleton, 1998, p.5), for example through the separation of boys

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and girls, or through school uniform (1998, p.9). Lessons about the health of the body, and topics like anthropology, biology and sex education also contributed to ideas about how children should regulate themselves when it comes to sexuality (Sheridan, 1980, p.172). Elden (2001, p.101) argues that the need to control children's bodies gives rise to a new discourse that 'places the fundamental blame on the parents and puts the onus on them to prevent' behavior such as masturbation. It is important to note that this mostly concerned children from bourgeois or aristocratic families (Foucault, 1975/2003, p.120); and to a certain extent this resembles today's situation, where upper class children appear to have their sexuality controlled in public more than working class children (e.g. attending more disciplined private schools, having the resources to be taken to psychoanalysts who 'deal with their sexuality problems' etc.).

4.4.2. Children's sexuality governed

In these ways, children's sexuality was constructed as a peripheral sexuality, along with those of mad men, women and criminals (Foucault, 1978, p.37). According to *scientia sexualis*, with its concepts of heretical sexualities and normalization, children's sexuality was formed by discourses around health and a juridico-moral discourse was developed to include the cure for such a problematic status (Elden, 2001, p.98). It could be argued that this is not far from how we view children today: their sexuality is exhaustively analyzed and pathologised through theories about addiction, perversity and sexual illnesses (e.g. STDs, early pregnancy). Despite wider developments in technologies of social power, children's sexuality continues to be considered almost within the context of what Foucault terms biopolitics. Researchers still focus on the adult control and regulation of children's sexuality (see also Jackson & Scott, 2010, p.106) and have not really addressed issues of self-regulation or self-control. This is apparent in the implicit assumptions of 'communication risk' research (see Chapters 1 and 4), where a great deal of attention is focused on children's 'internet literacy' - clearly a self-regulatory technology - which is deemed to make them more resilient in coping with risks online. The same might apply to their emotional responses (e.g. disgust) when coming across mediated sex: they might reflect children's attempts to govern the self so as to be socially and culturally 'healthy'. As Jackson & Scott (2010, p.101) argue, this anxiety about risk helps to 'construct childhood and maintain its

boundaries': it also serves to maintain the boundaries of individuals' self-regulation. As this suggests, certain – acceptable - behavioural responses imply constructing and defining one's self in opposition to something that is deemed to be inherently and necessarily problematic. This might also be one of the reasons why the academy regards 'children as a special object of study' (Livingstone, 2003, p.148) when it comes to both the media and sexuality.

Brownlie (2001, p.522) examines how young sexual abusers are understood in contemporary society, arguing that governmentality can help 'us understand this subjectivity through allowing for a focus on how children become governed as a part of how populations generally are managed'. According to Brownlie (ibid), governing children's sexual behaviour means 'either reclaiming children from their natural sinfulness or protecting their natural sexual innocence'. In my view, it might conceivably be both; public debates often seem to reflect this inconsistency between views of children as both good and evil, although both are tied to the need to regulate them. When it comes to the case of the sexual abuser, the need for self-regulation is even more important, as the way in which this stereotype is constructed derives from theories of psychopathology and psychoanalysis, which as Foucault argued played a key role in changing how we regard sex in modernity (ibid).

Brownlie (2001) argues that wild or risky children have been examined through the lenses of psychopathology, for instance in hypothesizing that such children want to 'gain control of their behaviour and of the relationship between victimising and victimisation' (Longo & Groth, 1983). Another hypothesis is that they are inevitably bound to commit abuse again once they have committed it for the first time (Rubenstein et al., 1993). A third hypothesis is that they start practising this behaviour between the ages of six and twelve (Longo, 1982). Such themes construct the victim, the victimiser, the risky self and the controlled self (Brownlie, 2001, p.525). In every single case there is a harmful self, lying in need of a cure, or of protection; and the contradiction between the sinful and the innocent child is apparent in all these different selves. Brownlie uses the example of young sexual abusers because it is a clear representation of the child that is simultaneously evil and good, a representation that runs through modernity and post-modernity, and one that defines the way we think about childhood.

Clearly, one cannot ignore incidents of sexual abuse of children, especially when some of the most alarming voices in the current public debate implicitly correlate children's experiences with pornography with the threat or actual incidents of sexual abuse (*The Guardian* 01.05.2014; *BBC News* 11.04.2014). Of course, the sexual abuse of children is not a new phenomenon: indeed, many of the current scandals relate to long-running practices, not least to do with the treatment of children in religious and care institutions. The institutionalized sexual abuse of children within the Catholic Church indicates how the child figure has been loaded with negative sexual connotations at least since the advent of modernity; and the ongoing scandals show the continuing difficulty adults face in coming to terms with children's sexuality. Within academic research, this topic has been addressed from different perspectives such as psychopathology, feminism, social constructionism and post-structuralism.

Some feminist thinkers like Bray (2009, p. 174) provide a critical analysis of the way 'neoliberal governmentality regulates social difference by producing tolerance as a proper rational affect just as it produces aversion as a symptom of the improper irrational body'. In discussing the Henson case of artistic representations of child sexuality, Bray (2009, p.181) argues that there is a tolerance of crypto-paedophilic art because people have been 'instructed that such texts signify a heroic triumph over the normative moral-aesthetic boundaries that compose public morality'. She suggests that the 'liberal' argument for enjoying children's sexual agency, and the critique of child abuse discourses as *per se* puritanical, might also operate to depoliticize the issue of child abuse and underestimate concerns about issues affecting girls in particular. In fact, Bray argues that there is a marginalization of the feminist critiques of the sexual politics of pedophilia (e.g. Kitzinger, 1996; Scott, 2001) which have focused on the abject experiences of those 'wasted bodies' (Bray, 2009, p.177). She suggests that in celebrating children's sexual agency and identity in such a context, critics may neglect codes of sexual objectification across historical and cultural contexts and 'their political destinations in the private embodied practices of everyday living' (ibid, p. 182)

On the other hand, there is a sociological critique of the work of some feminist activists who – alongside medical experts - played a key role in contesting the notion that child sexual abuse (CSA) was a figment of children's imaginations and established their voices as a form of

'expertise' (Grondin, 2011, p. 245). Grondin (2011) argues that in CSA therapy victims and offenders are conceptualized as the adult perpetrator and the innocent child (also in Kitzinger, 2005, p.165), a perspective that stems from an assumption that children are more vulnerable to harm and incomplete beings in need of training (Crondin, 2011, p. 246). By contrast, she stresses the need to understand the processes through which we come to define and understand these phenomena (and their alleged solutions). She proposes that researchers should contextualize the issue within a social constructionist and post-structuralist context, both in order to problematise the dominant frameworks in which CSA is understood and to 'reinstate…inaudible speakers as claimants' (Miller, 2003, p.95) by examining the discursive construction of diverse forms of knowledge.

Brownlie's (2001) study provides a useful instance of this approach that is particularly relevant here. It considers how young abusers are constructed through public discourses in ways that position children within a strict regulatory and self-regulatory context where their sexuality is defined in terms of a binary of good and bad and has to be developed in a very particular way. Through such mechanisms children are expected to engage with an appropriately healthy and socially acceptable form of sexuality, which usually entails their engagement in heterosexual relationships at a specific age. This provides further evidence of how the medicalization of sex in the 18th and 19th century has defined children's sexuality and contributed to its understanding as a set of choices (ethical, health, cultural).

Foucault conceives of governmentality as a form of 'diet of the self', balancing physical needs with the need to be a 'political' being. The moderate socio-political lifestyle of ancient Greece appears as a useful platform for Foucault in this respect. Aristotle's perception of a 'political being' is one that does not only hold the right to vote and has a voice within democracy, but is also defined by the virtues of rationality and the ability to socialize, which are the virtues that distinguish him from animals. He examines the economy of marriage, the family and the sexual self, through the figure of the 'Man' as defined in ancient Greece. Although he does not refer to the idea of 'pan maetron ariston' - meaning that one should not exaggerate in anything regarding one's life - this is nevertheless embedded in his approach to sexuality as a way of regulating the self (with regulation either coming from the individual itself or from the state). For ancient Greek

thought, a 'Man' is the figure of the free male (not a slave, not a woman, not a child) who has a voice and a vote in public affairs. This is the kind of figure on which Foucault builds his analysis, as this is the figure that is discussed in the texts he considers – although this has not prevented some from criticising him for examining the construction of sexuality from a restricted point of view (e.g. Goldhill, 1995; O' Leary, 1998). The man in ancient Greece had to have a number of physical, ethical and political virtues. The political and ethical virtues would sometimes interplay, as the 'ethos' is directly linked to the political sphere (see also Foucault, 1986, p.89). From this perspective, a man's sexual activity and pleasures should be kept in moderation and under regulation (or self-regulation) in order not to affect negatively his political, martial or reproductive effectiveness.

It is not then surprising that Foucault discusses the discursive nature of sexuality through focusing on relationships developed between men, defining ancient Greeks' lifestyle as being led by admiration of the beauty of the body, the mind and the soul. As he notes, the concerns for the male children were the following:

> The test pertained to the familiar points of Greek education: the demeanor of the body […]; one's gaze […], one's way of talking […]; and the quality of one's acquaintances (Foucault, 1986, p.207)

It was these politically defined virtues in combination with the beauty of the adolescent's body that were admired; this was the status of *philia*, meaning the bonding between friends. It was after the establishment of *philia* that a sexually defined relationship between the adult and the adolescent might occur:

> By not yielding, not submitting, remaining the strongest, triumphing over suitors and lovers through one's resistance, one's firmness, one's moderation (sophrosyne) — the young man proves his excellence in the sphere of love relations (Foucault, 1986, p.210)

Nevertheless, this relationship remained a relationship of power, as the man's status was higher, he was socially and politically significant and sexually mature, and was also the one approaching

the adolescent sexually. The boy's power in Foucault's (1986, p.198) examination lay in the fact that that no one could exercise any kind of authority over him and he would not do anything unless with his own will. As he mentions, 'Between the man and the boy, there is not—there cannot and should not be—a community of pleasure' (1986, p.222). [...] 'On the contrary, he was supposed to yield only if he had feelings of admiration, gratitude, or affection for his lover, which made him want to please the latter' (ibid). '[...] The boy was not supposed to experience a physical pleasure; he was not even supposed quite to take pleasure in the man's pleasure' (ibid, p.223). His point seems to be the following: the figure of the paedophile (in today's terms) was condemned in Ancient Greece as perverse. For that reason, an adolescent was not supposed to respond sexually to the adult. A sexual advance was only accepted if the boy felt like it, but the adult never had the right to ask for it. So in a sense, Foucault is suggesting that there was a disavowal of certain forms of pleasure, in the interests of what was considered acceptable. Foucault sees the construction of sexuality as a discourse; and in this sense, it is meaningless to look for arguments about either children's sexuality or homosexuality in his analysis. His aim is to show how sexuality is constructed, for example as a political discourse or as a health discourse – rather than as a manifestation of some innate 'homosexuality' for example. For him sexuality provides a very useful means to examine how power and governmentality work, and how they set the boundaries of a society (of a group of rational beings).

Ulitmately, Foucault only speaks about children's sexuality specifically when raising the issue of masturbation, or when he discusses it as a form of perversity. This makes it even more challenging for a researcher choosing to apply Foucault to their analysis. As I have noted, for him children's sexuality is another reflection of the emergence of self-governing techniques, and part of a broader change in how sexuality was constructed. Yet in that respect, the topic of masturbation actually provides a productive example for further discussion, which is directly relevant to my own study.

4.5. The 'problem' of masturbation

Cox (1996) talks about wild children being of scientific interest because they were challenging the teleological and theological certainties of the time (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.48) and appeared to problematise the distinction between animals and people. Based on a rereading of John Locke, Egan & Hawkes (2010, p.18) argue that the 'connection between mind and body' controlled by adults, the reproduction of the 'diet of the self' or the moderate lifestyle that Foucault identifies in ancient Greece, is a process imposed on children in order to ensure that they grow up within the 'dynamic of moral order'.

As early as 1754, Condillac said that a child becomes aware of its body through the senses (cited in Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.21); while Rousseau (1938, p.57) argued that 'the most dangerous period in human life is between birth and the age of twelve' as the child is 'exposed to errors and vice' before being able to understand them. Consequently, Locke's argument (cited in Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.21) is that it is in the nature of child to be 'vulnerable and susceptible to influences'. Similarly, contemporary researchers stress the need to do research on younger children and teenagers (Livingstone et al., 2011) and it is this group that is described as being most in need of guidance in their media use (including coping with sexual content as a possible experience). In this respect – and in accordance with ideas about children's lack of sexuality that were especially dominant in Victorian times – the child today is described voyeuristically as sexual, although it is also assumed that it should remain asexual. The idea that the corruption of innocence will occur as a result of experiences with sexual content is exactly a proof of this contradiction.

Egan & Hawkes (2010, p.23) observe that in the 18th century, the child was clearly distinguished from the adult; it was understood as being in need of training and sensual by nature and thus, in need of (self-) control. However, they suggest that the notion of childhood is about more than distinguishing younger from older people, or children from adults. The construction of childhood and the development of a whole regulatory, aesthetic, psychological, and political culture around it, implies the desire to preserve the continuity of society via the reproduction of rational social beings (children).

This rationale generates the 'masturbation phobia' tool, which works in the same direction: it cultivates morality (control of body and mind) via government (from parents and school) and self-government (the care of the self). Foucault highlights that masturbation became a problem in relation to children's sexuality first via the discourse of sexual psychopathology (Foucault, 1975/2003, p.234) although without any specific reference to children's sexuality. It appears together with the 'problem' of homosexuality but not in a tight relation. Mostly the focus is on excessive masturbation and the problems this might cause. In arguing so he draws on texts typically explaining how masturbation can cause someone to go blind or have a heart attack (Foucault, 1975/2003, p.239). According to Elden (2001, p.99), 'Foucault sums up the development as a political anatomy of the body, [...] and traces how this leads to a pedagogical medicine of masturbation and the linking of the notion of desire with that of instinct'. This then led to the increasing interest from a medical and an educational point of view in the effects of masturbation on children's mental and physical health; it also motivated an increasing campaign targeting parents. To refer to parental mediation again, 'this new discourse places the fundamental blame on the parents and puts the onus on them to prevent such behavior' (ibid, p.101).

In this process, children become eroticised beings and yet at the same time are demonised and victimised (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.14; Foucault, 1975/2003, p.244). On the one hand, they must be supervised at all times in order to prevent them from masturbating and on the other hand they are potential victims of perverse adult sexuality (paedophiles). The urge for continuous surveillance resembles the strict parental mediation that is today applied to children's use of technologies and media. There is an extensive literature on the merits of more or less strict parental mediation strategies (Austin-Weintraub, 1993; Livingstone, 2007; 2008), which aim to protect them from any 'stranger danger', either becoming a pervert or succumbing to the perversity of technology itself. As I have implied, there is a contradiction at this point: children in the 18th century are indeed presented as beings able to choose whether to be 'rational' or 'irrational' (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.14, 17). To apply this example to today, this is how young bullies are portrayed in research as evil beings, using the internet as a medium to bully ('to harm') (Jackson & Scott, 2010, p.107). There seems to be a confusion here as to whether it is the

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child that is the problem or the medium that offers such possibilities. Talking about technology's perversity rather than children as perverts may appear to represent a more child-centered research approach. Nonetheless, as children appear in some cases to be the actors of a practice (such as 'cyberbullying' or 'sexting'), one is again led to assume that children's behavior is to some extent considered as problematic and therefore in need of regulation. This makes the debate about whether technology or childhood is perverse (or both) an ongoing one, continuously enriched by research recommending both media (O'Neill et al., 2011) and childhood regulation (e.g. Dürager & Livingstone, 2012).

Risks associated with children's sexuality have also been approached from a Foucauldian perspective in research. For example, Curtis & Hunt (2007) describe the 'fellatio epidemic', the discursive construction of a public debate around a scandal focusing on young female adolescents having oral sex with older young men in the US. The demonisation of this practice and the intense visibility of this scandal led to a wider intensification of regulation of children's sexual health. The authors highlight 'the insistence on sexual danger, ignorance and abstinence in American policy' (2007, p.6) regarding children's sexual activity. They argue that sexuality is a product of social practices; and they point to Foucault's assertions about the 'instability and the potential reversibility' (ibid) of power relations (Foucault, 1978; 1983; 1991; 1997), influenced by the policy-oriented work of second wave-feminism. Their analysis suggests that girls' sexuality is constructed as being under the threat of harm (loss of self esteem, traumatized sexual life): girls involved in sexual activity are defined as victims, following Foucault's argument about the construction of sexuality within a *scientia sexualis* framework, rather than as potential agents (Foucault, 1997; Curtis & Hunt, 2007, p.8).

While a more comprehensive discussion of these issues is beyond my scope here, Curtis & Hunt's work about the fellatio epidemic is an important example of using Foucault's approach to show how the topic of children's sexuality came to be 'spoken of' in the way it is today. Not just masturbation, which even today is understood in terms of health (addiction, low self-esteem, problematic sex life) and morality ('if you are in a romantic relationship it is wrong to masturbate unless with your partner'), but young people's sexual practices in general, are interpreted as problematic.

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As I have suggested, the contemporary emphasis on strict parental mediation of children's use of technology resembles the disciplinary power that surrounded the discussion of masturbation in the 18th and 19th century, while the notion of co-use and more dialogical forms of mediation resembles a self-governmental approach. However, sexuality-related content or activities are equally demonized and represented as a threat in both perspectives. Contemporary research appears to be motivated by public anxieties - although these are themselves often motivated by 'media panics'. Yet much contemporary research appears to examine childhood through 18th century lenses, in line with older biopolitical understandings of children's sexuality as a phenomenon that needs to be regulated by adults.

4.6.Conclusion

Children's sexuality can be understood as a key field for the exercise of power. It is a 'subject of power' (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p.24) that is placed at the centre of medical, religious, parental and political attention. The anxiety surrounding masturbation is one aspect of the overall attempt to conceptualise and regulate any kind of 'irrational' activity (or the irrationality in children's nature). It is this management of the population through an 'intersection between public health and social order' (Mort, 2000; Turner, 1996) that Foucault tried to explain, both by discussing the issue of masturbation phobia and in exploring the construction of sexuality in ancient Greece. But as he moved from a theory of biopolitical power to a notion of governmentality, he argued that managing the population's conduct increasingly took place not only via authoritative institutions but via the self as well: the population was required to regulate its own conduct. The way in which sexuality has been constructed during the last four centuries continues to a certain extent today and what appears to be an exercise of power over minors might just be the latest stage in the evolution of this process.

All kinds of agents in and outside of the family were – and are - deeply concerned with children's sexuality and how to regulate and control it (Foucault, 1997/2003, p.110). The ways in which children are taught to think and behave and also to reflect on themselves in this area are

therefore a very appropriate focus for a Foucauldian analysis. As we shall see, my participants adapt to a certain kind of sexual ethics through their relationships with family, school and peer networks: the use of sexual content, and the practices that surround it, is one means through which they learn to be governed and self-govern their sexual conduct.

As Foucault suggests, children gain the sympathy or applause of adults when confessing their problem with masturbation or arousal (1978, p.30). I would argue that in many respects, the scientific or biopolitical approach to the 'problem' of children's sexuality continues to dominate the research, media and policy agenda. One then can compare, for example, the public confession of a child's allegedly problematic sexuality in front of a doctors' committee in the 18th century, with the public confession of a boy's masturbatory experiences with pornography in front of a public broadcaster's camera (*Teens Hooked On Porn*, Channel 4, 2009). Moreover, as was the case in the 18th and 19th centuries, today's academic and policy reports that seek to explain children's experiences are largely created by adults on behalf of children.

Both in the 18th and 19th centuries and today, children are denied agency – the potential to feel aroused, to experiment with their body or with their sexuality, to deal with technology and in general to gain life experiences by themselves. Furthermore, once they have had such experiences, they are expected to account for them, rationalise them and possibly acknowledge them as problematic in front of adults. On the other hand, they also appear as agents of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, bullying or masturbating over sexual content. Children's conduct is constantly portrayed as contradictory. There is a need for them to appear both passive (victims, good) and active (villains, evil), possibly for a rather simple reason: it is the only way that both the aims of being governed and learning to be self-governed might be accomplished. As I have argued, the accomplishment of this goal indicates a voyeuristic and paedoscopic interest in children, which reflects a much broader interest in preserving and reproducing the rational conduct of the social group.

What are the implications of this for research? According to Jackson & Scott 'childhood is institutionalised through family, education and the state, resulting in dependence on adults and exclusion from full participation in adult society' (2010, p.103) - even in the case of research.

Children are inevitably examined as problematic beings because of their very nature as children, a category which necessarily signifies lack of knowledge, lack of experience. This also signifies a lack of power (in Foucauldian terms) to define their own agenda. The only chance to appear otherwise is via research that gives them a 'voice'. But then there is another obstacle that one cannot easily overcome; the social (academic, age, gender) status of the researcher inevitably establishes a power relationship between the researcher and the participant. So how can the researcher overcome these obstacles? Foucault offers a framework which enables the researcher to think as much as possible outside the discursive nature of children's sexuality; and this is also possible using a broadly social constructivist approach. As Jackson & Scott (2010, p.110) argue from a social constructionist position, 'children are neither inherently sexual nor inherently asexual; they are what it is possible to be under specific social conditions'. This is how the approach I intend to follow in this study differs theoretically from the media effects and the 'risk and safety' paradigms.

To sum up, given that children are expected or trained into self-government, I aim here to focus on how this process happens through tracing the shifting construction of identities in my participants' talk about sex and mediated sex. Second, drawing upon Foucault's notion of sexuality as a technology that keeps people under constant social or cultural surveillance (the Panopticon concept), my aim is to see how young participants deal with being constantly under the impression that mediated sex is bad and negatively influential on their lives. The same argument is supported by Jackson & Scott (2010, p.102) who propose that children should be examined as being under adult surveillance, and not outside 'the social relations in which childhood in general is forged'.

Thirdly, what makes this theoretical approach particularly appropriate for my study is that I examine closely the health and moral context within which mediated sex and children's sexuality are regarded. As I have already mentioned, discourses about health (psychological effects, medical risks) and about morality (consequences for moral development and behaviour) run throughout the majority of the available studies, albeit often without explicit acknowledgment. Finally, my reading of Foucault's history of sexuality challenges the existence of 'childhood sexuality' as a category in itself. I would argue that Foucault's reference to children's sexuality is

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another reflection of society's attempts to regulate itself. Childhood is constructed as a regulatory, governing tool that keeps sexuality within the boundaries of the rational and away from the instinctive. This becomes evident if we think of the relationship between adult and young males in ancient Greece or the sexual relationships between non-adults.

However, there are drawbacks in this approach that have been already highlighted. Foucault builds his argumentation based on historical texts that either represent a very specific period of time or are targeted at a very limited audience. In this respect, one might question his ability to link broad theoretical arguments to very specific historically and culturally oriented facts. While such grand social theories might constitute a useful theoretical framework for a researcher following a social constructionist approach, analysis needs to explore how the macro works out at the level of the micro. Foucault does not offer an explicit analytical framework that would enable one to unpack all technologies and apparatuses that he considers as discourses. As a result, the researcher has to apply either other known analytical frameworks or build their own, specifically for their research. This last remark points towards the following chapter, where I consider the methodological implications of these arguments in more detail.

Chapter 5. 'Collecting sexual stories': methodology and method

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical paradigms framing my study and the methods I used in research. First, I present the ontological and epistemological position of the thesis (5.1). Next, I present the methods chosen and the ethical issues underpinning my research (5.2.). Finally, I discuss the analytical approaches to my data (5.3). The structure of the chapter broadly follows Creswell's (2009) suggestion that research methodology consists of a theory of knowledge, the methods used and the approach to research.

5.2. My ontological and epistemological position

Most studies on children's sexuality have been ontologically framed by positivist or post-positivist approaches (Guba, 1990). Positivist approaches assume a given reality with which researchers engage in a non-interactive relationship (Guba, 1990, p.19-20). Post-positivist approaches however, claim to adopt a more critical stance towards the ways their data reflect reality (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994; Lobe et al., 2007) avoiding taking reality as defined by unchangeable laws. Lobe et al. (2007, p.8) argue that the EU Kids Online project adopts a post-positivist approach, in the sense that it moves from 'a "naïve realist posture" to "critical realism"'. However, as I showed in Chapter 2, the EU Kids Online approach is in a sense approaching data in the same way as positivist approaches, such as the effects tradition, also do. Critical approaches derive from neo-marxist, feminist, materialist perspectives and critical theory and suggest that data are interpreted in the context of participants' and researchers' values. Finally, constructionist approaches (invoking structuralist and post-structuralist theories) assume reality to be a system of social and cultural constructions. This study is ontologically set within a constructionist paradigm and acknowledges that people understand the social world, through multiple, discursive constructions of reality. Multiple realities imply that people adopt multiple subjectivities and in regard to sexuality, or multiple sexual subjectivities (Flick et al., 2004),

which is what this study aims to unpack. Consequently, I start from an assumption that individuals constructs of themselves as sexual agents are informed by wider social constructions (Burr, 1995). I consider how agency and subjectivities are constructed, and how these constructions are culturally and socially defined.

5.2.1. Epistemological stance

Epistemology refers to the framework of the available knowledge that a researcher is using to address questions and understand data (Lobe et al., 2007, p.6). There is a distinction between 'internal' and 'external' approaches to society (Calhoun, 2002). An internal approach, of the kind that this study adopts, assumes that researchers are part of the society they observe. Their values, social position (e.g. gender) and status play a role in research, unlike in an external approach, which is mostly observational. This is also reflected in how researchers research other people's experiences, as in studies about children and the media. Positivist researchers are assumed to adopt more essentialist approaches to social categories (e.g. gender), while critical researchers and those deriving from a constructionist perspective adopt mostly anti-essentialist ones. An essentialist view derives from an acknowledgement that people's and the world's nature is predetermined; that individuals have been given certain characteristics by nature that define what they can or cannot do (Burr, 1995, p.14). Having said that, an anti-essentialist approach – unlike essentialist approaches - draws upon an understanding of the social world as a product of social processes (Burr, 1995, p.4). Experience is socially and discursively constructed via constantly changing understandings and its essence is not predetermined or given. In that respect the opposing 'sides' of positivist and critical researchers disagree over the degree of relativism in different traditions, but prioritise reflexivity in identifying and considering limitations or factors that might influence research (e.g. Lobe et al., 2007).

5.2.2. Epistemological standpoint

5.2.2.1.Researching culture

Storey (1997) notes that 'culture' is the object of study of cultural studies and that it refers to a certain way of life, defined historically and socially (Williams, 1983). Johnson (1997, p.76) perceives the political nature of culture as threefold: 'cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations'; 'culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realize their needs'; and it 'is neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles'. These social differences and the inherent power relations between social groups are embedded in individuals' cultural practices, such as the production, symbolic representation, and consumption of cultural texts (Storey, 1997). My study belongs to cultural studies because it examines individuals' cultural practices (watching sexual content) within a particular socio-historical context. These practices are connected with social relations between adults and children, males and females, and encompass power relations between them. Further, sexuality and childhood sexuality are among the most prominent sites of social differences (e.g. between the aforementioned groups), but also sites of struggle (e.g. in women's struggle against patriarchy).

Drawing upon assumptions informed by Marxism (Storey, 1997), cultural studies acknowledges differences and inequalities between social groups, in relation to class, gender, race and generation, which play a significant role in how texts are produced and used. In this context ideology has been a central concept in cultural studies, especially in Britain (Carey, 1997). However, McRobbie (1994, p.23) suggests that during the 1980s and 1990s, debates about ideology and hegemony were largely replaced by debates about postmodernism and postmodernity. In this context 'discourse' provided an alternative to the concept of ideology (Franklin et al., 1997, p.259). Hall's work on 'articulation' - being the process through which emaning is made in and of a cultural text (Grossberg, 1986) - is particularly significant here and is another element of cultural studies analysis; it refers to how social groups use discourses (ethical, political, cultural) to make meaning of cultural texts and how these texts relate to people's social standing (to their own way of life).

Cultural studies' turn to discussions about postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s, generated 'from the modernity/postmodernity exchange among left intellectuals' (McRobbie, 1994, p.26), encompassed a focus 'on lived experience which breathes life into inanimate objects', including aspects like aesthetic pleasure and personal style (ibid). In this respect McRobbie points to a return to ethnography in cultural studies, a move to examine lived experiences in relation to the consumption of cultural texts where ideologies, pleasures and individuals' other social and personal agendas can be traced and unpacked (Storey, 1997). Johnson (1997, p.80) argues that we live by particular subjective forms, and wider historical forms of consciousness, that underpin the relation between 'consciousness' and 'subjectivity' that is the focus of cultural studies. For him, then, the 'ultimate object of cultural studies is the social life of subjective forms at each moment of their circulation, including their textual embodiments' (1997, p.97). These subjective forms are embedded in cultural practices and are revealed via the close examination of lived experiences.

To sum up, a cultural studies approach seeks to explore and interrogate the axioms ascribed in different social groups and the power relations between them. By axioms I mean the general or accepted truths, or even 'common sense', embedded within social relations for example. In this sense, axioms embrace discourses which people use to make meaning of culture in the practice of consuming media texts. A cultural studies approach also acknowledges media as contributors to how reality is constructed. Finally, it takes a close look at how the above (axioms, discourses) appear in people's and groups' lived experiences with cultural texts. Thus, this study examines how children make meaning of sexuality via their experiences of mediated sexual content, and regards these meanings as a result of the relationship between lived experiences and cultural texts; considering such issues provides an insight into their pleasures, ideologies and sexual agendas. Also, I consider how the cultural specificities of children as a social group reflect power relations with other groups; in other words, how cultural specificities signify ways in which children fit, and are regarded, within society.

5.2.2.2. Researching young people

Researchers within the mass communication approach, and recently effects researchers (Horvath et al., 2013), have highlighted children's significance as research informants (e.g. Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009). Such an acknowledgment signifies a broader change in research with children, signaled by the argument that researchers should give voice to children (Livingstone, 2002). However, just 'offering voice' is different from studying what children actually say. In fact, surveys of the kind employed in the EU Kids Online studies typically analyse data derived from children's choices of pre-determined answers to multiple-choice questions. Children's actual accounts are more complex because language is used to make meaning of a situation or a phenomenon. Sexuality is a sensitive topic and if researchers want to go further than mapping children's experiences, they need to ask difficult questions about relationships, their experiences with sexual content, and their understanding and embodiment of sexual practices. In this process, the social context of the experience and the power dynamics among different agents (peers, researchers, interviewees) is prioritised in analysis.

Mass communication and effects researchers approach sexuality from a rather positivist perspective (Livingstone et al., 2011; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; 2007; 2008). Mass communication researchers discuss the risk and potential harm of encountering sexual content, without going further to explore the context of the experience and how children engage with it. Effects researchers aim at identifying effects through participants' responses, beginning from an assumption that sexual content has an impact on users. By contrast, cultural studies researchers have developed constructionist accounts of children's practices. This is apparent, for example, in Buckingham & Bragg's (2004) study about children's experiences with mainstream portrayals of love and sex, Tsaliki's (forthcoming) work on children, pornography and the politics of sexuality, or Bale's (2012) work on young people's perceptions of the impact of sexualized media on their sexual health. Such researchers start from an assumption that children actively make meanings of their cultural practices, which are embedded in their narratives and accounts, and that these reflect the ways they position themselves, for example as heterosexuals, as mature or as sexually savvy.

Discursive constructions of childhood and sexuality are politically and historically located. This study was not conducted *with* children (individuals under 18 years old) per se; it is *about* children, and was conducted with young adults talking retrospectively about their childhood and teenage life. Nevertheless, both the conceptual and methodological frameworks are informed by advances in research with children. Being a construction itself, language is used to reconstruct aspects of social reality; thus the participants' accounts do not reflect a naturalistic, or even a transparent view of reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), but different readings of what is represented as reality. This approach may also invoke contradictory accounts of the same phenomenon, situation or topic (ibid), especially when it comes to contested issues like sexuality. This approach also signifies that language use as a social practice takes place in particular contexts and encompasses relations of power (Shotter & Gergen, 1989). In these respects, my study draws on a post-structuralist perspective in researching young people's accounts, which is consistent with the theoretical framework of this study as discussed in chapter 3.

To sum up, then, offering children a voice can be prioritised in research, either by inviting their responses to structured questions, or by asking them to account for their experiences from a perspective that requires a complex reading of social reality. I find the second approach a more appropriate framework for this study as it allows me to access more angles on the participants' understanding of social reality, via examining the context in which they generate accounts of their experiences and how they position themselves in doing so.

5.2.3 A feminist epistemological approach

There is a difference between methodology, method and practice. Methodology is derived from the theoretical paradigm framing a study; it informs the research questions asked and is the perspective from which researchers discuss a topic. Method is about decisions on research design and data collection - that is, the research tools used to collect data and make sampling decisions. Research practice however, differs in terms of the questions researchers ask, their location within the process and the intended purpose of the work produced (Letherby, 2003). Kelly (1988) argues in this respect that there is a distinctive feminist research practice: feminist researchers'

questions are about 'what is going on in women's lives' (Letherby, 2003, p.6); researchers are personally involved in the research process and in theorizing their findings (mostly because as women, they are personally interested in women's issues); while the purpose of research is to inform the overall [political] objectives of the feminist movement.

Nonetheless, Letherby (2003, p.5) suggests that it is debatable whether there is a distinctive feminist method or methodology, and argues instead that there is a 'feminist approach of thinking about methodology', which is distinguishable from other forms of research. Somekh & Lewin (2011, p.70) track the routes of feminist research back to second wave feminism that 'challenged traditional forms of knowledge production by arguing that women's experience had either been excluded from research or served to maintain existing unequal gender relations'. Feminist enquiry aims primarily to produce new knowledge that would further support the feminist emancipatory project (Letherby, 2003). It starts from the belief that Western society is hierarchically structured and is defined in terms of gender inequality (Skeggs, 1994) and that the 'manmade' nature of language is a result of the male dominated control and development of authorized knowledge (i.e. the development of knowledge within certain institutions which leads to it becoming a legitimate way of knowing) (Letherby, 2003). The distinction between experiential knowledge and (male-defined) authorized knowledge is core in feminist enquiry that is concerned with revealing the conditions of both women's and men's lives (Letherby, 2003) and with analysing how gender relations are constructed (Flax, 1987, p.171).

Letherby (2003) argues that there are three dominant feminist epistemologies: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint epistemologies and post-modernism. Feminist empiricism is a foundationalist approach, seeking to 'use 'traditional' methods and approaches more "appropriately"' (Letherby, 2003, p.43) by critiquing the practices of scientific method, and it also provides a critique of women's exclusion in social science (Smart, 1990). Although it explains scientific norms from the perspective of the 'other' (Letherby, 2003), it takes for granted a fixed reality, while underlying discourses (e.g. scientific, social) signal the unequal power relations between women and men.

Feminist standpoint epistemologies are also a foundationalist approach, acknowledging the

existence of an objective reality, where all women are oppressed; they argue in a sense for a new 'successor' science, defined from women's perspective (ibid). Experience is at the centre of this approach too, especially that of politically and intellectually engaged women (Smart, 1990); and reflexivity is also significant. However, as this approach does not distinguish between different groups of women, Stanley & Wise (1993) argue that there are different standpoints (e.g. black, lesbian, working-class), which should be taken into consideration, because a unified view of 'oppressed women' threatens the objectivity of this epistemological approach. A further problem is that it does not focus on men and masculinity, thereby ignoring key aspects of male power (Letherby, 2003).

Postmodernism is the third epistemological approach, deriving from broader developments in philosophy and aesthetics. It rejects the idea of a universal reality of women and their condition and challenges any kind of clinical objectivity in research (Harding, 1987). In this sense, as Waugh (1998) notes, it suggests a more radical change in thinking than the other two approaches. The turn to post-modernism also signifies feminism's shift away from systemic notions like capitalism and patriarchy towards more fluid approaches to culture, sexuality and representation (Kemp & Squires, 1997). Drawing on a Foucauldian approach that suggests knowledge is inherently a result of or subject to power relations, such researchers argue that all accounts of social reality and of the self are constructed through discourses. For example, 'woman' is not a unified or even a specific category, but a constructed concept, continuously redefined in social and cultural terms (Zalewski, 2000, p.130). Jackson (1992) argues that feminism aims to deconstruct what is given, in the same way as postmodernism does. In that respect, according to Letherby (2003), some feminists suggest that feminism is inherently postmodernist (e.g. Flax, 1987) in that it too contradicts established notions of the self, knowledge and truth, in the way modernism inherited them from Enlightenment thought (2003, p.53). For others, however, its relativist nature signifies a 'backlash' against feminism at the time when 'gender inequality has been acknowledged as a social problem' (Scott, 1998, p.13).

There are some distinctive characteristics of the postmodern feminist epistemology which inform this study too. First, it highlights the 'subjective involvement of the researcher' (Letherby, 2003, p.5-7), and further prioritizes the significance of the tension between objectivity and subjectivity.

Buckingham & Bragg likewise suggest that feminist and postmodern researchers prioritise the significance of reflexivity in the analytical processes of research (interpretation, representation and knowledge production) (2004, p.38). Stanley (1991) highlights the importance of the 'intellectual autobiography' in understanding the feminist project. There is, therefore, a focus on experience (experiential knowledge) in an attempt to make up for women's previous silence and thereby confronting the [male] experts (Maynard, 1994).

The assumption that reality is constructed via (ethical, moral, cultural) discourses is also central to this approach (Letherby, 2003). Feminist researchers argue that reality is not fixed via language; instead language provides frameworks of understanding, which individuals attach to their experiences (Letherby, 2003). This is a characteristic that I consider in my study too; however, this is not a specifically feminist position, and could be seen as characteristic of cultural studies more broadly. As Franklin et al. (1997, p.260) suggest, feminism contributed to cultural studies' shift 'from interest in issues concerning ideology and hegemony to those concerning identity and subjectivity' and reinforced 'the influence of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism'. What makes such epistemological characteristics feminist is their relation to the feminist movement's political cause (the struggle against patriarchy and oppression of women). As Skeggs claims, feminist research practice was the result of feminists' attempts to provide more legitimate claims about the hierarchical and unequal nature of society in western society (1994, p.77).

To sum up, the notion of 'feminist research' is a contested concept, not least because a 'reflexive and critical approach to research is not the province of feminists alone' (Williams, 1993, p.579). However, feminists have raised the significance of gender relations and power/ knowledge discourses, and further prioritised the subjective involvement of researchers in the process. Johnson (1997, p.77) summarises the contribution of the feminist agenda to cultural studies by arguing that it 'aided a more general turn from older kinds of ideology critique to approaches that centre on social identities, subjectivities, popularity and pleasure'. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 3, Butler's approach to gender performativity questioned issues of women's representation as addressed in the second wave feminist agenda; and she was also among the theorists who stressed the need for feminists to focus on the forms of power embedded in

specific discourses (McRobbie, 2009).

This study does not solely examine women's position in relation to men, nor does it examine the topic from an exclusively feminist perspective. However, it is inevitably informed by what I have described as a feminist perspective in research, and it acknowledges the vital feminist contribution to getting sexuality on the cultural studies agenda (Franklin et al., 1997). It also seeks to explore how feminist thought has contributed to perceptions of sexuality, both in theory and via participants' discursive constructions. The political nature of feminist assumptions about sexuality and gender performance has been considered in detail in the theoretical part of this thesis. They are also considered in my analysis in Chapter 8 where I work on the discourses through which my participants frame their accounts of sexuality.

5.3. Method

5.3.1. Collecting the data

5.3.1.1. Semi-structured interview: choice and design of the research tool

The semi-structured interview has been a popular method within audience reception studies, especially in researching children as audiences (e.g. Buckingham, 1993b). It allows the researcher to collect contextual information about the informants and go deeper into specific issues that might otherwise be neglected. It might also facilitate a better assessment of the significance of certain issues for the interviewee. Also it allows the researcher to establish familiarity and trust with the participant and collect data regarding the dynamics of the interaction (Silverman, 2011). My engagement with the qualitative research within EU Kids Online III showed that single gender focus groups are also an effective way of going deeper with young people's perceptions about sensitive topics. However, I chose one-to-one interviews as a convenient research method (partly because of the difficulties I had in recruiting people to talk about sexuality, discussed below), and in effect because I believe that through an interview, the researcher can establish a more confidential and personal relationship with the interviewee.

For this study I constructed a guide following a certain agenda that would allow respondents to elaborate on the issues discussed and raise others that were not included. I specifically chose the semi-structured interview as a type of interview with a 'flexible and fluid structure' (Mason, 2004, p.1020). Researchers suggest that semi-structured interviews generate data interactively, and therefore both sides (participant and researcher) adopt reflexive and active roles (ibid). As a result the guide included topics and themes of discussion, rather than particular questions. In this sense, the interviews were shaped both by participants' understandings and by my research interests on the topic. I first asked about respondents' experiences. For example: 'When was the first time you saw something and thought 'this is sexual'?'; or 'What exactly was the depiction you saw? What was it showing?' Through such questions I gathered information on what exactly the participants had seen and thought was sexual or pornographic. However, I sometimes collected responses about different kinds of sexual representations, that participants did not consider pornographic, but just sexual. Such a classification provoked further discussions about what makes something pornographic.

I then moved to their views about sexual content and about using it. For example, I asked: 'What do you think about those who use sexual content for masturbation?'; or (in response to a particular observation) 'did you have the same views when you were between the ages of 9 and 12 for example?[2]' 'How did you came to think about sexual content the way you do?' Such questions provided an insight into how the respondents think and talk about mediated sexuality. They provoked further discussions about upbringing, sexual development and parental regulation. Here, issues of presentation of the self and 'identity work' were particularly evident.

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[2] References to how one was thinking at an earlier age serve two purposes: first, to motivate participants to reflect on how they have been thinking in the past (here a reference to a specific age is not of particular significance). Second, effects and mass communications researchers suggest that younger children are at greater risk of experiencing sexual content; in this respect I wanted to explore participants' own reports about their experiences at a young age.

The third section considered their awareness of the public debate about pornography and the notion of risk, either regarding the user or those involved in the production of mediated sexual activity. For example I asked: 'People say that children should not watch sexual content; what do you think about that?'; or (in response to a relevant comment of theirs) 'why do you think it is harmful? Do you think it was harmful for you too, when you were at a younger age?' Questions in this section also generated discussions about ethical standards, participants' upbringing and healthy development. Again in this section of the interviews participants seemed to work a lot on the way they presented themselves.

The last – summarizing - section asked for a definition of pornography. For instance I asked: 'So having said all this, how would you define something as pornographic?' Within this context they were also challenged in addressing the pornography vs. art debate; a sample question was 'If I were to show you two depictions of people having sex, and told you that one of them was part of an art exhibition while the other was found in a porn site, what characteristics would each of them have, in your view?' This section proved particularly challenging, for example because I had to phrase the questions in a particular way (which was not always neutral) and give precise descriptions of my examples as I could not show any specific instances (I discuss this issue further in Chapter 7). However, this generated interesting discussions about taste and cultural capital.

I chose to include such questions in the interview guide because – among other reasons - they also reflect particular presences and absences in existing literature. For example, as I have already suggested, most researchers working with quantitative methodologies cannot ask participants to elaborate on the exact representations they have seen or how their views and perceptions about sex and sexual content have been shaped. Some of the questions also point at particular policy and research recommendations, typically based on the assumption that children should not watch sexual content as it might have behavioural, attitudinal or developmental effects. I also attempted to revisit well-established debates such as the one about the differences between art and pornography, as this would offer some insights into the broader issue of how young people define or construct sexuality discursively.

5.3.1.2. The sampling process

My sample is intended to be illustrative and not representative. It consists of young people aged 17-22, 12 men and 14 women. Six come from Greece, six from Denmark and 14 from the UK. The sample's ethnic diversity reflected reasons of convenience and not cross-country comparison purposes.

Table 3. Participants' Details

No	Name	Age	Gender	Country of Respondent
1	Marios	20	Male	Greece
2	Ellie	22	Female	Greece
3	Eleni	19	Female	Greece
4	Zoe	19	Female	Greece
5	Manos	22	Male	Greece
6	Nikolas	19	Male	Greece
7	Tara	20	Female	UK
8	George	17	Male	UK
9	John	17	Male	UK
10	Phil	17	Male	UK
11	Ken	18	Male	UK
12	Luke	18	Male	UK
13	Jenny	17	Female	UK
14	Sarah	17	Female	UK
15	Julie	18	Female	UK
16	Judy	20	Female	UK
17	Kate	19	Female	UK
18	Elisabeth	20	Female	UK
19	Richard	21	Male	UK

20	Harry	20	Male	UK
21	Trine	19	Female	Denmark
22	Amalia	18	Female	Denmark
23	Lea	18	Female	Denmark
24	Gitte	19	Female	Denmark
25	Jonas	18	Male	Denmark
26	Daniel	19	Male	Denmark

I conducted 31 interviews overall, but analysed 26, as the remaining five either did not fulfill the age criterion, as I later discovered (3) or were not successful (2). For example, in the UK, one participant did not want her account to be recorded, and another only provided 'yes' and 'no' answers to all my questions. The different ethnic groups imply a lack of homogeneity in the sample, which is a limitation of the study; however, my primary aim has not been to examine their experiences in terms of their ethnic background, but rather in terms of shared cultural codes. Although one could argue that there is no specific saturation point for a sample in a qualitative study, there is usually a point at which the researcher identifies that data is being continuously repeated: although I could have continued to collect well over 30 accounts, I realised that in these 26 interviews I had enough evidence to explore my research qustions.

I began my study with the intention of interviewing younger children, but this proved impossible for several reasons. Apart from ethical problems, choosing a sample of 9-17 year olds would have raised practical difficulties too. Entering a school environment would have required not only parental consent but also different bureaucratic procedures. This process would take considerable time and I might have encountered difficulties in obtaining parental consent. Additionally, a process like this might expose children's use of sexual content to their parents and might result in disturbances to family relations. In relation to this, Renzetti & Lee (1993, p.5) define a topic as 'sensitive' when 'it poses a substantial threat for those involved, which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and /or dissemination of data'. This topic is certainly 'sensitive' in this sense. Indeed, as I have already discussed, sexual content is frequently seen as a threat for children; and such a perception might

contribute to the problem of finding people to take part in a study and convincing them to talk about their personal experiences. For all these reasons, I decided to choose a somewhat older age group.

To recruit participants I used the snowballing method (Lobe et al., 2007, p.11). I began by visiting different academic institutions and posting adverts on online forums. As none of these strategies bore fruit, I turned to convenience sampling. First, I conducted a pilot study with a group of four Greek young adults (18-21) whom I knew personally. The fact that I was familiar with their lives is a limitation; it ensured however a relation of trust and ease between the two parties.

After restructuring the interview guide I moved to the main fieldwork (pilot data were also included in the final dataset). A fellow student put me in touch with the principal of a college in Location A (Denmark) where I travelled to interview the Danish participants, who were aged 18-19 years old. Via a common friend in the UK, I found my participants from a university in Location B (Greater London, UK), who were aged 19-21. I interviewed them at my friend's home. Subsequently, a colleague in the UK put me in touch with the head of the sexual health center in a college at Location C (a town in the Midlands, UK), who recruited the participants, aged 17-18 years old. I conducted these interviews at the sexual health center located in the college. One British (19 years old) undergraduate and two Greek (22 years old) postgraduate students also volunteered to take part. These interviews took place at Location D (University of London). As it transpires, there are both age differences between the participants and contextual differences because of the different settings and contexts of the interviews.

The practicalities of time and location were decided either by the respondents or by the liaison person. Greek participants themselves chose the location and time of the interview, while in the case of participants from Locations A and C it was the liaison persons who decided. The rest of the British respondents gathered at the liaison person's house. Because of the sensitivity of the topic and the lack of familiarity with the researcher, I thought it would be more convenient for the respondents to feel comfortable, and in charge of the situation as much as possible. Allowing them to be the hosts might offer them a feeling of controlling their territory, a feeling of security.

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However, as I had no previous relation with most of my participants, I was possibly seen as an intruder, which might have affected the whole process.

5.3.2. The interview as a social event

5.3.2.1. Context of the interview

Interviews are social events (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004) involving an interaction between two individuals that usually do not know each other. The accounts produced are at the same time private and public and are constructed and reconstructed as such during the process. In this process, participants might work on providing socially acceptable accounts (Cornwell, 1984), or confessions: for example, Lea (18, DK) said that I was the only one to know about her experiences with sexual content, while Marios (20, EL) disclosed that he knew someone who was a necrophiliac.

I conducted interviews both in and outside formal educational contexts. Conducting interviews at a house or in a coffee shop (even a university coffee shop) creates a much more relaxed and friendly atmosphere than the strict atmosphere of a classroom or sexual health center interview room. Therefore, participants who were not interviewed in an educational setting appeared more relaxed and at ease with the process. In Location B, the respondents would sit at the desk in our friend's bedroom, while I was sitting on the bed. Others chose the bed too, like Judy (20, UK) who said 'oh, I prefer to sit here next to you'. After the interviews in Location B, a dinner had been planned, and this had established an even friendlier atmosphere prior to the interviews. For the pilot interviews in Greece, I met my participants at a coffee shop of their choice. There is a particular coffee-culture in Greece, understood as a socializing event among friends: in this context, the interviews were more like friendly discussions rather than a formal interview. However, I cannot underestimate the possibility that my respondents felt less comfortable because we were in public and the interview was not as protected as it would have been in an educational setting.

By contrast, the educational context alters the 'rules of the game' because it is an establishment where authorized knowledge is disseminated (Letherby, 2003), and where individuals learn about social behaviour (Foucault, 1978). In fact, in Locations A and C I had to do a lot more work to make participants feel comfortable. However, there were circumstances, especially in Location C, where I failed and ended with either unrecorded or poor quality interviews. In Desmond's (18, UK) case I failed to get any response other than a 'no' and a 'yes' to my questions. Apparently, he did not feel at ease to discuss a taboo topic with me, although he had readily volunteered to participate when asked in front of his peers. Peer dynamics seemed to afford two different subject positions, one of openness in sexual issues (in a peer-to-peer context) and a second, more reserved one (in the research context).

The authoritative status of the college was also asserted in some cases during the interviews, especially in Location C: Luke (18, UK) started by accounting for his standards in relation to safe sex. Apparently, he did so because within a sexual health center everything is about sexual health, and this possibly signified that he should be talking about this topic. However, a proof that I managed to make Luke feel comfortable was his concluding question 'do you have any Rizlas at all?', possibly implying his comfort in asking if I had any weed to smoke. Nonetheless, in the majority of interviews conducted in an educational context respondents would avoid naming certain sexual practices or body parts, and I had to allow them to choose their expressions freely. This means that words like 'cock', 'dick', 'pussy' or 'fuck', were out of the linguistic context, and the use of such terms was something that I had to ask them to do if they felt like it. Luke (18) was one of the few to use such terminology from the beginning, possibly in seeking to assert a more dynamic sexual identity.

However, accounts about sex are not only subject to the context, but also to the age and class of the respondents: this also defined the amount of information provided, but also how it was framed, and implicated in the construction of identities.

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5.3.2.2. Age of participants

Eleven individuals were 17-18 years old (five 17 year-olds and six 18 year-olds) and the remaining fifteen were between 19 and 22 (seven 19 year-olds, five 20 year-olds, one 21 years old and two 22 year-olds). Participants' age had implications for the methodological choices I had to make, and the interview process itself. For example, questions about 'sexual content' are difficult to assess, not least because 'sexual content' does not mean the same thing for everyone - although at the same time it is typically perceived as something 'obvious' and is usually associated with 'pornography'. Discussions were much more complex because the participants' age implied a lot more extensive experiences with such cultural products than would have been the case with children. Older age also implied more advanced knowledge of the world and different subject positions, given their status as legitimately sexual beings (young adults). However, there is an obvious limitation in choosing young adults: given that the average age of first using new media for example has decreased to 7 years old (Livingstone et al., 2011), young adults have probably had relatively different media practices (and also experiences with sexual content) during their childhood and teenage life than children growing up today.

Moreover, the dynamics between myself and the participants were also different because of age proximity (at the time I was 26 and 27 years old). Buckingham & Bragg (2004) note the implications of the generation gap between themselves and the children in their study. They highlight how they were perceived as teachers, as adults, as 'others', and had to bridge this gap by either sharing biscuits with participants, or sharing their experiences as children or explicitly asserting their knowledge of popular genres that children were familiar with. My young age helped in establishing a comfortable relationship with the respondents, but at the same time it motivated them to feel that the research was a discussion in equal terms, even though I was of different academic, status. This became apparent for example in Ken's (18, UK) direct question to me: 'So do you like porn?'

Choosing young adults to talk retrospectively has both ethical and practical implications. Because of the view of childhood as a status of sexual innocence (Tsaliki, 2011), the topic of childhood sexuality becomes a greater taboo, or is not at all on their agenda. For example

Richard (21, UK) mentioned that 'I was year 9 and I saw it and kind of ignored it cause I was like, 'I'm a boy, I'm used to throwing stones at people' (similar responses are found in Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). This implies that children talk in different ways about sex and sexual representations, and possibly construct their accounts in a more regulated linguistic context. By contrast, young adults (especially after the age of 16, the age of sexual consent) are not any longer considered within the protective context of 'innocence'. Consequently they construct different accounts, from an allegedly sexually legitimate position; and this implies maturity – even a sexually active status. George (17, UK) for instance, mentions: 'obviously I don't need my family to talk to me about it, I'm 17, the legal age, I know, obviously I do know when it is safe to have sex'. Apparently, the legal age to have sex signifies a different status towards sexuality, a different sexual agency.

5.3.2.3 Class

Eleven participants came from a working class background, primarily the UK participants from the Midlands. The town in which the college was located was in a former mining area that has been immensely influenced by Margaret Thatcher's time as prime-minister; she effectively closed down the mining industry and is likely that some of these people's fathers might have lost their jobs. The remaining 15 participants were of lower middle or middle class background; and I was able to ascertain this either from their references to their parents' professions, or from their references to ownership of technological equipment and internet literacy (e.g. how many devices they owned; when they learned to use the computer), and social activities with the family (e.g. eating out). For example, Trine (19, DK) mentions that her family of 5 owns seven computers. Elisabeth (20, UK) refers to her internet literacy at a young age because of her dad's profession as a computer expert. Tara (20, UK) mentions that she and her parents used to share a lot of social activities, such as eating in good restaurants. Finally, Marios (20, EL) mentions that his parents 'are of a different class than others' (being doctors) in his attempt to justify their openness in talking about sex to him.

It transpires that class differences do exist within the sample, although they are not extremely

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striking. Differences in class imply differences in cultural and educational capital, and this possibly implies different ways of talking about sexuality. In this respect, the most visible differences appear between the respondents from Location C and the rest of the group. Mort (2000) suggests that working-class sexuality has long been constructed as problematic, as out of control. This creates an analogy with the 18th century when allegedly pornographic texts were kept out of the sight of the uneducated masses in order to 'protect them from corruption' (Sarikakis & Tsaliki, 2010). As a result, the values developed within working class groups, which may also be more strongly influenced by religious beliefs against sex out of the context of marriage, led to a different view of sexuality. Today, working class areas in Britain are also presented as being of high risk of teenage pregnancy (Thepovertysite.org.uk), and it is on these areas where sex education curricula are often expected to focus.

Within the existing literature reviewed, especially the studies deriving from mass communication and effects approaches, there are assumptions about possible correlations between children's use of sexual content and their socioeconomic status. In this thesis, class is included in this chapter in order to give further contextual information about the participants: it serves to inform the reader about my attempt to collect a fairly diverse sample. Information about class is also occasionally helpful in drawing the reader's attention to participants' SES when making references to how their discourses (particularly political, cultural and ethical discourses) might relate to social class positions; but this is a complex issue that is not my primary focus of analysis here.

Overall, face-to-face interviews of this kind have both limitations and advantages: asking individuals to think retrospectively means that they account for past experiences that they might not remember very well; even further, young adults might be more wary, or inclined to manipulate their accounts, than children and thus the data might lack spontaneity. On the other hand, the retrospective approach might allow for more detailed and coherent accounts about practices in the past, or more explicit accounts regarding the negotiation of identities. Further, adult participants might feel more at ease talking about their sexuality than children; it might be the case that they have already experimented with their sexuality and have already been using sexual content of various kinds, and have reflected on the issue, which could possibly lead to richer accounts. This study is not a typical study using the method of memory work as discussed by Onyx & Small (2001, p.774), where the researcher works on 'subjectively significant events'

and the way they are constructed and preserved as memories of the individual. This method also requires that the researchers 'position themselves with the group and become a member of the group' (ibid, p.775). In this study however there is no focus on the significance of past experiences for the individual. The choice of relying on retrospective accounts was primarily an ethical choice resulting from the difficulty of acquiring permission to recruit children 9-16 from the Institute of Education's ethics committee (which, like most UK academic ethics committees, is extremely cautious on matters of this nature). Although it proved a practical choice, it was ultimately the only possible one.

Moreover, my familiarity with some of the participants might be criticised as raising problems of reliability. Yet by contrast, lack of familiarity might imply the same thing. Taking the various limitations into account, convenience sampling was most probably one of the few available choices. Finally, balancing the limitations and advantages of talking to young adults instead of children and considering the ethical challenges of collecting data from this age group, building a sample in this way was possibly the best possible choice. Acknowledging these limitations early on in the study helps to ensure as much as possible the validity of the findings.

5.3.2.4. My role

As Buckingham & Bragg (2004) note, the researcher's desires and fantasies inevitably influence the research process. My own definitions of what is sexual, of how sexual and romantic relationships are formed and my own experiences with sexual content sometimes contradicted or coincided with my participants' accounts.

I grew up in a middle class family in Crete (Greece), where children's upbringing is inevitably different than in capital cities like London or Copenhagen. My values developed within a liberal family context: my parents never controlled or restricted my friendly or romantic relationships, although they never talked to me explicitly about sex. In Greece girls are still are rarely informed about sex by their parents. As Zoe (19, EL) notes 'we learn about sex via girls' magazines, not in the family'. Inevitably my views were influenced by broader cultural values that dictate that sex

should begin after the age of 18, and take place within the context of a romantic relationship. I grew up knowing about sex, but could not imagine myself in this situation because of its taboo nature. Having grown up with such dilemmas and blurred ideas about sex, my interviews proved to be a challenging process. My story conflicted with those of several of my participants, in that they knew more about sex than I did when I was their age, although I knew the same if not more about sexual content. Reflecting on my story was a path through vulnerability, as I realized that I –and others who grow up like I did - had been kept away from sexual knowledge. Judy (20, UK) stated 'if you wouldn't be with the boys you would learn occurrences on your own body', as sex education in Ireland (where she had grown up) included only some limited information about sexually transmitted diseases. Also, Kate (19, UK) mentioned how her mother would keep them away from any kind of sexual knowledge, 'I remember her fast forwarding through stuff'. However, this was generally the case with all my female participants; it was only Trine (19, DK) who presented herself as being a sexually savvy self since the age of 15. It transpires that I had a lot in common with my female participants, although I was older; and this meant that there are common perceptions about female sexuality, and common discourses via which we understood ourselves as sexual beings.

By contrast, since the age of 11 – if not earlier - I had had knowledge of the existence of sexual content: I knew sex existed. So with boys I could share my experiences with sexual content; I felt I could identify with them and draw on our shared experiences as a platform for discussion. In hearing Daniel's (19, DK) statement that 'actually boys like myself search the Internet for porn', I felt that at the same time I could identify both with my male and female respondents. Although being brought up within a particular ethical context regarding female sexuality, I had resisted that context via my desire to explore the world of sexuality from a 'male' perspective (watching sexual content). Since the age of 13, when I first connected to the Internet, I started accessing 'hardcore' heterosexual and anal sex representations. I accessed more transgressive forms such as threesomes, orgies or homosexual sex later on, at the age of 18, when online databases grew in terms of the number of videos and the diversity of sexual practices.

My knowledge about sexual content proved in some cases a limitation for my project. In many cases, my participants were not explicitly aware of some types or 'categories' of sexual content,

and I appeared as the 'wise-guy'. In Lea's (18, DK) case for example, I started explaining a popular definition of hardcore mainstream sex, and appeared to be 'playing it smart', while I was looking for her perception or knowledge of types of sexual content. Also, with Nikolas (19, EL), I rushed to provide him with the terminology of 'fetish porn' and 'alt-porn', when he mentioned 'sex with weird dressing'. This projection of my porn-expert self possibly revealed an attempt to establish myself as knowledgeable on the topic and as a 'cool' type of woman who knows an allegedly male activity very well. It was, nonetheless, one of the mistakes I made throughout the project, as it might have affected how my participants positioned themselves in the discussion.

I hope to have offered an idea of how different factors had an impact on the interview process. I will now move to the final part of this section, the ethical considerations and dilemmas that I encountered along the way.

5.3.3. Ethics

Sex talk is by default a taboo research topic; it is supposed to be private and to take place only in a context of a familiar or a special professional relationship (e.g. doctor-patient) (Mishler, 1984). Therefore, sharing such information with a stranger who will then make a report on it also makes it a 'sensitive' research topic. As I have already discussed in chapter 3, sex has historically been pushed into the privacy of a couple's bedroom and thus, became a topic requiring discretion. A relevant indication concerns the way researchers are expected to ask children about sexual content, being obliged by ethics committees to phrase the questions in such a way as to not trigger young people into actively looking for it. Hydén argues that sensitive topics pose the risk of researchers being dealt with as superiors, as they are asking about topics the participants would not be supposed to discuss in other cases (2008, p.123). As I have already noted, a 'sensitive' topic is one allegedly posing a threat to those involved. The choice of such a topic then has ethical implications for the research design and the data collection, not least in that the researcher has to make sure that participants are protected both during the process and after the dissemination of the findings.

The process of ethical approval to conduct interviews with young adults brought other issues to the surface, namely issues of confidentiality, anonymity, sensitive information disclosure and informed consent. I provided each participant with a letter confirming the anonymity and confidentiality of the study. I confirmed that their real names would not appear anywhere in the thesis and that in case they felt uncomfortable with what was being discussed they could either refuse to be recorded or withdraw from the process (see Lobe et al., 2007, p.20). In practice the design did not work in two cases, in Location C: Sharon (17) did not approve my recording and I had to take notes of her account. Apparently, I did not manage to gain her trust, neither via the consent letter nor via the letter about the ethical considerations of the study; as a result this was an unsuccessful interview. Also, Desmond (18, UK) was not – as I mentioned - willing to elaborate on his thoughts and views about sexual content. I tried to convince him that his account would be confidential, but I failed and as a result this was another unsuccessful interview.

Furthermore, I had to consider factors of sexual orientation and sexual taste, and to avoid any kind of discrimination; I also considered question phrasing in order to avoid the possibility that anything I might say could be taken as offensive or intimidating. I tried to ask questions about specific issues only when participants referred to them, or broad questions that offered the respondents the opportunity to choose their own approach. Last but not least, I tried to avoid assumptions that were not derived from my participants' statements. However, my personal desires and the way I was constructing myself, both as a woman and as a researcher, led to my either projecting a 'smart' self, or a very academic self, or even accounting for my own experiences more than the research context really allowed (in terms of the available time and the objectives of the project).

Finally, I had not planned that some male respondents would flirt with me during the interview and after completing it. For example Daniel (19, DK), who asked me out at the end of the interview, made me reflect on the process and the ways in which he constructed his sexually-savvy and at the same time romantic identity. I remember him reiterating that his girlfriend was older than him, and it was after the interview that I thought that his positioning might have had an impact on the interview process, at least on an unconscious or an emotional level (Walkerdine et al., 2001). Engaging, even unconsciously, in a flirting process during the interview is an

ethical issue: in such circumstances identities and subjectivities are constructed through emotions, raising questions about personal as well as professional research ethics. This could possibly lead to both shared and different understandings of each other's projected selves, and consequently to accounts that are constructed in different ways than others where there is no emotional involvement on the part of the participants.

So far, I have discussed the theoretical grounding of my methodological approach, and have provided some contextual information about the research process and the factors that – in my view - had an impact on the data gathered. I have also discussed some ethical implications of the study by cross-comparing my initial considerations and what actually happened in the field. In what follows, I discuss the approaches that I used to analyse my data.

5.4. Analytical methods

I analyse my data using three approaches. Though a thematic analysis I provide an overview of participants' reports about their experiences: I organize the data on the basis of the overt topics proposed either by myself or by the participants. In the discourse analysis, I am concerned with the use of, or reference to, specific discourses that show how participants contextualize their accounts. Finally, through narrative analysis I focus more closely on the particular stories of individual participants, and try to unpack the reasons why my participants tell me a certain story. The methodological questions as well as the analytical approaches that I discuss below will be further explored in my analysis in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

5.4.1. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis provides ways of organising and classifying qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), at least for a first level analysis. There are numerous textbooks that explain how to apply this approach in social science research (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Braun & Clarke (2006) offer tips for coding and organizing data into themes, while Riessman (2008) discusses the method through descriptions of sample studies.

Thematic analysis provided me with insights into participants' agendas about sexuality, not least within the realm of public concerns about risk, media effects and sexual abuse. I collected rich accounts and this approach helped me to organize the data into themes. Such an analysis provided a mapping of what participants said, and a good sense of the overall dataset. Given the lack of children's detailed accounts of the social world in research, the way research assumptions and findings are contextualised derives inevitably from an adult perspective. Thematic analysis aims to show how respondents actually talk about the topic in their own terms, and not what the researcher thinks they are saying. For this part of the analysis I considered the themes arising from the interviews as separate units of analysis. Reading throughout the text I identified the kinds of themes participants raised and then coded them into groups. For example, a number of participants talked about learning about sex through media, from parents or at school, which I grouped into an umbrella theme about sources of sexual knowledge.

Finally, the approach also informs the discursive context where identities are constructed and performed. It offers findings regarding 'what content a narrative communicates' (Riessman, 2008, p.73) and what kinds of assumptions arise. However, it also has limitations: it is relatively descriptive, and it cannot offer a deeper analysis of the data unless one applies additional analytical approaches. This is why I also analysed the data via discourse and narrative analyses. Another limitation is that there is less space for exploring underlying or implicit assumptions here than in other approaches.

To sum up, there has not been an extensive discussion about how to apply thematic analysis to data in the social sciences, or how it might be combined with other kinds of analysis. However, existing research shows that it is an effective tool for organising data, providing a context for further analysis and discussion. In the context of this thesis, it also serves to inform the reader about what kind of assumptions the researcher will be exploring more closely in the rest of the analysis.

5.4.2. Discourse analysis

Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p.96) understand discourse as 'a social practice which shapes the social world, including identities, social relations and understandings of the world'. In chapter 4 I discussed how Foucault (1969/2002) defines a discourse as a group of statements; I also presented his approach to statements as bearers of historically defined acceptable meanings. Although Jørgensen & Phillips do not use exactly the same definition, theirs might be seen as an extension of Foucault's definition. The ways in which people construct their identities and form social relations could be seen as matrixes of statements (that form discursive formations, if connected in a particular logical way) in the way Foucault defined them.

Foucault's definition of discourse is somewhat abstract and for this reason I find it more convenient to use Jørgensen & Philips's. They argue that discourse analysis requires certain kinds of assumptions to be taken into account (2002, p.5): it takes for granted that any kind of reality description is conducted through language. Also people's understanding of the world is seen to involve a process of classification in 'discursive analytical terms' (Burr, 1995, p.3). People might for example understand the world in ethical terms (what is acceptable or not; wrong or right); or in political terms (what is fair or not; what is equal or unequal). Further, Jorgensen & Phillips argue that these discourses compete to an extent in people's construction of reality (2002, p.17). In order to include such terms in the space of a discourse analysis, they need to fulfill the Foucauldian criteria of reflecting a particular historical moment and of being part of social knowledge; but there is also a need to identify what their particular mode of existence in a particular historical moment means. In Jørgensen & Philips's terms, these terms have to be ascribed to, or reflect, social practices through which people understand and position themselves in the world.

I draw broadly on a discursive psychological approach (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) because it provides ways of examining how people use the available range of discourses to describe or make meaning of the practice of using sexual content. I specifically draw on Edley (2001), who summarises efficiently the use of *interpretative repertoires*, *subject positioning* and *ideological dilemmas* as analytical strategies in discourse analysis.

To begin with, identity is seen here as a social process defined in particular historical and social terms (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). In the process of identity building, individuals' subjectivities are shaped through their use of discourses (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The researcher's aim is to identify any *interpretative repertoires* individuals deploy in their construction of reality. Interpretative repertoires are used as resources by individuals to talk about their understanding of the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002): they are 'discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.90). The linguistic structure of these accounts forms a set of codes with which the individual comes to know and explain a certain aspect of the world.

A second key concept is participants' *subject positioning*. This is defined as the way in which people locate themselves in specific social and cultural contexts by accounting for topics. Edley draws upon Althusser's notion of 'ideological state apparatuses' and 'interpellation' to discuss subject positioning (2001, p.209): this identifies how people position themselves as subjects of discourses forming social and cultural identity-related contexts. At the same time they reproduce these kinds of discourses and build their identities (Wetherell et al., 2001). Therefore, through subject positioning people identify (and identify with) particular groups (e.g. heterosexual males/females, ethnic groups, elites) and position themselves in relation to them.

Finally, the third element is that of *ideological dilemmas*. Drawing upon Billig et al. (1988), Edley discusses the identification of ideological issues or problems in people's accounts: the discourses they use reflect social relations that encompass power. Ideological dilemmas often appear in their accounts through assertions of 'common sense'. Common sense usually involves talking about values, established norms or routinely established patterns of everyday life which form 'lived ideologies' (Williams, 1965). However, these lived ideologies are not coherent in nature and therefore appear in people's accounts in the form of dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988). So when talking about what people do, or should be doing (and comparing their practices with what norms/routines suggest), people often engage in a kind of dilemmatic talk. When looking at sexuality, these dilemmas are of particular interest to the researcher: the nature of the topic as taboo appears to generate a substantial amount of argumentative statements deriving from

established norms, values or ideologies about sexuality.

Thus, in the coding of the data I picked up particular words and phrases that signified the kinds of discourses people apply in making meaning of the practice of using sexual content. For example, their references to *wrong*, *sinful* or *inappropriate* content signifies a kind of ethical discourse, while terms like *abnormal, unhealthy* or *sick* are mostly elements of a health discourse. In the relevant chapter I elaborate more on this process of data coding and analysis.

There are limitations in this approach too: for instance it offers a detailed view of respondents' perceptions but often does not provide contextual information about the respondents. The analysis is highly specific and a researcher needs to apply additional strategies to examine other aspects of the data (e.g. the kind of content the participant discusses and the kind of story in which these discursive elements appear). Overall, though, discourse analysis is an analytical strategy offering an in-depth view of how different discourses contribute to the ways in which participants position themselves and hence construct identities.

5.4.3. Narrative analysis

Finally, I draw on narrative analysis from a structuralist and post-structuralist perspective (Barthes, 1977). This approach acknowledges the existence of 'multiple disunified subjectivities involved in the production and understanding of narratives' (Squire et al., 2008, p.3). I approach the narratives – the 'stories' my participants tell - as constructed products through which participants construct and deconstruct their identities, position themselves in different ways towards different kinds of audiences, agents, stages of life and experiences.

Narratology is 'the systematic study of narrative, and especially of the structural, formal and temporal elements of narrative and the relationships between them' (Wolfreys et al., 2006, p.70-71). Narrative analysis explores the relationships described throughout storytelling and the relationship developed between the narrator and the listener. Narrative social research draws upon literary and cultural studies and social theory and follows by and large Patterson's (2002)

conceptual framework, according to which narratives are 'sequential and meaningful, human, 're-present' experience, [and] display transformation or change' (Squire, 2008, p.42). A narrative is a story about who the narrator says s/he is and a distanced account or reconstruction of the events that happened (ibid). In the case of events about sexuality (Labov & Waletsky, 1967), what we often find can be described as morality tales (MacIntyre, 1984). The moral nature of the story draws upon the ethical and moral framing of sexuality, as I have already discussed in Chapter 4. In this study I draw upon Plummer's (1995) approach to 'sexual stories'. The stories I discuss here are a reflection of how subjectivities are organized in discursive frameworks to do with ethics and culture and how identities are constructed interchangeably in the process of making one's sexual story. As in Plummer's discussion, this process of producing a sexual story includes one's own history of knowing and experiencing sexuality, and the cultural and social elements that frame it as a social practice.

Each story is one unit of analysis and is examined via the different strategies participants deploy to talk about and present themselves. As I have already mentioned, I elaborate more on how exactly I did the analysis in the relevant chapter. However, let me note here that such strategies may concern the *different* kinds of selves that might appear in each narrative, or the different identities that the participants are working upon during the narration of their stories: the self is not necessarily presented in singular or consistent terms.

This approach also has limitations: offering a view of a few participants' stories means that others remain outside the analysis. Further, as the researcher examines big chunks of sample cases but not the whole narrative, he/she inevitably leaves other -possibly equally interesting - parts unexamined; thus the whole process might be subjected to considerable criticism on the grounds of objectivity or representativeness. In this study I had to decide which parts of my participants' narratives to analyse, in order to respond more efficiently to the research questions. I also wanted to discuss data that illustrate as much as possible my whole dataset, but also create a coherent, logically organised analytical account.

On the whole, though, narrative analysis provides a significant addition – along with the previous approaches - to a holistic examination of a topic that is under-researched in some of its aspects,

but at the same time debated to a great extent within public and academic arenas. Thus, narrative analysis completes a threefold analytical process that helps to explore assumptions and arguments about the *what,* the *how* and the *why* of young people's experiences with sexual content.

To sum up, using the three approaches discussed in relation to the same data increases the validity of the study and offers a more holistic view of the dataset (e.g. Tamboukou, 2003; Cain 1991). Thematic analysis is the preparatory stage before moving towards more detailed analysis of the data. One significant difference between this and the discourse and narrative approaches lies in the difference in the units of analysis. In thematic analysis, the units of analysis are the themes individuals explicitly prioritise in their accounts; in discourse analysis the unit is the discourse embedded in their accounts (as identified by the researcher); while in narrative analysis, the individual story itself is the unit of analysis. Discourse analysis throws light on the underlying meanings of the themes identified from thematic analysis and offers a context for discussion for the narrative analysis that will follow. Narrative analysis often overlaps with discourse analysis: a discourse analysis of specific sets of terms respondents use has implications about the topics they prioritise and the statements they make about themselves and others. An analysis of their narratives partly includes a discursive analytical approach to the data too and usually affords a focus on one or more specific themes. These three approaches are therefore highly complementary.

Through a combination of these approaches I wanted to offer a full account of the data, beginning from an overall mapping (thematic analysis), moving to an overview of how the topics are constructed (discourse analysis), and finally, to how these constructions come through at the level of the individual, as constructions of the self (narrative analysis). I believe that such a threefold analysis compensates for the inability of other, more positivist approaches to offer a detailed and in-depth view of children's experiences and perceptions of sexuality, risk or harm. The obvious limitation is that they only provide a small scale analysis and thus findings cannot be generalizable.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the methodology of my research, the method of conducting the study and the analytical approaches to my data. Alongside these, I also discussed the ethical implications of doing research on a sensitive topic such as young people's experiences with sexual content. Instead of listing the differences between qualitative and quantitative methodology I tried to show how my choice of conducting face-to-face interviews was perceived, what factors influenced the process and what ethical issues arose in the fieldwork. Decisions about collecting a sample with certain characteristics required more explicit discussion of the differences this would make to the data collected but also in relation to the research experience.

Finally, I tried to explain the methods through which I chose to analyse my data, in an attempt to offer a holistic view of the phenomenon I am studying. I first discussed the choice of thematic analysis as a method of organising my data and offering a preview of what I have found, and continued with the discussion of discourse analysis as a method of getting deeper into the meanings underlying my respondents' accounts. At the end of the chapter I discussed narrative analysis as the final analytical method offering a more holistic view of sample cases, in terms of how the respondents might be projecting themselves and constructing their sexual selves via telling their sexual stories.

Chapter 6: The big picture: A critical reading of the quantitative findings of 'communication risk' research

6.1. Introduction

This thesis is based on a qualitative, in–depth study which does not describe a representative part of a population. However, since 2007, I have been working as a part-time researcher and member of the EU Kids Online project, a large-scale internet safety project funded by the European Commission. During the second phase of the project, the network carried out a large-scale survey, which offers a representative picture of the European children's population. My aim is first, to present some of the findings of this work, in an attempt to provide a context for my own analysis. Second I hope to offer a critical reading of these findings and draw attention to some theoretical and methodological limitations of the 'communication risk' approach, and hence of the data. First, I briefly introduce the EU Kids Online Projects and the 'communication risk' approach (6.1). Following this, I discuss a preceding national project and its findings (6.2) and then the EU Kids Online II findings (6.3).

6.2. An introduction to the 'communication risk' approach

Arguably, the communication risk model is becoming the dominant paradigm in research on children's use of sexual content online. Although my study is about the media more broadly, and not only about the Internet, the accounts I collected include lengthy references to what happens online. Because I explore participants' experiences at a young age, the discussion of this paradigm becomes necessary as it typically offers extensive quantitative data about the topic.

6.2.1. Internet safety: the EC context

The communication risk approach arose as a response to the call for more robust and rigorous research on young people's use of online technologies (see Livingstone, 2003). The EU Kids Online study was the first pan-European study in this area, and it builds upon the UK Children Go Online project conducted in the early 2000s (Livingstone & Bober, 2003a). The EU Kids Online Network began by conducting research on children's online experiences in 21 European countries. According to Livingstone & Haddon (2012, p.3), 'the members of the network worked together first to scope the contours of the field, its strengths and gaps, and its methodological challenges and policy priorities'. All the projects within the network are funded through the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme. This is an initiative of the European Union that aims:

> to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies in order to inform the promotion among national and international stakeholders of a safer online environment of children (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.2).

This short quote seems to define the rationale of the research and the policy context within which it is conducted. The two dominant notions of knowledge and safety reflect the fact that the concerns are centrally to do with regulation. According to McKee (2013) what typically leads to increasing [governmental] regulation in this area is the image of the helpless child that must be protected from pornography. In terms of EU policy, it is taken for granted that there are certain things online that might entail negative or harmful consequences. In this respect, although it claims to take a child-centered approach, this study is actually targeted at adults (parents, educators and other stakeholders) and aims to inform them about what might be bad for their children, and how to protect them from it (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.9). Such research fundamentally reflects a perception of the child as incompetent and dependent (Alanen, 1992), and as susceptible to corrupt or problematic development.

There are some regulatory imperatives behind the funding but these policies also address particular audiences (e.g. de Haan & Livingstone, 2009; O'Neill & McLaughlin, 2011):

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One challenge of an evidence-based policy designed to reduce harm is to understand how children's online activities intersect with their wider online and offline environment so as to understand which factors increase or decrease the risk of harm (Livingstone et al. (2011, p.12)

The policy-oriented framing of research, and the funding for it, direct the research towards identifying risks, identifying ways of regulating/controlling the use of the medium and thus aiming to solve what has been considered problematic. It is argued that 'there are multiple points of intervention, and several may be pursued simultaneously' (ibid), reflecting a clear acknowledgement of the need to regulate children's use via intervention of various kinds. In this respect, the policy agenda is implicitly oriented toward effects; although the researchers also call for a more balanced and nuanced approach, rather than adopting a simplistic notion of direct effects. In particular, there is an emphasis on 'internet literacy' as a means of countering risk. From a Foucauldian perspective, this is clearly a 'governmental' strategy: instead of banning what is considered dangerous or corrupting for the masses (repression), individuals are to be taught the kind of life choices that will ensure their well being (the biopolitical and governmentality approaches). Further, the development of a common policy framework, which implicitly homogenises children's use, suggests that the rules established within a community are such that they cannot allow for heterogeneous, inappropriate activity. As this implies, the communication risk model develops within a specific 'risk oriented' policy framework defined by a binary distinction between knowledge and risk (which derives from the lack of knowledge).

6.2.2. The development of the EU Kids Online II project

The EU Kids Online II project started in 2009 with 25 participating countries, while by 2011 (the beginning of EU Kids Online III) the number had risen to 33. In the first phase of the project (EU Kids Online I), the network grouped, analysed and archived the available research on children's online practices across Europe. The researchers identified a list of 'risks' and 'opportunities' for children online, as reported in different studies. The classification was based on whether the

child was a recipient of content, an actor or a participant (see Table 1):

Table 1. Risks Online

Motives / Child's Role	Commercial Interests	Aggression	Sexuality	Values/Ideology
Content ('child as recipient')	Advertising, exploitation of personal information	Violent web content	Problematic sexual web content	Biased information, racism, blasphemy, health 'advice'
Contact ('child as participant')	More sophisticated exploitation, children tracked by advertising	Being harassed, staked, bullied	Being groomed, arranging for offline contacts	Being supplied with misinformation
Conduct ('child child as actor'	Illegal downloads, sending offensive Messages to peers	Cyberbullying someone else, happy slapping	Publishing porn	Providing misinformation

Source: Hasebrink et al. (2009), 'Comparing Children's online opportunities and risks across Europe'.

Attached to this table is a diagram including the impact of variables like usage and access as well as the potential negative consequences of these experiences (e.g. 'harm, anxiety, financial consequences') (Hasebrink et al., 2009, p.8). The table of online opportunities (reproduced below, Table 2), includes another diagram with the potentially positive consequences of online experiences (e.g. 'knowledge, career, civic engagement, creative skills') (ibid, p.9).

Table 2. Opportunities Online

Motives / Child's Role	Education and Learning	Participation and civic engagement	Creativity	Identity and social connection
Content ('child as recipient')	Educational resources	Global information	Diversity of resources	Advice (personal/health/ sexual etc)
Contact ('child as participant')	Contact with others who share one's interests	Exchange among interest groups	Being invited or inspired to participate in creative processes	Social networking, shared experiences with distant others
Conduct ('child as actor')	Self-initiated and collaborative forms of learning and education	Concrete forms of civic engagement	User-generated content creation	Expression of identity

Source: Hasebrink et al. (2009), 'Comparing Children's online opportunities and risks across Europe'.

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These tables are intended to offer an overview of children's possible activities and experiences online. These classifications are intended to be inclusive, such that almost all experiences could be included; and in this respect, they might be a useful research tool for future studies. Nevertheless, by classifying experiences either as risks or as opportunities, and by labeling their consequences either as positive or as negative, they clearly lead to a dichotomous, binary view. Within this context, online experiences are seen as necessarily either good or bad; such assumptions feed the already highly polarized public debate and justify ongoing regulatory strategies (Buckingham, 2013). Further, this framing of academic research is bound to serve the regulatory framework within which technologies and childhood itself are set: this is hardly surprising given the source of funding. The research is not, in this respect, simply a matter of information-gathering. In effect, it is part of a broader strategy whereby institutional bodies attempt to control the rapidly expanding and diversifying use of new technologies. Within this strategy, good technology is technology that enhances our knowledge, skills and literacy; technology that lacks those objectives might be bad. Alongside this, childhood implicitly appears as a status of incompetence - children lack knowledge and experiences and are in need of adult guidance to ensure that they experience a 'proper' childhood.

EU Kids Online I examined current methodological approaches to research and produced a methodological guide (Lobe et al., 2007) and a best practice guide (Lobe et al., 2008). Cross country analysis identified existing data about children's experiences in all participating countries, in terms of demographics, economic variables (Hasebrink et al., 2009) and the status of research in each country (Stald & Haddon, 2008; Staksrud et al., 2009). Finally, a policy report included recommendations to national stakeholders about children's safety online (de Haan & Livingstone, 2009).

EU Kids Online II involved a pan-European survey with a 'random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 across Europe and one of their parents' (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.5). 25 countries participated during Spring/Summer 2010 in this survey that was designed on the basis of the earlier UK Children Go Online project. EU Kids Online III, which is an ongoing project, aims to examine in a more detailed way children's experiences and understandings of risk - as defined by the researchers - although there is no data from this phase yet.

In what follows I introduce the preceding project UK Children Go Online and then discuss EU Kids Online II in more detail.

6.3. The UK Children Go Online Project

The UKCGO project developed out of the Young People and New Media project in 1997, in which a sample of 1,300 children were asked about their online practices using face-to-face, computer assisted interviews at home (Livingstone, 2002). Following this project, the UKCGO research focused - among other issues - on the apparent 'digital divide' in children's use of online technologies and the factors that might affect it (Livingstone & Bober, 2005a). It therefore raises issues of inequality in children's access to the Internet, arguing for example that 'increasing Internet penetration might increase rather than reduce inequalities' (ibid, p.6). Researchers also addressed issues related to media literacy, defined (following the definition of the UK media regulator Ofcom) in terms of 'access, understanding and creation' (Livingstone & Bober, 2005b, p.3). While the study's theoretical framework falls within mass communication research approaches, the researchers argue that UKCGO 'steers a course between polarised approaches' (Livingstone & Bober, 2003b, p.6), for example between skeptical and optimistic views of the impact of technology. They claim that their approach sees new media in relation to other media and as embedded in children's everyday social and cultural practices. They also claim to take a 'child-centered' approach, viewing children as active users of technology.

Conducted in 2003, the project focused on the online experiences of UK 9-19 year olds (Livingstone & Bober, 2005a, p.8). The sample consisted of 1511 children and 906 parents; researchers conducted focus groups with school students, face-to-face interviews and observations in homes with both children and their parents, and administered questionnaires to both children and parents (Livingstone & Bober, 2005c). The face-to-face questionnaire focused mostly on questions about sensitive topics such as sexual content. There was only one questionnaire, 77 pages long, for all young participants (Livingstone & Bober, 2003a). The

interviews took place at the participant's home where the child and the interviewer would use a laptop not only for answering questions but also to do the observational part of the survey.

There are several methodological points to be raised here. First, given that the participants had already had participated in a focus group and a family interview, they might well have been reluctant to complete a 77 page questionnaire. They might also have been inclined to answer less carefully in order to finish quickly. The questions regarding experiences with sexual content were apparently answered privately; however, the even discreet presence of the interviewer or the parent might have made the participants feel less comfortable with answering (see Livingstone & Bober, 2003a, p.33). Questions regarding sexual content followed questions about whether the participants had given out false identity or private personal details (e.g. Livingstone & Bober, 2003a, p.34), whether they had engaged in illegal behavior (e.g. 2003a, p.36) or whether they had been in physical or online contact with someone they had met online. Since all of the latter could be seen as potentially harmful, it is clear that porn (or sexual content) was also implicitly framed in this way.

The participants were introduced to the topic with the following instruction '*The next questions are about porn which is stuff meant for adults. For example nude people, rude and sexy pictures*' (ibid, p.42). 'Porn' in this context might imply a rather specific kind of sexual representations such as those found in popular adult sites. However, it would be difficult for the researchers to identify exactly what participants might have in mind when they hear this word, especially if they have not seen material of this kind. The term in itself is culturally specific and the participants would almost certainly know that it is defined (negatively) in moral and cultural terms. Also, the definition, while 'child friendly' (in simple language), also includes the pejorative term '*rude*' and the direct claim that it's '*meant for adults*' and hence not for 'you' (the child). So it might well be concluded, that it is by definition understood as a problem. Such instructions are obviously very likely to predispose participants' responses; and in Foucauldian terms, they clearly invoke public discourses that are designed to regulate both adults' and children's sexual conduct.
Here is another example:

Qporn When on the internet, have you have ever......? (Ended up on a porn site
ACCIDENTALLY when looking for something else, Visited a porn site ON PURPOSE,
Seen a pop-up advert for a porn site while doing something else, Received pornographic
junk mail by email/instant Messaging, Been sent porn from someone you know, Been sent
porn from someone you met on the internet) (Livingstone & Bober, 2003a, p.43).

This question might well predispose participants to answer in particular ways. For example, participants might think that if they had seen 'sexy and rude' pictures by accident (including content that someone sent them) then this is less wrong than seeing them on purpose. However, choosing the answer 'been sent from someone you met on the Internet' might be interpreted by the researchers as a grooming experience. Therefore, children might combine rudeness (offence) with someone intending to harm them. This may well lead to the profiling of a paedophile (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7).

Another example of problematic questioning is the following:

Qfeel. Last time you saw porn on the internet, how did you feel about it? (I didn't think
too much about it, I thought it was disgusting, I thought it was interesting, I wish I had
never seen it, I enjoyed it, I didn't like it) (ibid, p.45).

At this point the participants are asked to answer about feelings of disgust or enjoyment. However, there are more negative responses than positive ones. Also some potential responses are missing – for example, 'I thought it was boring'. However, boredom cannot be interpreted as a negative effect and thus would not support the argument that the content might be 'doing something' to the user. Given the emphasis on negative responses, and the definition of porn at the beginning of this section, participants might well assume that they were expected to answer negatively rather than positively.

Finally, here is a last question:

Qthink (445). Thinking back to when you first saw porn, would you say (I was too young to see it then, I was about the right age to see it then, It would have been OK if I'd seen it before then) (ibid, p.48).

This question clearly implies assumptions about effects that are based on a developmentalist position (i.e. that there are certain things that children should only see when 'ready' or 'old enough'). It is also asking for a kind of confession about doing something wrong. However, from a narrative analytical point of view, exploring why participants might have answered the way they did, might reveal information about how they shift between identities and what claims they make about themselves.

Moving on to the findings now, these are developed in relation to three major variables affecting online use: age, gender and class. All these relate to the question of access (further informed by the variables of frequency of accessing sexual content and place of access). According to the findings, a little more than half of participants who go online at least once a week say that they have encountered sexual content. About a third say they have found it accidentally whereas a tenth say they have deliberately visited a site and a tenth say they received sexual content from somebody they knew and 2% from somebody they did not know (Livingstone & Bober, 2004, p.29). When it comes to emotional responses, disgust and annoyance are the primary feelings reported (ibid, p.30). Age differences, especially between the youngest and the oldest age groups, are also reported: the older the children, the more experiences they have had. There are also differences in media: more say they saw such material online than in other media.

These findings are merely reported here, although they do raise interesting possibilities for further research. For example, it would be interesting to explore further how the experience is lived among different age groups. Especially in the case of the last finding, one could examine media-related differences in experiencing sexual content given the opportunities that the new medium offers for privatized and personalised use. Moreover, some children report that they were either indifferent or did not like sexual content. This indicates that a different methodological and analytical strategy (such as in depth interviews and discourse analysis) might offer a more insightful view of what these statistics mean. Feelings of disgust and joy would be

interesting to examine from a constructionist approach (cf. Buckingham, 1996). Although the researchers conducted focus groups and family interviews to go deeper into such issues of concern, the way in which they define terms such as 'porn' might lead to specific answers that are pre-defined by moral and cultural discourses about sexuality and sexual content. Here again, as this study was funded by regulatory bodies, telecommunication enterprises and charities (e.g. AOL, OfCOM, Childnet, NCH), such discourses might appear to frame the terms of the enquiry itself.

6.4. The EU Kids Online II project

EU Kids Online project II builds primarily on UKGO in attempting to map children's online practices and their experiences online. Taking the public debate into consideration, the network developed a classification of risks and opportunities, outlined above (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.15). Addressing the previously identified gaps in research and claiming to respond to the concerns expressed within the public debate (ibid; see also Livingstone, 2009), the network designed a survey for use with children (9-16 years old) and one of their parents. Questions about sexual content were included in a self-completed questionnaire (see Görzig, 2012 for a detailed presentation of the methodology). Researchers focused particularly on the 'subjective harm associated with' the risks identified (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.16). Recognising subjectivity in talking about harm requires an examination of the cultural and social factors that create the conditions in which someone will report feeling harmed. However, while the researchers acknowledge the 'subjective' nature of the accounts collected, at the same time they have a particular view of harm, informed by the policy-oriented objectives of the research. Therefore, in what follows my aim is to raise some questions regarding how the findings of this academic study relate to the public debate and to the work of regulatory bodies.

Livingstone & Haddon (2012, p.1) acknowledge that childhood has been 'framed by hopes and anxieties and by the tension between perceptions of continuity and change', while changes in how childhood is considered have been 'tracked by the academic research, influenced by policymaking and reflected upon by the public'. Their theoretical framework thus appears to

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build upon debates regarding childhood, risk and responsibility in the digital era (ibid, p.4). There is discussion of Beck's analysis of risk society, and of how the notion of risk develops within specific political and economic contexts, and is defined by social and cultural variables. On the face of it, their discussion appears to offer a balanced account of children's relation to the Internet, taking into account that the Internet and other technologies are socially defined and understood within particular contexts. They also acknowledge the need for children to adapt to new forms of social relations via online technologies (e.g. online friends, like-unlike), which differ in relation to children's age and socioeconomic status.

Nevertheless, the principal reason for the project's funding is the aim to inform the policy agenda. In this respect, it seems that there is a pre-existing agenda that informs both research design and the discussion of the findings. It also frames in a specific way the questions that will be asked and thus excludes other possibilities. This then has implications for researchers' reflexivity, and how they critically assess the research that they are asked to conduct. By definition, 'risk' entails the probability of harm (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012, p.7; Hansson, 2010); thus, both their theoretical hypotheses and their methodology are designed to produce findings that will specifically generate recommendations for stakeholders and families that will prevent harm and enhance children's protection from harm online (e.g. Nutley et al., 2007).

Livingstone and Haddon (2012, p.11) argue that the research aims to:

> explore a child-centered approach to children's experiences, perspectives and actions in relation to the internet, contextualising them within concentric circles of structuring social influences - family, community and culture.

Their model is based upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work, as presented in his book *The ecology of human development*, although it differs in that it is applied on three levels, that of the individual, of social mediations and of the national/cultural level (ibid). The methodological decisions taken and the analytical strategies followed might be expected to follow the working model offered above. However, the study is targeted at adults and regulatory bodies, and also

takes for granted that some experiences are by default risky and can be harmful for children; and in this respect, the approach adopted is not as child-centered as is claimed (ibid, p.2).

The methodology applied in the research is discussed in detail (see Görzig, 2012, and the various project deliverables), ranging from the context of the interview (e.g. place) and ethical issues (e.g. disclosing information about abuse) to the piloting process, and verbal phrasing of the questions and terms used (see also Livingstone et al., 2011, p.45). As I have already mentioned, children and a parent completed one questionnaire each. Parents were asked not to interfere at any point (Görzig, 2012). The parent's contribution was apparently only accepted if the child had language difficulties. Otherwise, it was up to the researcher to 'check [the] child's understanding, clarifying both questions and answers as needed' (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.45). Yet although parents were asked to be in a separate room, 62% of parents were present at the face-to-face interview with the child and 52% were present when the child was completing the self-completion questionnaire (Görzig, 2012). Although the presence of a parent might have made the child feel secure and relaxed, it might equally have discouraged them from answering questions in general, not just the sensitive ones (which were completed in a pen and paper form of questionnaire). Moreover, the presence of two adults rather than one, a stranger to the child and the child's parent, might in itself signify that there were aspects of the child's conduct that were likely to be problematic and needing to be controlled.

The length of the questionnaire is also an issue. Although it was originally designed to last 30 minutes, the average time of completion was 56 minutes (Görzig, 2012). It is always difficult to recruit respondents to participate in a lengthy survey, especially one for which they will not necessarily be reimbursed. In children's case, researchers have argued that it might be even harder to keep them interested, either because they might want to do other activities, or perhaps because they might see it as an investigation of their behaviour (and possibly worrying) (e.g. Galesic & Bosjnak, 2009; Berger, 1998). A questionnaire that lasts almost (or over) an hour to complete might exhaust participants, and lead to less focused answers – especially when combined with the implicitly coercive presence of the researcher and the parent.

Questions relating to sexual content were included in two types of self-completion questionnaires, one for children 9-11 years old and one for those aged 11-16 (Livingstone et al., 2010 a, b). Each questionnaire included a set of approximately 14 questions on this topic; these included information about the time, frequency, type, media of exposure, emotional responses and the possibility of harm. Researchers introduced the respondents to the topic with the following text:

> *In the past year, you will have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these might be obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex. You might never have seen anything like this, or you may have seen something like this on a mobile phone, in a magazine, on the TV, on a DVD or on the Internet.* (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.19; 2010b, p.19)

This definition appears to be an explicit and clear definition of what the term 'sexual' might involve. By contrast with UKCGO, the term 'pornographic' has been replaced by the term 'sexual', implying some recognition that 'pornographic' is a vague category. Although 'sexual' is a term with less negative connotations, its use nevertheless implies that sexuality may become problematic. Asking about sexual content in a self-completion questionnaire might by default signify that it is a problematic topic, no matter what definition researchers adopt. Having explained very broadly what is considered sexual in this study, the following questions then assess aspects such as specific content and response:

> *Which types of website have you seen things like this on in the LAST 12 MONTHS?(SNS site, pop-ups, video hosting site, adult site, gaming website, P2P site, other type)* (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.22; 2010b, p.22)

This question appears to cover all possible sites where an online user might see sexual representations. Pop-up images and videos, video hosting sites, and P2P sites appear to be popular platforms for sexual representation (see for example several case studies in Attwood (2010)). However, this broad definition might also imply a form of sexual representation found in art or sex education sites. Even so, participants might assume that researchers are asking about

specific types of popular representations (that is, 'porn') appearing in specific platforms. I would also suggest that asking about where someone has seen sexual content reflects a desire to identify websites where children might encounter such content. This means that certain types of sites are framed as risky or dangerous and it follows that children are to be guided towards avoiding using them.

Another problematic issue relates to what exactly participants are asked to report that they have encountered:

> *Which, if any, of these things have you seen on a website in the LAST 12 MONTHS?* (*images/videos of someone naked, images/videos of someone's 'private parts', images/videos of people having sex, images/video of movies that show sex in a violent way) (only 11-16 questionnaire*) (Livingstone et al., 2010b, p.23)

The clarification of what these representations might have been is reasonably comprehensive and also appears to be neutrally phrased, although one might still assume that they could be artistic or educational representations of nudity or sexuality. Furthermore, terms like 'private parts' and 'violent sex' invoke specific ethical discourses, which the participants might infer within this context. Thus, 'private' might signify that genitalia should be kept covered or hidden from the public eye. 'Violent sex' on the other hand, signifies that sexual content in the media is possibly violent and therefore, different from the sex taking place with a romantic relationship.

Another relevant assumption could be a link between emotional responses and the explicitness of the representation:

> *In the LAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen any things like this that have bothered you in any way? For example, made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen them?* (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.23; 2010b, p.24)

> *Thinking about the LAST TIME you were bothered by something like this, how upset did you feel about it (if at all)?* (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.24; 2010b, p.25)

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Thinking about this time, how long did you feel like that for? (11-16 only) (Livingstone et al., 2010b, p.26)

Did you do any of these things afterwards? (hope the problem would go away by itself, try to fix the problem, feel a bit guilty about what went wrong) (only 11-16) (ibid)

This question implies that having seen violent sex or private parts should have made respondents feel uncomfortable, bothered or upset. Suggesting that respondents might feel 'bothered' or 'upset' could possibly in itself generate negative responses and therefore they could be interpreting the experience as something that should not happen. These questions implicitly psychologise and individualise the experience rather than seeing it in a context of social or cultural practices. Respondents are asked what they did if they felt upset; but the possible responses to this question implicitly frame the experience as problematic. However, they are not asked to explain why, which means that the context within which this discomfort occurred is missing. Asking if the respondent felt 'a bit guilty about what went wrong' implies responsibility, and therefore a need for children to self-regulate; and a possible failure in this respect then might require the intervention of an adult.

The following question might lead to a similar assumption:

Again, thinking about this time, did you talk to anyone about what happened? If yes, who? (mother/father, brother/sister, friend, teacher, someone whose job is to help children ['police', 'social worker', 'adviser'], another adult I trust) (Livingstone et al., 2010a, p.25; 2010b, p.27)

Sharing the problematic experience with an adult, parent or expert might be interpreted to reflect a need for the problem to be solved by someone who has the ability to do so, unlike the child him- or herself. As this all implies, the questions implicitly – and sometimes quite explicitly – invoke a regulatory frame: experiencing sexual content is by definition problematic, children are implicitly defined as innocent and lacking in experience (e.g. Buckingham, 2011; Livingstone,

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2009), while adult intervention is deemed necessary in order for children's experiences to be supervised or controlled.

6.4.1. Findings

There are three groups of findings concerning access (which also includes variables of frequency and place of access). For instance daily use is related to greater online access, more opportunities and possibly a greater likelihood of experiencing risks (Mascheroni et al., 2012). Also, more privatized use may mean increased online skills or exposure to online risks (ibid.) but ownership of private online devices is not positively correlated with exposure to sexual content (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). It might be important to examine what everyday use means for different children; what is included in this daily routine, and possibly where experiences such as accessing sexual content might occur. Likewise, as we shall see, there seems to be no enquiry here into the possibility that children from different class positions, or of different genders, might interpret, perceive or define what counts as 'sexual' in different ways. The point here is that the object ('sex' or 'porn') is implicitly seen to remain constant, with only the dependent variable (demographics) changing.

6.4.1.1. Access to sexual content

According to the findings, 23% of the participants report that they have encountered sexual content in any medium (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). 15% of boys 9-12 years old and 13% of girls say they have seen sexual material either online or offline, while this was the case for 33% of boys and 28% of girls 13-16 years old. It seems that those reporting having seen sexual content represent a minority of one quarter of participants overall (Livingstone, et al., 2011, p.50-51). It appears that it is older children rather than younger who have such experiences, while gender differences are not especially significant. These findings to some extent confirm findings from previous studies, but here again there is need for a more detailed examination of how this 23% of children engages with the experience as well as the context in which it takes place.

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Further, 14% of the participants report encountering sexual content online (7% boys and 6% girls 9-12 years old; 24% boys and 17% girls 13-16 years old respectively). 12% of all children report having seen sexual content on TV, in a film, video or DVD, 7% in a magazine or a book, 3% in their mobile phone and 1% by Bluetooth (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.50). It seems that the Internet does not rank very high in the list of media. Even so, as children grow up their experiences with sexual content increase and there is also a positive correlation between age and experiences with sexual content online (see ibid, table 9). The researchers suggest that this is an indication that as children become more skillful online the possibility of experiencing sexual content increases (Mascheroni, Murru & Görzig, 2012). By contrast, effects research typically assumes that children's increasing interest in sexual content online is correlated with diversified interest in sexual representations, i.e. more hardcore content (e.g. Hald & Malamuth, 2008); although both conclusions are based on correlations rather than causal evidence.

While the project reports primarily focus on quantitative data, short quotations from interviews are often used alongside this, perhaps in order to make the text more concrete or more engaging. Yet this is often highly problematic. For example, an 11 year old girl from Turkey is quoted as follows: 'What really affects me and my psychology are the ones depicting rape and sexual acts' (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.50). I argue that such use of short, decontextualised quotes of this kind makes the interpretation and impact of findings even more problematic. Researchers do not provide further information, which would clarify the context within which sexual content 'affects' the person or its 'psychology' or the rationale behind this perception. They only aim at making the findings more attractive to the stakeholders (including parents and educators) and at pursuing policy-oriented goals.

When we look at the statistics, 8% of 11-12 year old children report that they have had such an experience online: 5% have seen images of naked people, 3% have seen people having sex and another 3% have seen genitalia, while 1% have seen depictions of violent sex (ibid, p.52). It would be therefore interesting to examine the correlation between the quote above and the statistical findings. In the case of the girl above, a researcher might be interested to ask 'Have you seen such a depiction of sex?' If the child had not had such an experience, then it would be interesting to see the discourses used when talking about mediated sex and how these relate to

the wider public debate around it. In this respect, the girl's use of terms like 'affect' and 'psychology' is particularly interesting, since it implicitly invokes discourses about effects; while the term 'rape' implies violence and criminal activity which are also popularly associated with pornography. We should also consider that this answer is given by a female from Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, where access to such material is routinely blocked. The point here is that qualitative evidence of this kind does not speak for itself, and it can be actively misleading. While the authors argue that discourses like the one above need to be analysed within a broader sociocultural context (Hasebrink et al., 2009), this is not always carried through in the reports themselves.

Equally, questions can be raised about how the statistical findings here should be read and understood. For example, when we look at a different age group, it appears that 11% of 13-14 year olds report having seen images or videos featuring naked people, 8% having seen people having sex, 7% having seen people's genitalia and 2% having seen violent sex (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.52). Clearly, there are different kinds of depictions that might be seen; yet the choices given to the respondents, and the encouragement to tick as many boxes as they need (Livingstone et al., 2010, p.23), might be confusing for the children. For example, a given pornographic video is likely at the same time to show someone naked, people having sex, people showing their genitalia and it might also show sex in a violent way (e.g. spanking). However, Given that researchers have not defined what could be violent, respondents' idea of what is violent might vary Along the same lines, an art video might depict naked people, having sex and showing their genitalia, while the activity could possibly include a kind of violence. Although the researchers have considered this possibility and weighted their statistics accordingly, further explanation is clearly needed here.

6.4.1.2. Statistics about self-perceived harm

In relation to self-reported harm, 32% of children who have seen sexual content online (14%) report being 'bothered' by it (figure 37, Livingstone et al., 2011, p.57). Girls appear to be slightly more 'bothered' than boys and this is also the case for younger children (56% of 9-10 years old) as compared with older ones (e.g. 42% of those 11-12; 32% of those 13-14; 24% of 15-16 years old). As children grow up they report being bothered by such an experience to a lesser extent. It might be assumed that in teenage life children begin exploring their sexuality, and that gender and peer dynamics at this age are bound to involve issues about sex and sexuality. Yet a further examination of the context of the experience is clearly needed here. For example, here is a girl's response to what might be harmful when online, quoted in the study:

> *I don't know. I think absolutely nothing. There isn't any kind of thing that you can't get over in less than...10 seconds and forget about until tomorrow (Girl, 14, Romania)*
> (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.47).

This girl is a teenager from Romania, where the majority of citizens are Orthodox, coming from a working or middle class background. In this context, one might expect that children might be bothered to a greater extent because of the moral values that frame the public debate. Yet this quotation in itself reveals very little. What is clearly needed is for researchers to discuss such responses outside the context of a structured interview. It is possible that this girl's denial reflects much broader or more complex aspects of identity or of her perception of risk and harm.

Likewise, it is reported that 59% of children who were upset by sexual content online said they got over it straight away, while 33% of the respondents said it took a few days, 6% a few weeks and 3% a couple of months. The differences between boys and girls here do not appear to be significant and the same applies pretty much for both age and class variables (see ibid. figure 39). Yet there might be two points for consideration regarding this finding. First, it may be that simply asking how long the respondents were 'bothered' by the experience might in itself imply that watching sexual content is a problem and should be dealt with as such. Second, the statistics provide only a superficial, descriptive indication of that fact that a certain number of people

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report that for some (unexplained) reason they have been 'bothered' (in some vaguely defined way) by some kind of sexual representation (the nature of which is not specified). The reasons for being 'bothered', the context of this experience, the nature of the experience and the thing that prompted it remain unknown. While such findings may provide the scientific aura of statistical certainty, they ultimately explain very little about the social world.

Further, according to the statistics, 16% of the participants said they felt very upset, 28% felt fairly upset, 41% felt a bit upset and 15% did not feel upset at all as a result of seeing sexual material (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.58). Feeling upset can be both a personal and a social emotion, not least because the experience of sexual content is closely related to the public debate around pornography. It is therefore possible that someone reporting that they are 'upset' might be related to the fact that sexual content is labeled as 'taboo' or 'forbidden knowledge' – or indeed because a parent or another adult caught the user watching such content. They could be upset, for example, because they were concerned that they might be discovered, or because they were somehow embarrassed. Here again, we are given another decontextualised quotation, this time of a boy's response regarding the sources of 'bothersome' experiences:

> *Young people in my age can be bothered by announcement of the internet paedophiles*
> *and large quantities of pornography (Boy, 16, Estonia)* (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.55)

This quotation is quite ambiguous: it is not clear whether it is the actual representations that bother the respondent or the public debate around them. There is frequently an association between paedophiles and increasing amounts of pornography online in the news. It could be the case that children come across these news reports to a greater extent than they do actual sexual representations. Rather than taking this quote at face value, as an indication of being 'bothered', we could also look at it through different analytical lenses. From a narrative analytical perspective, it might be a claim for a particular subject position: the respondent might be seeking to present himself as a 'responsible' young person concerned about the impact of the media on other young people. From a discourse analysis perspective, the participant might be invoking socially available discourses about media effects – although whether these are about news ('announcements') or about pornography itself is unclear. Exploring the data from these kinds of

perspectives raises questions about how the pubic debate is developed and how children reproduce the knowledge they are exposed to. One could even argue that it is the public debate that needs to be regulated in the same way as bodies attempt to regulate the Internet or the pornography industry. After all, if children appear to be upset by what they hear about pornography and not so much by what they actually see, then one might assume that this fear of what one could *possibly* see online is a motivation for what Foucault analyses as forms of self-surveillance or self-governing.

The final set of findings relates to what the respondents said they did after having been 'bothered' by seeing sexual content: 26% said they deleted any messages from the person that sent it; 25% stopped using the internet for a while; 23% blocked the person who sent the material; 19% changed filter/contact settings; and 15% reported the problem online (Livingstone et al., 2011, p.60). These findings raise important issues regarding the effectiveness of online practices when something is found to be 'bothersome'. They also illustrate to some extent possible strategies that might prevent future harmful experiences. However, they also reinforce the implicit point that watching sexual content is understood as potentially problematic by definition and that it requires knowledge of coping strategies on behalf of children and attempts on the part of institutional bodies to regulate the internet. Here again, the findings of the research, while purporting to be child-centred, seem to derive from, and speak back to, an adult-centred, regulatory framework.

6.5. Conclusion

To some extent, the findings of this kind of research are fairly predictable. For example, it shows that there is a certain number of children who have experiences with sexual content online. In general, older children (13-18) have had more experiences than younger ones (9-12); and some children (more younger than older) report that they have been 'bothered' by the experience. However, some other findings are perhaps less predictable; for instance there is not a significant gender difference concerning access between boys and girls.

While this research is to a large extent framed by public and political concerns about risk, some of its key findings would seem to challenge these concerns. First, the number of children who have encountered sexual content is significantly smaller than the figures frequently presented in the media or in campaigns about children's protection from pornography. In this sense, it seems that the extent of children's experiences has been significantly overstated within the public debate. Second, of those who have encountered sexual content, few report that they were 'bothered' by the experience and a significant number report that they could cope with it effectively (Tsaliki, 2011), in the sense that they were aware of how to cope with what bothered them or what was thought inappropriate for them to see. This might suggest that indicates that children's internet literacy - or at least their ability to regulate their own use of the internet effectively - has been underestimated.

While these findings provide some useful indications of the 'big picture' – and hence a valuable context in which to set my own, much smaller-scale study – they are also limited by virtue of the ways in which the research is framed. As I have argued, these studies are primarily intended to generate proof for policy makers in their attempts to regulate online communication - which is the preliminary reason for the funding they receive. The risk perspective is developed within a policy framework that defines their topic of study theoretically and methodologically. As a result, contextual information about children's experiences might be missing because policy-makers are mostly interested in numbers that provide evidence that support any intended policy plans. Although the EUKGO survey provides large amounts of data about 25 countries, allowing for cross-national comparisons, this remains on a largely descriptive level. Although contextual

information is promised as an outcome of the analysis of the EU Kids Online III qualitative data, the main imperatives to do with risk and harm remain the same.

Buckingham (2013) argues that researchers looking at children and media need to consider who their research addresses, and who they aim to address. It is fairly clear how the EU Kids Online projects are designed to respond to the public debate. The study claims to adopt an innovative, robust and rigorous type of research, and to take a child-centered approach. However, it transpires that it is designed for stakeholders and seeks to inform adults rather than children. It effectively requires children to acknowledge traits of problematic behaviour online, either as alleged 'victims' or as 'perpetrators'; such responses are discussed as evidence for further political regulation, not only of the internet but also of childhood. Its apparently child-friendly questions imply that children 'lack' some sort of capacity to be respondents to research who are equal to adults. Such an assumption links to Lesko's (2001) argument that children are seen as a distinct social category, understood in fixed terms of 'innocence', 'lack of capacities' and 'lack of experiences'. Although in the EU Kids Online survey adults are not speaking on behalf of them (or at least not entirely), the research design pre-determines children's position as being 'at risk' because of their innocence and lack of experience. As such it effectively denies their social and technological agency to engage with cultural practices. Children are not given the opportunity to account for their own experiences; instead they choose from a list of pre-determined answers that reflect adult perceptions about them. The format and structure of the questionnaire, where questions are phrased in particular ways and preclude certain answers, clearly indicates that researchers are looking for policy-friendly evidence about children online. To this extent, it is very problematic to claim that this is research that gives voice to children.

Ultimately, studies like EU Kids Online add limited new data to the existing body of knowledge. However, this research fails to engage in a critical assessment of existing knowledge or of dominant perceptions about childhood and sexuality. It fails to take account of children's own perspectives, and the meanings and pleasures they derive from their media experiences. As such, the research is wholly framed by the existing public debate about children's experiences and the dominant perception of 'children at risk'. Without problematizing established notions about childhood, any data gathered in this context are bound to be constrained by a limited view of

childhood (Skolnick, 1976). An alternative, critical approach to childhood research would require us, as Alanen (1992, p.10) argues, 'to consider a familiar subject in unfamiliar ways'. In the chapters that follow I intend to pursue this alternative approach by means of a detailed, multi-faceted analysis of my own empirical data.

Chapter 7: 'What is this story all about?' A thematic approach to the data

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I wish to offer an overview of the substantive topics that arose through my participants' accounts. I here examine my first research question about what people prioritise in talking about sexuality. This is a largely descriptive account of my data, which aims to introduce my participants to the reader before moving to a more detailed analysis. First, I discuss the analytical approach to the data (7.1); I then provide a discussion of the sources of sexual knowledge available to my participants (7.2) and follow this with a discussion of their descriptions of the representations they consider to be sexual (7.3). Finally, I discuss their emotional responses to their first experiences (7.4), and how they account for ways of engaging with sexual content (7.5).

7.2. The thematic approach

Thematic analysis offers a straightforward way of organising data into thematic topics making it easier to approach. For the purposes of this chapter, I have identified topics that my participants mentioned and have grouped them into key issues. One issue that I seek to explore is the information about sexuality that is available to young people from sources other than media, since this offers a picture of the wider context within which they learn about sexuality. Another issue is how they interpret particular representations or forms of sexual content. In addressing these issues of context and content, I will seek to draw connections between individual accounts and more broadly available discourses about sexuality and sexual content in the media.

7.3. Sources of sexual knowledge

Counting is a common characteristic of empiricist research and has not been highly valued within interpretative traditions (Murdock, 1997). However, I find counting a useful way of mapping my data, even though it comes from a limited sample. Following Murdock (1997) and Williams (1980, p.47), I argue that counting aspects of my data will not reduce the complexity of my analysis of 'the nature of practice and then its conditions'; it will instead provide an overview of how my participants' accounts of their practices are patterned. A quantitative researcher might challenge this approach by arguing that I am quantifying qualitative data that have not necessarily derived from asking exactly the same question to each participant; however, the fact that I have grouped the data with certain thematic codes allows me to provide a broad idea of how many individuals refer to certain themes.

Although counting qualitative data may not allow for generalizations – because of the small size of the sample - it does at least provide a more organized view of the specific data and of the way the sample 'behaves'. While a quantitative approach to qualitative data does not necessarily identify reliable patterns, it nonetheless offers a micro-picture of how the majority or minority (boys vs. girls; lower SES vs. middle SES) of participants respond to the issue. This might also provide space for generating hypotheses about bigger populations, for example if compared with a bigger group of a larger study; although my main aim here is to provide a mapping of this small sample and help the reader to gain an overview of the data.

More than half of the participants mentioned sources of sexual knowledge other than mediated sexual content. More specifically, they refer to sex as a topic of knowledge that pre-existed their encounters with sexual representations in media. They either discuss what they had learnt about it as children, or state that they had a blurry perception of it as something adults do, or mention their perceptions of non-explicit representations in mainstream media (e.g. cinematic representations of love and romance, reports of celebrities' sex lives in the media). They also refer to it as a topic of knowledge in sex education at school, or to their parents' guidance about sexual health and safety.

7.3.1.Finding out about sex

As a response to my asking about having prior knowledge regarding sex, Manos (22, EL) mentions:

[1.01] […] Well, when I was in the 4th class of primary school, we asked our teacher
[1.02] «how are children made?» and he described sex as an activity when «a man's
[1.03] penis enters a woman's vagina». He didn't give us more information, but I
[1.04] think all of us understood.

Manos reports turning to an educational agency to learn about sex [1.01]. In Greece, there is no curriculum for sex education and therefore, it is the parents', teacher's or children's own responsibility to learn about sex. In Manos's case, knowledge about sex came prior to his experiences with sexual content in the media (he had his first experience of this at the age of 14). Unlike Manos, George (17, UK) reported that his knowledge of sex came primarily through sex education at school ('I was taught all this at school, so we did have, like sexual health classes at school. So obviously we learn about sex, how to have safe sex and that').

Lea (18, UK) reported that the idea of sex has always been present in her individual set of norms, deriving from her upbringing:

[2.01] […] It is something that is incorporated in you, I think... that it is...sex has
[2.02] always been, […] well, eh, it is a bit different, but in older times it was eh, a
[2.03] sin to have sex, and I think that that still lies in us, even if we have become
[2.04] more open about it...but it is a touchy subject, and you don't want to share it
[2.05] with too many [people], it is very personal.

According to her, the association of sex with morality is still embedded in people's sets of values [2.02-2.03]. Gitte (19, DK) also mentions that '*it's just something that you've always been taught, what's right and what isn't*', implying an association of sexual content with unacceptable behaviour. Lea is possibly reflecting on the moral notion that sex is acceptable only if it happens

for reasons of reproduction (Rose, 1999). At this stage, she summarizes the taboo nature of sexual activity, and conceptualizes it as a topic that is spoken of only in certain circumstances, within a group of people who trust each other [2.04-2.05]. Thus, sex talk requires legitimate agency (trust), in order to be shared.

Richard (21, UK) raises an example of the moral context in which sex is acceptable:

[3.01] The difference is that I was born in a Christian home so I have very different
[3.02] views [...] I don't believe in sex before marriage, so I'm not having sex, I
[3.03] believe it's wrong [...], I don't think that porn is right, so [...] I felt bad about
[3.04] watching porn.

Richard is mentioning his religious upbringing in his reporting of a certain set of beliefs with which he was brought up, which included the notion of sex being a sin if it happens before marriage [3.03-3.04]. He also relates this to watching sexual content. He then associates watching sexual content with sexual activity and thus implicitly defines it as a moral mistake akin to having sex before marriage [3.02]. Although this thesis does not provide the space for generalisations regarding religious groups' perceptions of sexuality, I discuss the matter later on. In my sample Richard, Elisabeth (20, UK) and Kate (19, UK) make specific references to the impact of religion in their upbringing. However, even though most of the participants do not claim to be religious, their knowledge about sex has been in many cases developed within a broadly moral context.

In the same terms as Lea, Ellie (22, EL) reports on embedded ideas about sex being invoked via media representations of love and romance:

[4.01] There was always a kind of knowledge, you know. I mean, even when
[4.02] watching a kiss on TV you were thinking that something romantic/ erotic was
[4.03] going on [...] you would see naked people in a bed and you would understand.

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For her, representations of intimacy on TV appear to connect with, or to mediate, this embedded knowledge [4.01-4.02]: her existing knowledge of sex is confirmed by mainstream representations of sexuality. Kissing, nudity and romantic activity between people in a bedroom are seen to signify sex, or at least something implying affection and romance: and this reflects reflect the dominant, iconic prototype of a romantic relationship, of love, to which individuals are exposed from a young age (e.g. watching their parents' displays of affection towards each other).

On another level, young people are also exposed to a kind of meta-knowledge about their relationship with sexual content, from platforms such as media. Bragg and Buckingham (2009, p.132) note: 'all the young people we talked to showed an acute awareness of the public debate about their relationship to sexual media'. Specifically in relation to sexual content, Jenny (17, UK) reports the existence of a big debate concerning children's experiences:

There's always a massive debate whether it should be right or wrong, especially when there're young children or people that are vulnerable.

Jenny reports discussions regarding children's sexuality being available to young people too. There is a paradox here: on one side, media are constructing children as sexual, and suggest ways of protecting them from their own sexuality. On the other side, children are exposed to these debates, and such activity (their interest in news) is celebrated as an indication of constructive media literacy. The consequence of this is that children do eventually come across information suggesting that they are inherently sexual. This information however assumes that they should be protected from or learn to control their sexuality. These conflicting types of information indicate that we grow up exposed to different (and potentially contradictory) conceptual understandings about sexuality; yet in each case, children are understood as a distinct social category when it comes to sexuality, in the same way as they are considered as 'other' in relation to adults in general (Alanen, 1992).

Three key points arise so far: people learn about sex in particular contexts - at school, via media, from family, or through established knowledge informed by religious or other moral discourses. They 'know' about sex – even if they have a blurred perception of it - long before they have any

encounters with sexual content in the media. And finally, they become aware of the fact that they are sexual (or at least potentially sexual) beings from media, and are exposed to debates about whether they should see sex in the media. There is then some sort of existing cultural and social knowledge, as well as a form of media literacy, which young people can use to reflect critically on the media messages available to them.

7.3.2. Media framing of sexuality

Most of the framing of children's experiences with sexual content within the mainstream media and the wider public debate comes down to the two main issues: child pornography and the sexualisation of childhood (Bailey, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010). Children's own sexuality thus becomes, by default, a problematic topic. A number of participants account for the negative framing of sexual knowledge, and the notions of abnormality and illegality that appear within mainstream media context. Some of them discuss the mass availability of sexual or sexualised content in media:

[1.01] It's not like, before, that they had to stay awake till late, or to look for it, or
[1.02] dad's magazines in the drawer. We can log in anywhere, and it's easy, TV,
[1.03] internet, etc, so to an extent we think it's normal.

Nikolas (19, EL) reports on children's exposure to more representations of sexuality in comparison with the past [1.01]. He asserts that media provide children with many different representations of sexuality, some of which are most probably explicit [1.02-1.03]. The same applies to Jenny (17, UK), who claims that she has been brought up with information about sexuality being spread across news media:

[2.01] I think I've grown up with it being in the news, uhm, famous celebrities making
[2.02] their own porn tapes, I think it's accepted, even if probably it's classed to a lot
[2.03] of people as wrong.

Jenny seems to agree with Nikolas that sexual knowledge is something she has been brought up with [2.01], implying that such knowledge is embedded in popular culture. She appears to have a clear idea of the ambivalent nature of sexuality in the public debate as she is commenting that although for several people exposure to sexuality in the public eye is unacceptable, it is something she is used to encountering in the news media [2.02-2.03]. Other participants such as Kate (19, UK) (in relation to music videos, and the programme *Sexetera*) and Tara (20, UK) (in relation to advertisements) also made references to mainstream media in their discussion about sexual representations.

Popular media campaigns against pornography repeatedly mention incidents of child sexual abuse or child pornography possession. In a study I conducted with Tsaliki (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2008), we found that 30% of press media coverage about sexual content in Greece was concerned with child pornography. We discussed how child pornography has almost become a mainstream type of sexual content in the media agenda, and how terms such as sexuality and pornography are interchangeably related to concepts of childhood, womanhood and sexual abuse. As a result it is not clear in the press whether children watch sexual content or child pornographic content, or whether they somehow become themselves victims of child pornographers. Interestingly, however, only a limited number of my participants related the term 'illegal' to types of content such as child pornography; and most of their experiences were of legal pornography, or of sexual content in mainstream media. Out of the twenty-six participants only Gitte (19, DK), Jenny (17, UK), and Marios (20, EL) mentioned specific types of illegal content when asked. The remaining references to the topic were usually the result of a more specific question based on the respondents' accounts, for example references to the word 'paedophile':

There has been stories before about paedophiles, that they've been watching illegal sex on the internet, with children.

Here George (17, UK) refers to a profile of the paedophile that fits with the dominant media framing. Likewise, John (17, UK) states that '*You'll hear about child porn or stuff like that, some freaks have been downloading pictures or something, you always hear about that on TV or*

radio'. As John points out, on one side there are the 'freaks', those who according to allegations use child pornography; on the other side, there must be then someone who is producing this content, allegedly, a predator. A quick look at media coverage reveals a blurry profiling of the alleged predators as individuals who possess child pornography (e.g. Freeman, 2013; Cafe, 2013a, b). However, the profile of the user of child pornography matches the profile of a paedophile, which is also indicated by what George mentions later:

[3.01] Yeah, paedophiles watch the online sex, they find it interesting to go and
[3.02] watch it online and then try and find gals and talk to the gals. So that's who
[3.03] they find, that's how they find the way to do it.

In fact according to Burn & Willett, children are frequently exposed to 'sensationalist stories about, for example, what happens with girls who enter chat rooms' (2004, p.48), which enter children's pool of knowledge about sex and are asserted in their accounts. The same study confirms that paedophile activity is associated with pornography and yet also in some cases with computer viruses – suggesting that children may have only a vague notion of what paedophilia entails. Such an agenda is further confirmed in Greek children's accounts of risk during the EU Kids Online III qualitative study (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2013b). Their accounts of such stories reflect what Burn & Willett (2004) call a kind of folkloric discourse, incorporating events that are considered to illustrate social or individual problems. It seems then that the participants' perception of users of sexual content online reflects to an extent the way the topic is covered in the public debate[3.01-3.02]; and this in turn reflects a construction of sexuality in public arenas defined in terms of an overall notion of 'danger', 'harm' and 'unhealthiness'.

Finally, Elisabeth (20, UK) makes a more general statement about illegal content:

Like, you hear about the illegal stuff in the media, and with the illegal stuff, people are like, in general all of it, it's bad.

Elisabeth seems to be accounting for the hyperbolic nature of constructions of sexual content within the media. Whether in terms of sexualization or child pornography, it becomes clear from

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this evidence that children get an idea of how sexuality is publicly framed as something problematic.

Here I have shown that participants tend to work within ready-made discursive frameworks when accounting for media representations or for certain aspects of human sexuality that are socially condemned. Sexuality is regarded also in health terms and the view of sexual content as problematic is associated with illegal practices like child pornography or sexual abuse. Moreover, the construction of paedophile activity is gendered and females are thought of as the potential victims. The participants' awareness of the public debate about children's exposure to sexual content or the problematic nature of children's sexuality is another indication that they account for sexuality in terms of dominant media frames.

7.3.3 Parental mediation in sexual matters

The issue of sex talk within the family has long been a topic of inquiry for health and psychology researchers (see Fisher, 1986; Afifi et al., 2008). In this study seventeen out of twenty six of the participants discussed parental mediation when it comes to sexuality in one way or another. Four of them addressed the lack of discussions about sex with their parents in contrast to two female participants who mentioned their parents' advice regarding safety in sex. By contrast, eight of them reported knowing that their parents positioned themselves negatively towards sexual content, in comparison to three who described instances that allowed them the assumption that their parents were more relaxed.

In my study, talking or not talking about sex was in most cases related to watching sexual content:

[1.01] Parents don't talk at all about it [sex] so you don't know even the basics if you
[1.02] don't watch sexual content. No-one discusses it in the family, which is a
[1.03] mistake, cause they make kids turn to illegal stuff too and abnormal stuff, and
[1.04] stuff that is not reasonable or for their age. (Eleni, 19, EL)

Here Eleni is relating children's exposure to illegal or less mainstream types of content to the fact that parents do not talk about sex with them [1.01; 1.03]. Meanwhile, Ellie (22, EL) implies that sexual content might serve as a learning resource for children, in their attempt to find information about sex:

But then, it was also that I had to understand what is going to happen to me, I felt that as nobody is going to explain it to me I have to do it [i.e. watch explicit sexual content].

Harry (20, UK) is another individual who said he had to learn about sex from sexual content because of a 'sheltered upbringing':

[2.01] You know, I didn't have a brother or sister to show me, whereas with my
[2.02] parents I didn't have a relationship where I could talk about it, so my
[2.03] upbringing was quite sheltered but I made effort to do it [find out] myself.

For him, there are distinct family roles when it comes to learning about sexuality [2.01-2.02]. He reports that if he had had siblings he might have had access to sexual knowledge via another agent. The reality though - as reported - is that as an only child he could not turn to his parents to provide him with any kind of relevant information and therefore, explored the field by himself [2.03].

Nikolas (19, EL) attempts to offer an explanation of why he thinks his parents avoided talking to him about sex:

[…]because of my age my parents didn't mention stuff for adults; I remember them saying 'you won't get it, when you grow up you'll learn'; they might have been afraid of scaring me.

Nikolas raises the issue of children's lack of agency to understand and negotiate matters of sexuality, and is possibly using this as a means to explain why his parents kept sexual knowledge

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a secret from him. Children's status as 'innocent' is typically used as a rationale for excluding them from access to any kind of sexual knowledge (see Buckingham & Bragg, 2004).

On the other hand, two participants mentioned parental discussions about safe sex. Trine (19, DK) reports having been informed about pregnancy and sexual activity:

I have talked about it when I was younger, when we had that, 'obviously we need to talk to you before you go to bed with anybody, a talk about the flower and the bee', or whatever you call it.

Tara (20, UK) also mentions that her parents talked to her about safe sex at a certain point in her teenage life ('*yeah in terms of like about being safe… mostly just about like, the sex act*'). In other participants' cases, such as in Location C, sex education was a topic covered at school and thus did not come up through their accounts of family life to a great extent.

Nevertheless, most of the participants accounted for their parents' attitudes towards sexual content in the media as an issue that could be related to whether they had or had not discussed about sex with them. In that respect, some respondents described the degree of conservativeness of their parents. Such comments were made by Lea (18, DK):

'*I believe that they had a bit negative opinion about it, they are a bit conservative*'

and Amalia (18, DK):

'*my parents are very conservative, so if they have been always commenting on music videos and people on the street who should dress more and stuff like that*'.

Some others accounted for the shame with which sexual content is perceived, providing a moral context for considering sexuality within the family:

Manos (22, EL): …parents, uncles, aunties, you know, relatives, teachers and so on; […] it's that, the sense of being ashamed'.

Kate (19, UK): My mum always tried to keep us, like, I remember her fast forwarding through stuff, [...] and has always been like, 'oh, this is horrible, turn it over'.

In contrast, other participants discussed their parents' negative responses towards the sex industry as a commercial market. Thus, Ken (18, UK) talks about the profits made by producers of sexual content ('*[...] they kinda said it's fake, [...], it's like, not meaningful and it's all just done for the money'*; while John (17, UK) mentions his mother's comment on the aesthetics: *'she normally just says 'she's ugly' and judges them [...]'*).

On the other hand, three respondents presented their parents' positioning as rather neutral, either because of their own use of sexual content ('*I don't think they are negative about it because they have porn themselves (laughs)'*, Trine, 19, DK) or because of being generally more open towards the topic, as in the case of Marios (20, EL); '*my mother had found some movies and did a general discussion with me,[...] she showed some sort of understanding, [...], my folks are open'*.

I have shown here that my participants frequently refer to their parents' perceptions of sexuality and sexual content in the media in their accounts, representing it as a form of parental mediation or influence in the process of governing their own sexuality. Although I cannot argue that those who come from more conservative family environments turn more easily or not to sexual media, there is indication in some instances that their accounts about sexual content are constructed in different, more critical ways. Their accounts focus on the need for protection while growing up, in which sexual knowledge is kept at a safe distance; and the need for children to be provided with certain knowledge about romance and love, which usually comes from representations of affection within the family or in media. However, there is another type of family where discussions about safety or more open perceptions about sex are circulated; and in this respect, my participants operate a binary distinction between 'conservatism' and 'liberalism' in sex talk, around which they develop their own perceptions about sex. The next set of topics discussed concerns my respondents' experiences of sexual content more directly. I consider their accounts of what kinds of sexual content they have come across, how they felt the first time they saw something sexual and how they have engaged with it more broadly.

7.4. Context of the experience

As discussed in Chapter 2, mainstream researchers in the effects and communication risk paradigms have typically defined sexually explicit material or pornography in terms of the intention to create sexual arousal (e.g. Malamuth, 2001) or as a matter of 'obvious' representations of nudity and sexual behaviour (e.g. Livingstone et al., 2010a,b). However, even in this kind of research it is not clear whether respondents share the same definitions. In their study, *Defining Violence,* Morrison et al. (1999) showed that people's responses to 'violent' media are characterized by different definitions of violence. As I have discussed so far, there is an analogy here with defining sex or pornography.

Another aspect of the debate concerns the internet, which is assumed to be the primary source of sexual content (e.g. Flood, 2009b, p.135). Researchers within the effects tradition have been concerned about intentional or accidental exposure to sexual content (Wolak et al., 2007) in an attempt to form policy-based recommendations about children's safety online. Since this is a key issue in the debate, I will be presenting some data on how my participants account for the nature of their experience as accidental or intentional. In this study eighteen out of the twenty six participants say they have seen sexual content online; ten have either seen it offline only or both online and offline. Nine participants report that the experience was accidental, and nine say they looked for content themselves. The remaining eight do not mention whether this was deliberate or accidental.

I grouped my respondents' descriptions firstly in relation to the medium of representation. For example, five respondents account for their first experiences with photographs of sexual content; another five mention having at some point seen videos of heterosexual sexual activity but do not refer to these experiences as the first ones. Another two mention coming across sex services adverts both online and offline. Finally, two referred to reading short stories. (Not every respondent necessarily mentions a medium in which they encountered sexual content, and this is why the total number is not 26.)

How exactly do they classify sexual content however? What are the popular categories a user may come across when looking for content? In most pornography search engines one will find categories such as 'amateur', 'threesome', 'anal', 'Asian', 'bisexual', 'fetish', 'funny', 'gay', 'group sex', 'lesbian', and 'bondage', among the most popular ones. This is just a gross classification of the types of content users might find online. There are different classifications of content, not only within the industry, but also among participants. However, the data show that most participants adopt some of these popular classifications when they talk about it. As I have noted, academic research within the field of 'porn studies' has focused on a range of different genres and sub-genres, and sexual tastes or communities (see Chapter 3).

My participants were aware of certain types of activity such as anal, group or homosexual sex, and some of them even know about fetish or sex toys activities, although they did not always use these exact terms to define them. In our Greek Porn Project with Tsaliki (Chronaki & Tsaliki, 2013a), we have discussed how sexual taste in pornographic content draws on two types of representations: one is reflecting a kind of relationship between those involved or implies romance between a man and a woman (the dominant heterosexual model). The other is the choice of transgressive forms of sexual practice (anal, orgies, threesome, homosexual) reflecting the inherently transgressive, socially condemned nature of pornography. So the very nature of pornography as a genre that presents socially unacceptable sexual practices, and the fact that it sometimes visualizes fantasies (of transgressive practices), makes such representations pleasurable for some potential members of the audience, although not necessarily for all. By contrast with popular assumptions that the representations children come across online are always violent or aggressive, my participants frequently mention types of practices (e.g. romantic sex) that cannot be described in these terms.

7.4.1. Pictorial representations

Manos (22, EL) accounts for his first experience with pictures of sexual content at an internet cafe with a friend:

It was at high school, […], I was with a friend at an internet cafe and […] we were online and got into a site that had pictures, uhm, I guess from porn movies, of sexual intercourse.

Manos is possibly describing explicit sexual activity of two or more individuals of the kind appearing in popular platforms with sexual content (e.g. Youporn) where genitalia and actual penetration are portrayed. Judy (20, UK) describes another online format featuring similar representations: '*they were proper emails, these are pictures of full-on hardcore porn, kind of like [...] it'd be like, men inserting their penis into women, like pictures of them*'. Likewise, Richard (21, UK) accounts for a similar experience: '*I saw, like Google, MSN pictures, and there was a naked lady*'; while Kate describes an offline experience: '*we found, all of the girls found a gay magazine under their bed*'. By contrast, Julie (18, UK) talks about advertisements for phone sex as does Elisabeth (20, UK): '*adverts like viagra, different stuff like that, or like, dating, things like that*'. She continues:

[1.01] In the back of the magazines they have loads of them don't they? Like, [...]
[1.02] they would say, 'call now!' 1p a minute for like hot sex or whatever, I see it in
[1.03] all kinds of magazines.

Tabloid newspapers frequently have a section with advertisements for sexual services portraying primarily females in positions that according to Julie are sexual [1.02-1.03]. Phone sex and other types of commercial sexual activity have primarily been a topic of research enquiry in relation to adults such as in Sender's (2003) study about sex, taste and class in commercial homosexual media, or Flowers' (1998) examination of the phone sex industry.

The accounts I have discussed thus far do not provide details of the actual depictions and therefore I am not able to define in an unambiguous way, exactly what these participants have

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seen: I am working with accounts and self-reported data. However, this is what my research has in common with all previous studies about children and pornography, not least for ethical reasons. Ultimately, I would argue that the definition and interpretation of sexual content is subject to individual perceptions about sexuality and sex: 'pornography' or indeed 'sexual' material therefore can refer to any kind of representation one considers as such. There is great difficulty in actually defining what is pornographic. This applies equally to responses to questionnaires: the data about children's access to 'pornography' (for example by effects or risk communication studies) do not necessarily prove that children have seen pornography or that what researchers define as pornography is the same as what children have encountered.

7.4.2. Sex videos

Audiovisual representations were rarely the first representations the respondents had come across. In most cases, this was a later experience. Three participants describe their accidental experiences with sex services or adult website pop-up advertisements online:

There's pop ups in all sites, [...] like porn websites, stuff like that, sometimes they just randomly pop up and you think 'oh I don't really wanna see that', but you know… (Jenny (17, UK)

These accounts are possibly describing a type of audiovisual representation usually working as a teaser, promoting pay-to-access material. Pop up advertisements have also been at the focus of policy recommendations when it comes to privacy online (e.g. Hoofnagle, 2009; Ybarra et al., 2009). According to Jenny, these websites, in an advertisement format, appear randomly and possibly without the user's consent ('*I don't really wanna see that*').

Manos (22, EL) on the other hand, is describing portrayals of sexual intercourse found on web-sharing or commercial sites:

I've seen orgies, videos with people of the same sex, women or men, fetish stuff like tying, here, there...uhm, yeah. I think though I was primarily watching heterosexual stuff.

Manos reports having seen diverse representations; however, he explicitly mentions his preference towards heterosexual activity. In most of the interviews respondents (predominantly males) mentioned having seen sadomasochistic and fetish representations and accounted for them as a non-preferred portrayal of sex. John (17, UK) for example finds fetishism 'weird' and claims he does not like it ('*weird fetishist and stuff like that, I don't like it*'), which is a view that Richard (21, UK) appears to share ('*For me, I think when people are like, whipping and tying up and nipple tweaking and kind of weird stuff*'). Phil (17, UK) also accounts for such material as 'bad' or unacceptable:

[...] and then it was like, starting to get like, big boobs, machines, transexual, midget transexuals, like bondage and stuff like that, and like, pain-sex videos, that's when it started to get 'wow, this is bad!'

To an extent it appears that personal tastes – in terms of the idea of what sex should be and in which context it should take place - are factors influencing the assessment of the representations. Some effects studies focus primarily on young people's experience of violent forms of sexual content, arguing that these shape their attitudes towards sex or women (e.g. Lo & Wei, 2005), or trivialise the notion of rape in viewers' perception (e.g. Sabina et al., 2008). I cannot be sure that what my participants here describe as spanking, or 'mistress sex' is the same as what these studies define as violent. However, these quotes reflect participants' work on taste, and hence on personal identity; taste becomes a filter for what participants like and choose, or do not like and reject. The inclusion of the variable of taste complicates even further the assumptions that there is a causal relationship between sexual content and attitudinal or behavioural effects.

Several participants also distinguish in broad terms between 'soft' and 'hard' forms of sexual content. For example, Trine (19, DK) distinguishes between these, and attributes roughness to pornography and mildness to erotica:

'*naked people and people having sex, but sometimes it is two pictures: one that is mild form of it, soft kind of it, and the other more rough, which I think of when we say this word [porn][...]*'.

Ellie (22, EL) offers a more detailed account of this classification:

[1.01] I think in the beginning I was watching really soft stuff, with a story and a
[1.02] couple of erotic scenes, where you couldn't see genitalia. [...] I saw
[1.03] Emmanuelle shortly after, [...] erotic movies that don't show the penetration
[1.04] very clearly. [...] The first time I saw proper porn was [...], meaning a whole
[1.05] movie only based on sexual intercourse.

Ellie is accounting for how her introduction to mediated sex progressed from mainstream movies [1.01-1.02] with erotic scenes, to erotica where the intercourse is shown but not explicitly [1.03]. Finally, she ends with explicit representations [1.04-1.05], defined as such because of the focus on intercourse. *Emmanuelle* is a series of movies where sexual activity is usually a result of romantic involvement or sexual 'chemistry' between males and females, as becomes evident through the script. What defines such texts as 'soft' is the fact that genitalia are not explicitly shown in any scene. It could be argued that my participants use this criterion, to do with filming techniques and the contextualisation of sexual activity, in order to make a distinction between soft and hardcore sexual content.

It appears that Ellie is assessing what is explicit or pornographic based on the central focus in the representation (intercourse) and the degree of explicitness (genitalia). In this study, respondents appear to agree in their descriptions, prioritising the criteria of explicitness and nature of the activity as those that make something pornographic. In the next two chapters, this becomes clearer as I offer more detailed analyses of how they discursively construct their idea of pornography.

Marios (20, EL) implies that the content he used to see when he was between 10 and 12 years old was something softer than what he had in mind as hardcore:

We didn't have many choices back then, it was plot based, most of them, [...], then we
progressed, technology progressed and we started with hardcore and anal and stuff.

This does not mean that those who describe mainstream sexual content – featuring explicit sexual intercourse - as 'hard' or 'hardcore' are mistaken, as the boundaries between what is hard and soft are debatable. For example, some sites with sexual content include a distinct category of hardcore material where the sexual depictions are characterized as physically painful. However, it does suggest that the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' – albeit variously defined – is a significant dimension of many participants' accounts, at least in relation to visual media.

7.4.3. Experiences with short stories

To conclude this section, I present two accounts of participants who had experiences with fictional erotic stories and discuss their taste for the genre:

Short stories, I think those sometimes give you an idea or role play or something like that. (Trine, 19, DK)

Trine accounts for short stories as a medium for more creative sex play. Although she is not offering a detailed description of what these might be, she is probably referring to erotic novels, a form of narrative with detailed descriptions of sexual activity (*Fifty Shades of Grey* is an illustrative example of that genre). She is implying that this kind of material lacks explicitness and yet the narrative format allows the reader to use it as a tool for fun during sex. However, the mediation of the eye reduces the work of imagination, and in this sense one might say that visual sexual content is more explicit. Even so, erotica as a form of sexual content has in the past been put under the researchers' microscope for its potential effects on readers - young people included (see Zilmann, 2000) - and its possible implications for violence against women (e.g. Kenrick et al., 1989; Donnerstein, 1980).

Daniel (19, DK) also accounts for short novels as being his first experience with sexual content:

[1.01] It was mostly short stories [...], I think, sometimes I preferred the novels,
[1.02] because I can let my imagination and I can fantasize, [...] it is written from a

[1.03] person that wants to share thoughts about the subject.

Daniel appears to be claiming that novels allow him to fantasize and make the story he reads his own, possibly in contrast to screen mediated sexual activity [1.02]. He also argues that novels appear to be a creative expression of someone's inner thoughts [1.03], which could possibly be a way for the reader to build a certain kind of relationship with the author. Erotica of this kind might then allow the reader to imagine the author as the creator of the representation or even as a partner in the activity.

On the one hand, Daniel's and Trine's accounts show that young people may choose another medium rather than the internet to access sexual content and use it for pleasure and fun. It also shows an ability to use the content for their benefit, which implies that it is the user controlling the content and not the content affecting the user's cognition, as the effects argument suggests (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Lam & Chan, 2007). Finally, it also shows even in this small sample that there are some young people who choose so-called erotica, or less explicit material which generates fantasies (Wilson-Kovacs, 2009), instead of the internet.

In the accounts I have considered so far, participants have not elaborated explicitly on the actual details of the representations. However, the discussion raises several broader points. Firstly, it implies what someone considers sexual can be categorised in different ways - and that in some cases this is not even remotely close to what dominant research paradigms describe as sexually explicit. More importantly it indicates that defining what is sexual or pornographic is not straightforward and that talking about it is a much more complex issue than is assumed in the media and in a great deal of research. It is also clear that such material can be a source of learning about sex, or about particular sexual practices. Unlike the dominant psychological assumption that the content has a direct impact on the user, these accounts show an understanding of the different gratifications different sexual texts enable and the different functions they might serve.

7.5. 'Am I bothered?': Emotional responses to sexual content during the first encounter

Participants' emotional responses during their first exposure to sexual content is an issue of particular interest in the debate about children's experiences (Livingstone et al., 2011). Effects researchers for example have been arguing that the disgust or fear this might cause proves that it is disturbing or bothersome for children and could possibly be harmful – even in the short term (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2003, p.341; Von Feilitzen & Carlsson, 2000). This is not claimed as a direct effect, but it does imply a different type of effect, of an emotional nature. However, I would argue that audiences' emotional responses might also be of a social nature: for example, a user might feel disgust at seeing sexual content, not so much because of the nature of that content, but rather because she/he is encountering sex in a public rather than a private domain.

Research so far has not shed much light on where emotional reactions, such as disgust or laughter, might come from when it comes to sexuality. As I have already discussed (Chapter 4), the discursive transformation of sex into a private issue means that keeping sexuality in privacy also implies that talk about it should be restricted and private. At the same time, the existence of peripheral – and thus problematic - types of sexuality such as children's sexuality have been more widely exposed to audiences as examples of what is not normal (Foucault, 1975/2003) and as requiring medical investigation; and this in itself might provoke certain emotional reactions such as laughter, embarrassment or disgust. Some emotions then signify either a diffusion of the arousal (laughter) or ethical disapproval of the act (disgust/shock). It is in this light that I examine my participants' emotional responses during their first experiences with sexual content.

7.5.1. Emotional constructions of the 'inappropriate'

Disgust

Overall, eight participants said they had felt disgust or discomfort during their first experiences, of a kind that would generally be assumed to be a negative response. Four of them identified the emotion as disgust, offering slightly different accounts:

First time I felt disgusted, I wasn't ready to see, now I watch it, I now know what it is, I'm objective (Eleni, 19, EL)

Eleni is locating her disgust in relation to her lack of sexual knowledge, and also accounts for knowing more now that she has initiated her sexual life. Disgust might thus have emerged as a social response to the 'forbidden knowledge' which – particularly as a girl - she should not have been aware of yet. Eleni was probably not completely unaware of what sex was, but the confirmation of its existence within a specific context provoked a specific reaction of disgust, of discomfort. Julie (18, UK) on the other hand describes the nature of the representation itself as disgusting:

[1.01] There's loads, there're like young girls that are naked, there're old ladies,
[1.02] like grandmas, it's like, minging, it's disgusting, [...] there's old ladies, it's
[1.03] like the dead, with wrinkles, like 'old hot granny sex', and they'll say like,
[1.04] 'ring this number'.

Sex and especially mediated sex are generally associated with youth [1.02]. At this juncture, one could trace elements of a popular discourse about sex being a means of reproduction, and thus as excluding people that are not in a reproductive phase of their lives - a discourse in which older people are denied sexual agency (see Thomas, 2002; Kessel, 2001 for discussions).

On the other hand, Gitte (19, DK) describes two contrasting emotional reactions, of disgust and of excitement:

[2.01] No, but I think I got a little disgusted because it was something I didn't do and

[2.02] something I knew, was a thing that older people did. […] I thought it was

[2.03] exciting because it was something, […] we haven't seen before.

Here again we have the recurring theme of sex being something that adult people do [2.02]. The issue of minors lacking sexual agency also appears [2.01], and leads to the assumption of young people as being asexual. Interestingly enough though, disgust is also followed by excitement, which is a positive emotion, deriving from Gitte's introduction to a new world that was forbidden [2.03]. Excitement in this case is not located in physical arousal but in the delight of gaining new, adult, knowledge. It could be that young people celebrate the fact that they gain 'forbidden adult knowledge'. Gitte had some knowledge that allowed her to recognize that the nature of the content meant that it would be classified it as something wrong ('*it wasn't noble for a 9 year old girl to see porn*'). Yet this idea of what is 'noble' for a girl to do or see is an indication of the fact that Gitte is using a particular set of social norms to govern her own relation to sexuality and sexual representations.

Fear

Unlike Gitte, Amalia (18, DK) experienced an emotion of fear:

[3.01] I thought it was very bad, and very wrong for me to see stuff like that and I

[3.02] got very confused I think, but I don't know if it's just me, but when I was at

[3.03] that age I didn't like watching MTV or stuff like that when my parents were in

[3.04] the room.

Amalia's fear seems to derive more from her parents' perception of sexuality rather than her own [3.02-3.03]: she has already mentioned that her parents are conservative and have a particular view about sexuality. As this suggests, emotions of disgust, fear or even embarrassment, frequently appear to derive from the ethical context of the family environment and the values

embedded in children's upbringing. According to Buckingham & Bragg (2004, p.211) parents' accounts about children's access to sources of sexual knowledge 'were as much about 'sex' as about 'the media' and about what kind of men and women they wanted their children to be'. In this context 'good parenting' signifies a particular kind of care about one's offspring, a care that entails protecting them from anything problematic and guiding them towards proper ethical decisions.

Embarrassment and guilt

At a different level, three participants said they felt embarrassed or guilty during this experience, showing that gaining knowledge that is forbidden to minors is not necessarily exciting. Elisabeth's (20, UK) first experience was with a pop up advertisement:

I saw it as quite embarrassing, I knew I had to take it to my dad to get rid of, or even if I didn't take it to my dad to get rid of, he would be able to see it in the history.

It seems that what made her feel more embarrassed was the fact that she had to share it with a parent and less the representation itself. Parents' relationships with their children in relation to sexuality are obviously influenced by different factors, but this may often result in children feeling uncomfortable to share their experiences. Parrott & Harré (1996) argue that embarrassment is an emotion of social control and it is inherently social because one does not feel embarrassed on one's own. It may also reflect a perception of what one will think if an improper act becomes known, as Goffman (1967) suggests. As some participants, such as Tara, Harry, Gitte and George, imply or even explicitly state in their accounts, their upbringing is set within a specific ethical context defined by their parents' values and attitudes towards sexuality. This might well explain any discomfort, and indeed shame, on their part, as Manos (22, EL) suggests:

Basically I felt ashamed, ashamed because you know it's, uhm... it's the forbidden.[...] I wouldn't though talk to elders about that, only with peers.

To a certain extent, elders are seen as the safeguards of values and ethics in society and are thought as responsible for bringing up equally ethical children – although for Manos it is not just parents, but older people in general.

To sum up so far, children's lack of knowledge about the practicalities of sexual activity results in certain expectations about what it might involve. These expectations partly derive from representations of affection that participants might have encountered in everyday life. For example, sex may be associated with romance in a relationship between two people. It is conceivable that a child might not know anything about sex and thus does not expect anything; however, there is usually some sort of access to displays of affection (e.g. kissing, hugging), for example between parents. Moreover, sexual agency is related to access to knowledge; the older a person gets, his/her power deriving from broader knowledge and life experiences increases. In this context children's limited knowledge implies unequal power relations between themselves and adults. Parents usually depend on this limited knowledge to justify regulation of children's sexual conduct – as for instance when Nikolas (19, EL) describes his parents' comments: '*they would say 'you'll get to know when you grow older*'. However, the reverse is also true: unequal relations of power are also a result of this regulation. When parents restrict children's access to sexual knowledge, they themselves also frame the regulatory framework within which children's sexuality is defined.

7.5.2. Responses to 'new knowledge'

Broadly speaking, I would classify ten respondents' accounts of their first experiences of sexual content as 'positive', including here emotions like feeling excited, relaxed, aroused or amused.

Excitement

[4.01] I think it kinda like, felt like, excited, [...], I thought, I'll just keep scrolling
[4.02] down the page, stuff like that. I suppose a lot of it was like, in the school
[4.03] ground, like, a lot of lads talk about stuff like that and, [...] like, 'have you seen
[4.04] this', and then, and they have it on the phone as well (Ken, 18, UK)

Ken appears to be locating his excitement in being introduced to the new world of sexuality at a particular age [4.03-4.03] (cf. '*from 13 to 16 I was really excited, to see [sexual material]*', Nikolas, 19, EL; '*It was amazing at the time*', John, 17, UK) [4.01]. He is also reflecting on the peer culture and the notion of belonging [4.03], and reports sharing experiences with sexual content with friends [4.04]. Therefore, being excited in this sense involves different pleasures, such as gaining new knowledge, sharing it with peers, proving that one has had the experience and is a member of a teenage (and perhaps specifically male) community.

In addition Daniel (19, DK), explains that using sexual content for the first time gave him a feeling of joy and relaxation.

Beyond any imagination, [...] because I was so excited about the experience reading it first time and then watching it at my friend's place.

His reporting implies that this was an activity that he was looking forward to or maybe one towards which he did not know how he would react, but apparently the outcome was better than expected. Excitement could also imply a certain relationship to one's prior knowledge about sex.

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This first experience is the confirmation that sex exists and that the knowledge that was so far 'a forbidden fruit' is now not a secret anymore.

Fun

On a different level, three respondents talk about sexual content being fun or amusing for them. Kate (19, UK) says she found the setting and aesthetics of the representation amusing:

[5.01] We found a gay magazine under the bed, and we looked at it and had a good
[5.02] laugh, [...] I don't know whether it's because we felt uncomfortable but we'd,
[5.03] like, girls giggling about stuff and it was really funny, and it was like 'oh my
[5.04] god, this hotel is horrible'.

The setting and aesthetics of the representation and the context of the experience make the experience fun for Kate. Being with friends possibly creates a specific context where sharing the experience and diffusing the arousal with laughter transform it from a private sexual episode into a social experience [5.02-5.03]. Laughter is then possibly a way of playing down the significance of watching sexual content, by projecting one's maturity or life experience. Yet as Kate herself notes, there might be some discomfort because of the experience itself. As Gitte stated earlier, it is assumed that girls should not watch sexual content, and it is typically framed as an age-inappropriate and socially inappropriate activity.

The way people account for emotions is obviously influenced by the social context within which the experience is narrated. Accounts employ social discourses and these discourses are asserted in people's identity work during story telling. Such an argument contradicts a dominant trait in psychological research where individuals are examined via an individualistic and deterministic approach to emotion. For example Freeman-Longo (2000) suggests that further research on pornography effects on young users should take into account children's 'emotional vulnerability'. Braun-Courville & Rojas (2009) assume that not being upset is an indication of the effects of sexual content on adolescents' attitudes. Such research is individualistic because

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participants' emotional responses are understood to derive from innate psychological traits of the individual, while the influence of the social context is not examined. It is also deterministic because unless children express disgust or shock towards sexual content, then this implies some kind of negative effects on their attitudes.

In Richard's (21, UK) case, fun is derived from getting to know about his brother's secret:

I thought it was really funny and as I was scrolling down [on his brother's computer] there were loads and I was like, 'oh Michael, what have you been doing?'

Richard, who grew up in a Christian environment, finds out that his brother has exposed himself to this 'forbidden' knowledge. This episode makes the experience a different kind of fun. It is the transgressive nature of the experience that makes it fun, but also the pleasure at embarrassing his brother. Schadenfreude is the process of getting pleasure out of others' suffering or misfortune (Portmann, 2000). Although it is frequently discussed in psychological research (e.g. Smith et al., 1996; Leach et al., 2003), in this case Schadenfreude signals the pleasure Richard gets from revealing something that will prove embarrassing for his brother (or something that would lead to parental penalties). In Portmann's (2000, p.12) terms, 'appropriateness dictates [this] emotional response'. Schadenfreude is clearly a social emotion - in this case occasioned by a response towards something that is considered to confront established (or parental) norms about appropriate sexuality and religiosity.

Arousal

Three participants account for experiencing a different kind of pleasure, that of arousal:

[...]I realised that this is somehow related to you and with your desires; meaning that this is an erotic act and also has an influence on you,[...] that physically it does something to you. (Ellie, 22, EL)

For Ellie, her first experience of sexual representations made her relate the activity to her desires and to herself as a sexual being. Marios (20, EL) offers an even clearer experience of arousal:

'*obviously I was aroused because of the particular elements [...], just a little bit of boobs would turn us on*'.

The fact that only three out of the twenty-six participants mention feeling aroused during their first experience might be an indication that this is in the first place defined and influenced by the cultural and ethical context within which one understands sexuality. We learn what is arousing, as well as what kind of arousal is socially acceptable or not. Being aroused by sexual content is not a socially appropriate type of arousal, primarily because sexual content appears to transgress the boundaries of the private. In this sense, this leads to a change in what participants expect to happen when watching sexual content: from an exciting experience that provides 'forbidden' knowledge, it also becomes a physical experience, and that changes the ways of understanding one's self as sexual.

On another level, Trine (19, DK) enjoyed her first experience because, as mentioned, she was with her boyfriend whom she loved and felt secure with:

[6.01] [...] he asked me if we could watch it together, and I said yeah, I was
[6.02] comfortable with him, [...] I didn't find it wrong or something, or revolting
[6.03] [...] I remember feeling secure and safe because it was someone I liked and
[6.04] loved at the time and that made the experience positive of course. So that's

[6.05] the feelings I got, aroused and secure.

Trine's response was mainly influenced by her emotional attachment to her boyfriend [6.02; 6.03-6.04], so to some extent she associated the use of sexual content with her personal sexual life (Letherby, 2003). An effects researcher would probably interpret this response as an emotional influence of the boy over the girl (Forsberg, 2001, p.160), and a feminist researcher might argue that the female followed the male's desire for fear of disappointing him or because she was emotionally attached to him. However, I assume that Trine's desire for her boyfriend made the experience pleasurable: sharing the experience with a partner might be seen to diffuse the negative ethical significance of the experience and turn it into a positive one. Trine might also be feeling less guilty because the experience happened within the context of a legitimate, romantic relationship. Earlier in her account, she mentioned that her parents also have sexual content for their own use, which could also lead her (along with some other respondents) to contextualise sexual content differently. Participants who expressed positive emotional responses towards the experience are mainly those whose parents were described as being either more open-minded or more relaxed towards the topic. (Although I do not have systematic data on the parents, I make such an assumption based on participants' reports.)

When experiencing sexual content happens within the social context of the peer group, it invokes diverse interpretative codes and meanings. However, even when it is experienced privately, participants express social emotions because of the way the experience is socially framed as inappropriate or immature. Sexual content is not only a means to sexual pleasure but can also be a way of expanding one's knowledge regarding sexuality or of strengthening the dynamics of the group. I argue that this social locatedness of emotions means that experiencing sexual content should be examined alongside particular social conventions that frame the activity, as well as the conventions that frame sexual content itself. Coming across explicit sexual content may change the user's expectations, because it does not fit into the already available interpretative codes for romance, love and sex. The social framing of the experience and the context within which it takes place are thus particularly important for the way people make meaning of it.

7.5.3. Responses to 'just another' text

Awkwardness

The last group of respondents includes those who mentioned feeling either indifferent or awkward when they first experienced sexual content.

[7.01] I felt awkward cause I couldn't understand a thing, it was like watching a
[7.02] Rambo movie; it was just information in my head, it didn't change anything for
[7.03] me [...] I think I felt a bit awkward until I got to know what it was (Marios, 20, EL)

Marios, earlier in his account, mentioned that he was physically aroused when he came across sexual content for the first time. Shortly after, he mentioned that he felt awkward, as he could not understand the rationale of the representation even though he was aroused [7.01; 7.03]. He describes the reason for his awkwardness as a combination of the physical arousal, a lack of sexual knowledge and a lack of interpretative codes for making sense of the representation [7.02]. In this sense, he –and possibly others - also lack codes or knowledge that might lead him to interpret the experience as 'risky'; and this indicates the significance of examining the experience outside of the context of risk and harm, as I have argued in earlier chapters (Tsaliki, 2011; Bragg & Buckingham, 2009). Young people do not necessarily interpret sexual content the way adults do (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004), as happens with depictions of violence in media as well (Buckingham, 1997/2005), and this is indicated by their diverse accounts of what might be sexual. So how do children exactly understand what they see? Which strategies or codes do they use to interpret it?

Sarah (17, UK) also explains her discomfort or awkwardness with reference to her lack of sexual experience and knowledge:

Oh, first time was well, like, 'how you do it?' I was a bit confused, thinking 'is that how you do it? I don't want to do it if they are doing stuff like that!

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Her queries about how sex is 'done' and whether sexual content is a realistic representation of sexual activity, is her explanation for the confusion she felt. From an effects perspective, this confusion might be interpreted as evidence of a premature influence of sexual content on Sarah's attitudes (see Wartella et al., 2000 for an overview). One might perhaps expect that young people would almost instinctively classify that type of influence as a negative one. However, as Jenny (17, UK) later notes:

'*It was not a big deal cause it's obviously very well-publicized these days, so I kind of crossed it up and carried on with whatever I was aimed for*'.

Such a statement implies that sexual content has no influence on her, or at least that she is perfectly capable of coping with it: because it is not something significant, it is also something that does not affect her.

To sum up, two key points derive from this section. Teachers and parents are commonly assumed to be primarily responsible for guiding children towards morality and an ethical life. In the process, they generally provide children with some sort of knowledge regarding sexuality, albeit mostly through displays of affection or through references to biology (the model of reproduction). In that sense, the knowledge that sexual content might be sexually arousing, or the knowledge that there are diverse types of sexual taste, are likely to be unfamiliar concepts to young people.

However, what we feel is very much what we are expected to feel, because of how we have learnt to think about sexuality. In this sense, awkwardness and disgust might derive from the fact that an allegedly private act is exposed to the public eye. Arousal might derive both from the engagement of the viewer with the depicted sexual act, or because of the process of engaging with a transgressive form of sexuality. Fear and anxiety might derive from a concern about being caught watching sexual content. As this implies, emotions are socially performed (Buckingham, 1996, p.99). Yet for children, this process occurs in the context of regulation. Fear and embarrassment are likely to result from thinking about how their public profile will change – and what the disciplinary consequences might be - if a teacher or a parent learns about their

experiences (Parrott & Harré, 1996). In this respect children's sexuality is constantly under ethical and social scrutiny: and this scrutiny and investigation of childhood is apparent to children via media or other public campaigning, as well as via parental regulation of their everyday life. Such knowledge, that being a child is something to be carefully examined and regulated, critically influences their social performance of emotion, especially when it comes to the area of sexuality.

7.6. Engaging with sexual content

My dataset includes a range of data about participants having group experiences with sexual content. These are sometimes participants' first experiences, happening accidentally (as in the case of Kate (19, UK) finding a gay magazine under a bed in a hotel; or Gitte (19, DK) putting the wrong videotape in the video), or deliberately (e.g. Nikolas (19, EL) and Jonas (18, DK) and their friends took advantage of parents' absence to look for content to watch). In other cases participants describe such experiences as a way of having fun together (e.g. John (17, UK) and George (17, UK) specifically mention the pleasure of watching it in a group). Others like Elisabeth (20, UK), Judy (20, UK) and Tara (20, UK) describe incidents where male friends of theirs were watching sexual content in a group in order to have fun. Finally, Eleni (19, EL) mentions how her male friends showed her such content, in order to make fun of the fact that she had not seen that kind of thing before. Although my sample is small and illustrative, many of the respondents mention this kind of group experience with sexual content. EU Kids Online III, which is currently ongoing, has been conducting focus groups where experiences with sexual content (predominantly defined in terms of risk) are discussed. However, the majority of studies reviewed in this thesis do not provide data about how young people discuss such group experiences.

In this study, fifteen respondents account for engaging with sexual content on TV, in magazines or online. I have grouped their answers into three groups: sexual content as a learning resource, for fun or for masturbation. Some of the participants account for the ways in which *other* people engage with sexual content. Such data do not indicate engagement regarding themselves;

however, I am interested to identify how they understand different ways of engaging with it, whether this is true for themselves or not. In a sense, I am discussing a particular kind of motivation for engaging with content, almost reflecting a 'uses and gratifications' approach, implying a search for media content that will satisfy particular needs.

7.6.1. Sexual content as a learning resource

The first of these needs might be broadly defined as educational. Phil (17, UK) mentions the usefulness of sexual content for someone who is unaware of the practicalities of sexual activity:

[1.01] I think a lot of people do use it because, they use it for learning in bed. Uhm,
[1.02] say if someone is a virgin, you could say like, ok, 'go on the internet, watch a
[1.03] few positions', so if they watch porn that has many positions in it.

Phil accounts for the internet as a medium for sexual learning (Attwood, 2010), and as a means of encountering a more diverse range of sexual cultures and practices, a theme that has appeared in 'porn studies' research (e.g. Maddison, 2009; Attwood, 2011; Huntley, 2000). To an extent Phil's account reflects the idea that sexual activity is more pleasurable when it incorporates diverse positions or ideas, and that this enables him to become a sexually savvier individual.

Eleni (19, EL) also seems to account for the need to be informed about how sex is done, but primarily in relation to males:

I think if boys wouldn't look for porn, there would be even more problems. Me, for example, I feel much more relaxed when my boyfriend is being updated and looks to learn.

Eleni, earlier in her account, had discussed the lack of information about sex provided by parents. Watching sexual content is then a tool for learning how to have better and possibly safer sex. In relation to what Eleni says, Allen (2006) has discussed in her study young people's perceptions about including sexual content in the sexual education protocol. Interestingly, she is

implying that gaining know-how about sex this respect is men's responsibility and it is in their interest to copy sex practices from watching sexual content in order to take good care of their female sexual partner.

Marios (20, EL) offers a detailed explanation of the extent to which mediated sex introduces someone to the adult world of sexuality:

[2.01] Porn surely introduces you to the sexual society because it's difficult at that
[2.02] young age to know things about it, to have practiced it; [...] I believe that
[2.03] these are useful experiences for a guy's life, to get involved early enough so
[2.04] that he at least gets the basics.

He reports that sexual content offers a kind of sex education for young people who are expected to have sex at some point in their life but do not yet have any practical experience [2.01]. Like Eleni, he also prioritises men's engagement as a kind of need [2.03], implying that men are the ones who initiate sexual activity. This could well reflect a popular stereotype about females turning to experienced males in order to have a better – and possibly safer - introduction to sexual activity. Likewise, John (17, UK) claims that '*I like innocence and virgin girls and that sort of stuff*', again reflecting the binary opposition – and the double standard - of the experienced male set against the inexperienced female (cf. Sprecher & Regan, 1996 on men and women's account of their sexual status as virgins).

Daniel (19, DK) takes this argument further:

[3.01] [...] if you are shy about your body about yourself, if you are very
[3.02] uncomfortable, when connecting to other people, then it can be a way of
[3.03] learning things about yourself, you can eventually use them when you find a
[3.04] partner because you can tell them your experiences about yourself, how you
[3.05] feel about it, yourself how you feel about sex.

Daniel is also accounting for the role of sexual content in raising sexual awareness [3.02-3.04]. Learning about one's self possibly means learning about one's own body as a sexual means, about arousal or about what someone likes during sex. In his case representations of sex are seen to help people who lack self confidence [3.01] as well as working as a platform for communication between sexual partners [3.03-3.04]. In effect, sexual content in this excerpt is discussed more as a means to sexual liberation and as a path for people to understand and enjoy with their sexuality – a very different argument from the one that typically dominates the public debate.

7.6.2. Engaging with sexual content via masturbation

Another cohort of participants explicitly identified masturbation as being one of the possible ways of engaging with mediated sex. Seven of them talk about using sexual content to masturbate or that people use it to masturbate. For instance, Marios (20, EL) describes using it for masturbation ('*I was using it for personal pleasure*') while Luke (18, UK) appears to be claiming that after he had started having sex he masturbated only if he had not had sex for some time ('*if I've gone quite a while without sex, obviously I'm gonna go watch some porn, but it doesn't, since I lost my virginity, it's not like 3-4 weeks that I haven't been without sex*'). Luke is discussing masturbation as a sexual practice, especially one that might temporarily replace intercourse. Nevertheless, he argues that using sexual content for masturbation becomes rare, once the individual has engaged with sex with a partner. On a different level, Daniel (19, DK) makes a distinction between using visual sexual content to masturbate, and using erotica to copy things about sex:

...that was more the novels, the short stories, I definitely used it to copy something about [sex].

Daniel is the only respondent using erotica to find information about sex, possibly because he enjoys the romance in these sexual narratives. This is interesting, as academic discourse to date has only focused on women's pleasure in erotica or other types of print sexual content (e.g.

Smith, 2007b; Juffer, 1998); by contrast I have not been able to find any studies considering men's use of erotica.

On the other side of the spectrum, Ellie's account could possibly be a reflection on females' engagement with sexual content via masturbation:

[4.01] 15 [years old], somewhere there, I gradually started - I think it becomes less
[4.02] and less as I grow older; in order to feel comfortable to say that the reason I
[4.03] want to see a movie is to masturbate, even today I can't really do it 100%, it
[4.04] started after my first sexual intercourse.

Earlier in her interview, Ellie mentioned that she wanted to learn about sex and thus started gradually looking at sexual content in media, choosing more and more explicit forms. In contrast to Daniel and other males, Ellie discusses her discomfort with masturbation [4.03]. Other elements in her account imply that Ellie is interpreting female masturbation within an health/ethical context where females are not supposed masturbate - just as Smith discusses 'appropriate female sexuality' in her analysis of women's use of pornography (2007b, p.19). Such discomfort indicates that masturbation is indeed understood in terms of what girls are not supposed to do.

Finally, John discusses masturbation in relation to his mother's appearance during the experience:

If I get caught wanking by my mum, that is embarrassing.[...] the fact that you're pleasuring yourself and your mum is seeing it.

For John (17, UK), watching sexual content and masturbating is a private matter that can only be disturbed by his mother's sudden appearance. As we have seen, masturbation is framed as an ethically and socially inappropriate form of behaviour, and hence as something to be regulated; and the mother appears here as the regulatory figure.

To sum up, then, respondents account for masturbation in relation to sexual content as a gendered practice, as a sexual practice and as a private activity. Besides masturbation though, some others talked about other ways of having fun in engaging with sexual content; this is what I discuss next.

7.6.3. Sociable uses of sexual content

Young people have different experiences and interpretations of 'fun'. Especially, when it comes to fun from watching sexual content, this might serve different kinds of pleasure other than sexual arousal or masturbation. For instance, John (17, UK) and George (17, UK) describe their group experiences of watching sexual content as a matter of having fun with friends:

[…] when I was sleeping with my mates I used to put on, like, Babe Station, […] we'd just used to giggling with that [...]. We didn't put it on for the sake of it (John, 17, UK)

Although he provides no explicit descriptions of why it is fun, John is possibly offering a description of a situation where peers gather and usually are left alone, and do things that are normally not allowed by parents. Watching sexual content, watching horror films or other 'adult' activities appear to be part of such gatherings where young people have the chance to explore private spaces and share private (and possible transgressive) experiences. A similar argument has been made in Buckingham & Bragg's (2004, p.61) study where participants mentioned talking about sex-related matters during sleepovers. To an extent, the fun element of the activity is further confirmed by John's last comment '*We didn't put it on for the sake of it*' possibly implying that masturbation does not have a place in such a group experience and that they engage with the content in an alternative way, experiencing a different kind of fun. The way in which masturbation is constructed (further discussed in Chapter 8) might also be influenced if not defined by group dynamics. Laughter diffuses the arousal and it is in that way that fun is established as a replacement for arousal and as a test among peers at the same time. Thus, Sarah (18, UK) reports that she once competed with friends about who would manage to watch sexual content for longer:

[5.01] One time we did it to see who could do it longest and watch like a movie, like,

[5.02] a pornographic movie, see who could watch it longest and there was 5 or 6 of

[5.03] us, and after about 10 minutes I'm 'I'm not watching this'.

Strong emotions can obviously be a source of pleasure in themselves, at least for some people (Buckingham, 1996). In that respect, watching sexual content can be compared to watching a horror film, where the competition lies in how long someone can endure watching something that is supposed to be distasteful or excessive and make it fun both for themselves and for the rest of the group. In her study, Hill (1997) examines where the 'thresholds' of coping lie in audiences experiences with violent films. She argues that these thresholds define the point at which the audience self-censors their experience (and limits how much violence they will see); the identification of a threshold and the choice of whether or not to self-censor is what she calls as 'boundary testing' (ibid, p.66). In an analogy with Hill's approach to violence, in testing the boundaries of watching sexual content, Sarah is identifying a similar threshold in explicitness [5.02] and then decides when she will self-censor - although the nature of this threshold is not entirely clear from her account.

When it comes to violence, viewers engage in a 'boundary testing' process to test duration in responses of shock and disgust. In the case of sexual content, there is anticipation of greater explicitness and preparation for self-censorship [5.03]. In line with Hill, I here argue that Sarah is also using her existing knowledge about sex and sexual content, in her anticipation and preparation for self-censorship (1997, p.73); and it may be that her personal ethics or perceptions about sex (e.g. that it should be romantic) define how far she wishes to go with watching sexual content. This may work in this case as a means of 'protecting' her perception about sex, and this might in turn suggest that some young people are not necessarily willing to change the ethical perceptions they have about sex. This has an important implication for researchers. While challenging simplistic assumptions about media effects, we also need to acknowledge that young people may be positioning themselves within certain conventional discourses about sex (e.g. to do with romantic relationships) and that they can derive pleasure by imagining themselves in such circumstances or by actually engaging in such relationships.

By contrast, Kate (19, UK) describes her male friends having fun with such content:

[6.01] The boys in our class when I was, probably about year 11, they always, they
[6.02] had porn on their phone, and my friend was watching it, and we were laughing
[6.03] about it because it's so, I find it really unrealistic.[...] I haven't had, like,
[6.04] sexual intercourse, but I was was just like, that's really funny. But that was
[6.05] probably because I was really immature as well.[...] I didn't have a clue
[6.06] anyway about any of that stuff, so, and I was going 'oh, hahaha' but yeah, I
[6.07] thought it was silly.

In this excerpt Kate is describing a group experience of both males and females where the observation of an activity about which little is known so far might have made it funny [6.02; 6.04-6.06]. Kate appears to distance herself from the boys' behaviour by claiming that the representation was unrealistic and yet she also mentions her own lack of sexual experience at the time, and implies that her own response was a kind of rationalisation [6.03-6.04].

By contrast, Jonas (18, DK) claims that his view of sexual content being unrealistic is located in his real-life experiences:

'*I thought it would be like that because I had watched these porn movies, but it was much better to have real sex than watching movies*'.

Other participants confirm this judgment, challenging the claims of psychological research that sexual content has a direct impact on young people's attitudes or behaviour. Jonas here is not referring to any differences between the two experiences in terms of body aesthetics or sex practices; instead he is stating that the very nature of sex being a physical and personal engagement is much better than sexual content which is a mediated engagement with sex. This echoes Williams' (1989, p.94) discussion of the 'money-shot' as the way the genre speaks of sex, and her description of it as an act that extends visibility to the point of seeing climax (ibid, p.94). However, as she argues, 'knowledge of female wonders' still remains pretty much invisible on

screen. Such elements are not covered - as Lea (18, DK) noted in relation to depictions on the Playboy Channel – suggesting significant limitations to the realism of the genre. These different kinds of constructions of sexual content as 'unreal' derive from either different sources (parents, social values) or different life experiences. They are judgments about aesthetic or modality criteria that imply how conventions of realism work in these people's understanding of representation; and they point to the possession of a particular form of media literacy.

To sum up, in this section I identified three types of engagement: learning about sex, masturbating and having fun, and discussed each of them in the context of my participants' responses. However, accounting for these types of engagement often seems to entail a reassertion of the traditional roles of men and women, in which masculinity is identified with being sexually experienced and femininity with being sexually reserved.

7.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an illustrative overview of my participants' accounts regarding the nature and context of their experiences with sexual content. I first presented the context within which these young people learn about sexual content and sexuality and live their experiences, and then presented their reports on the actual experience.

As I have suggested, this is not a transparent or neutral process of reporting. The participants employ ready made discursive frameworks, both when accounting for media and when accounting for sexual content. They are exposed to certain ideological positions about how sexuality is performed, what kind of sexual relationships people should build, and the status of children's sexuality in particular. School, adults, parents and the media appear to be the agents of this kind of knowledge; and it is knowledge that undoubtedly has implications for how these young people interpret their experiences (examined in the next two chapters). In discourse analysis terms, 'sex' is constructed through the ways in which people talk about it, and in the social contexts they talk about it, where is decided what is appropriate or inappropriate.

It may be that in some instances when children see an explicit representation of sexuality they already know pretty much what it is about. However, sexual content provides depictions of a kind that participants might not have encountered before. Such depictions provide very detailed knowledge about the actual practice of sexual intercourse. This means that participants are expected to make meaning of more explicit information about sex, for which codes about romance, love or affection may not be sufficient. Especially in its more transgressive forms (e.g. fetishist practices) representations of sexual intercourse possibly challenge the interpretative codes of romance and affection that they have been so far using to make meaning of sex.

The notion of 'horizons of expectations' might here provide a further insight: according to this approach readers of a text are likely to come to a text with certain expectations of it. Pickering (2004, p.272) notes that the idea of a 'horizon' means 'expanding the experience and knowledge in ways not available to us in our existing or immediate situation'. In some instances, sexual content may provide ways of expanding one's knowledge which are usually not related to the current status of one's sexual experience. According to Lakoff & Johnson (1981, p.30), the horizon relates to the 'field of vision', meaning the territory that we can see, what we experience. It is rare that audiences' sexual lives will include all the kinds of practices as depicted in sexual content, even though this is not necessarily what they seek to embrace. At the same time, Koselleck (1979/1985) argues that there is no experience without expectation and vice versa, which is where the concept of 'horizon of expectation' comes in. Expectation exists within the horizon of 'existing social relations and practices in everyday life […] and in many ways everyday experience takes place within the realm of what is easily recognised' (Pickering, 2004, p.278), of what is expected. In an ethical context where we have learnt that sex equals a romantic, loving relationship between a man and a woman, where man is the leading figure in the relationship, a representation of a sadomasochistic practice where a woman has the role of the dominatrix signifies a change in what we can understand (as when Marios (20, EL) reports '*I don't like beating, or mistress stuff; it doesn't particularly turn me on; I was even afraid when I was younger)*'. Such representations – which are arguably common in sexual content - contradict the codes we have developed to understand sexuality and therefore change the territory of our expectations. Although I am using the concept of 'horizon of expectation' in a much broader

sense than it is used in the discipline of phenomenology, it might provide us with some explanation of why participants can react in the ways they report they do towards sexual content.

Even so, in the public arena pornography is typically understood as a unified, 'obvious' category, and sexually explicit material automatically signifies pornography. My participants struggle to define what is for them obvious; and this at first sight leads them to generate incoherent accounts about what is sexual. While in some cases these resemble well-known classifications of sexual content, they also provide evidence of how multifaceted much sexual content is and how much people struggle to define and come to terms with it. Ultimately, they define it in different ways, not only in terms of overt content, but also acknowledging the different formats it might appear in, as well as the different functions it has for users. This analysis shows that sexual content is defined in different ways (content, depiction, aesthetic format, media format) for different purposes and in different contexts. Of course, researchers who see pornography as inherently problematic do not deny that it includes different aesthetic elements and diverse practices; or that it is used for different reasons. However, they provide inclusive definitions, without discussing people's accounts of the elements that constitute the genre or of the gratifications they seek or derive from its consumption (even down to the simple fact that people may get pleasure from watching sex on screen). Such arguments feed into discourses that are also reproduced in institutions like schools or family where people gather and promote particular forms of knowledge about appropriate and healthy sexuality. They are also reproduced within regulatory bodies (e.g. sexual health bodies, political bodies) which provide guidelines designed to enable children to avoid problematic expressions of sexuality. As Foucault argues, sexuality is a technology of self-regulation (Foucault, 1978) but it also acts as regulatory technology for people's conduct: it operates in the spheres of both governmentality and biopolitics.

The responses analysed in this chapter suggest that young people are equipped with a set of diverse – and sometimes contradictory - interpretative codes which they use interchangeably when accounting for sexual representations. Love, romance and commitment are associated with socially acceptable sexual activity, and are almost the requirements for someone to have sex. In addition, sex is implied in representations of affection, and thus, it signifies affection between two people. On the other hand, sex exposed in public signifies an inappropriate expression of

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sexuality or unhealthy sexuality: people who have sex in public are frequently seen as people with low morals or of poor educational level. Watching sexual content is also associated with risk and harm. Masturbation also signifies problematic sexuality; not least in that it is associated with individuals' inability to engage in a real life relationship. Finally, sexual content is often seen as evidence of women's abuse in the pornography industry and is frequently associated with prostitution. These codes are inherent in most young people's upbringing and in the process of becoming part of the social body - that is, citizens; they also relate to conventions about acceptable sexuality, about realism and about social status. They represent a body of knowledge – in effect, a form of literacy - through which they make meaning of the social world. People's accounts of their emotions and responses to sexual content also suggest that experiencing sexual representations is a social practice, where people frame their social standing by responding in accordance to the ways they have learnt to think about sexuality.

In fact, I would argue that in this respect we should probably be talking about three kinds of knowledge or literacy. Firstly, there is a form of socio-cultural knowledge that provides interpretative frameworks of the kind identified above – for example, frameworks that typically define sex as a result of a loving and romantic commitment of two individuals, and as private. Media literacy provides an interpretative framework focusing on the construction of representations and provides a basis for critical reflection on media information about sexuality – and thereby making judgments about its accuracy, realism or reliability. Finally, sexual knowledge derives from family and school (as well as 'unofficially' from peers) and frequently provides an understanding of sex and a framing of sexual content in terms of health (safety) and social acceptance (stigma). Participants apply all three kinds of knowledge in their understanding of sexual representations.

This suggests that researchers and policy makers should take into more serious consideration what might be called young people's *pornographic literacies* – the kinds of knowledge and competence they use in defining their public selves and claiming their position in discussions about sexuality. Even more significantly, through such accounts they make a case about how important sexuality or talking about sexuality is for their own agendas and what part it plays in their development and the pathway to gaining the right to participate in the adult world – in

effect, to 'sexual citizenship'. In the next chapter I provide a closer account of the terms participants use to construct their perceptions about sex, by applying a discourse analytical approach to the data.

Chapter 8. Constructing the sexual self: discourse analysis

8.1 Introduction

As I showed in Chapter 4, discourses regarding health, ethics and culture influence how children's sexuality is constructed. In this chapter I examine my second research question about how young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content relate to widely circulate discourses about childhood and sexuality. I am concerned with reading participants' accounts as reflecting a set of discourses inherent in the contexts where information about sex is available (family, school, media). I apply a constructivist, discursive analytical approach developed within social psychology, drawing upon the work of Jørgensen and Philips (2002), Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Burr (1995), as discussed in Chapter 5. I also draw on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, which is central to my overall theoretical approach (see Chapter 4).

The chapter is divided into 6 sections. First, I present the analytical approach through which I am examining my data (8.1). Then I provide a brief description of the discourses I am examining (8.2). Next, I consider how participants define what they have encountered as 'sexual' or as 'pornographic' (8.3), and how they position themselves within the art versus pornography debate (8.4). In the next section (8.5) I focus on accounts of masturbation, and examine the discourses which surround it. Finally, I discuss participants' understanding of the risks associated with consuming sexual content (8.6). The analytic sections represent three key issues in the public agenda: the nature of the content, the profile of the user, and the relationship between them. As I attempt to show, these topics are discursively constructed in such a way as to reflect broader ethical, cultural and political assumptions, and cut across by a range of sometimes contradictory or competing discourses.

8.2. Discourse analysis

According to Foucault, power/knowledge emerges through discourses in a productive manner (Foucault, 1986, p.119). In relation to my data, the operation of power is apparent in this kind of analysis, as children's experiences with sexual content take place in the context of existing social relations between them and adults (parents, teachers, the researcher). It also is apparent as children claim power within a discursive context, e.g. via talking about sex in public. What links my analysis to Foucault's theory of how discourses work, is the distance it takes from assumptions that purport to be universal truths, or common sense, frequently proposed in effects or risk communication research. Through participants' accounts, the self 'becomes the medium for the culture and its language' (Kvale, 1992, p.36). Therefore the self becomes a platform where *particular* truths, as opposed to universal ones, are constructed (e.g. in relation to the risk or harm of experiencing sexual content). Wetherell & Maybin (1996) argue that children listen to accounts about the world and apply them to their own narratives; and in doing so, they project themselves, negotiate their identities and *position* themselves in relation to that world (Davies & Harré, 1990).

In exploring how participants position themselves, I will be looking for *interpretative repertoires*, *ideological dilemmas* and *subject positioning* (Edley, 2001) in their accounts. As discussed in Chapter 5, these discursive elements help to indicate how participants seek to define the world, and in the process build and negotiate identities. Interpretative repertoires are sets of terms with grammatical and stylistic coherence (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). According to Potter (1996) they are historically developed and used in peoples' accounts as they construct part of the 'common sense' of a culture. People draw on interpretative repertoires in diverse contexts. As an analytical tool they offer an insight into how participants construct reality through discourses that shape their identities (Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Interviews are an effective platform for a researcher to identify the discursive patterns that form part of interpretative repertoires (Potter, 1996).

The second concept I am using, *ideological dilemmas*, is an analytical tool focusing upon the transformation (or passing) of notions, 'from ideological theories to the lived ideology of

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ordinary life' (Billig et al., 1988, p.26). This can, for example, be the passing of scientific theories into lay theories (e.g. people accounting for 'addiction'). According to Billig et al. (ibid, p.27) ideology is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be non-dilemmatic, 'integrated systems of thinking'. However, they suggest that the dilemmatic traits in people's accounts often reveal contradictions between theoretical (intellectual) ideologies and how ideologies are lived out in a particular society (lived ideologies). Lived ideologies draw on beliefs, values or cultural practices of a particular socio-historical period. The analysis of ideological dilemmas thus reveals how participants deploy lived ideologies in self-construction within the context of a particular social reality (Edley, 2001).

Finally, the notion of *subject positioning* draws on the argument that people are produced by and are also subject to ideology (Althusser, 1971). From a more social-psychological perspective, it focuses on how people seek to establish their identification with particular groups (e.g. heterosexual males/females, ethnic groups, elites) (Edley, 2001). In this way, the notion of subject positioning links people's 'interpretative repertoires to the social construction of particular selves' (Edley, 2001, p.210).

8.3. Towards a taxonomy of discourses

In this section I provide a brief sketch of the kinds of terms participants use to describe their experiences and understanding of sexual content, with the aim of identifying specific linguistic codes that shape the meanings they make of that experience and content. The first step in the analytical process was to group emerging terms in order to identify particular discourses. In what follows I discuss the topics that emerge through these discourses. These primarily relate to ethics and morality, politics, health and culture, although there is inevitably a degree of overlap between them.

8.3.1. Ethical and moral discourses

Identifying moral and ethical discourses is problematic, for although participants' accounts include discourses about morality, their accounts are more about personal ethics. Morality concerns broad principles - what respondents describe as right or wrong, as appropriate or inappropriate, or even as sinful. Ethics is more about lived experiences - for example, when participants describe a certain way of living, or of being brought up, as correct or desirable. My analysis of such discourses derives theoretically from Foucault's approach to governmentality, as the 'art of living'. Foucault's (1986) discussion of the ethics of the self regarding sexuality, includes both the development of the lifestyle of a politically and morally virtuous individual, but also the idea that an individual should take equal care of his physical health. Ethics, in this sense, is a way of framing a virtuous life without excluding pleasure and desire. These are however subject to choices, defined by certain objectives. Morality appears on the other hand to be more about what an individual is expected to do in relation to external norms that define right and wrong - generally in absolute terms. Morality, in other words, is externally imposed, while ethics are situated contextual choices. I will be looking then for moral elements in participants' views, that is what they consider 'wrong' or 'right', 'sinful' or 'noble'. By contrast, elements of an ethical discourse might appear through references to what is 'not normal', 'extreme', 'inappropriate' or 'less acceptable'.

I will also be looking here for pedagogical discourses, for example as exemplified in judgments about what someone should or should not *learn* to do, or how they should learn about it. Pedagogy in this sense is different from morality in that it is about teaching or mentoring rather than merely informing the individual about established moral codes, or indeed imposing them. It is also often premised on developmental assumptions about childhood and adulthood.

8.3.2. 'Political' discourses

Political discourses in this context are primarily informed by feminist theories. By asserting feminist arguments in their accounts, respondents are making a political statement about themselves. Within the same context, regulatory discourses can also appear. In many cases, sexual representations of the body (primarily the female body) are characterized as objectifying, degrading or indicators of prostitution, terms that primarily appear in feminist readings (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988; Baldwin, 1984; Kappeler, 1986). Such arguments have also been influential in the development of a public discourse in favour of the regulation of sexual content. Therefore, when looking for such political discourses, I will for example be looking for references to ideas such as: 'perfect bodies', 'imperfect bodies', 'forced into sex', 'do something against somebody's will', 'respect for female actors', and so on.

8.3.3. Health discourses

Foucault (1986) discussed explicitly how sexuality talk has been medicalised (see discussion in Chapter 4). Issues such as addiction to sexual content, effects on people' psychology, or the medicalization of users (e.g. a profiling of the users as mentally ill people) could form part of what I will broadly term health discourses. References about risk or harm in using sexual content or working for the sex industry are also discussed in health terms. Quotes like: 'via pornography children get to know sex the wrong way' (Nikolas, 19, EL) imply cognitive or attitudinal effects of pornography; while quotes like 'my friends in the beginning thought that they could do what they see' (Jonas, 18, DK) imply behavioral effects. Furthermore, a different kind of health discourse might be related to actual health risks for those who work in the sex industry. References to sexually transmitted diseases reflect public concern about sexual content promoting unprotected and uncommitted sex (e.g. Weitzer, 2010). Thus, I will be looking for discourses signified by references to 'sick sexual activities', 'healthy sex', 'having multiple partners', or 'mentally ill people using sexual content'.

8.3.4. Cultural discourses

Looking for cultural discourses implies looking for statements about content production and quality (e.g. 'shitty storyline', 'we see that every day', 'nothing special about it'), about the nature and aesthetics of the content ('wearing a bikini', 'a silly story with a plumber'), the contexts and patterns of using it ('watching it for a laugh', 'you don't get pop corn and sit and watch porn') or about the profile of the users ('lonely people', 'people that can't find a girlfriend', 'old freaky men').

Through such statements, participants are asserting their educational background, family values and background, a degree of cosmopolitanism or other kinds of cultural capital in order to position themselves within the social event of the interview. These kinds of assertions may reflect social class positions as well. On a theoretical level, I here draw upon Bourdieu's work on people's cultural capital as discussed in works such as *Distinction* (1984) and *The Aristocracy of Culture* (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980). Cultural capital signifies for Bourdieu the taste for 'legitimate' types of culture and is asserted as a class statement in the process of constructing one's identity (Bennett et al., 2009). Educational background is also associated with cultural capital and people assert it to make statements about their agency to talk about something from a legitimate perspective. The assertion of cultural capital comes into existence through explicit projection of the individual's taste and through the evaluation of other individuals' taste (Bennett et al., 2009).

Having explained briefly some of the kinds of discourses that are available and are employed in my participants' accounts, I will now move to the discussion of my data.

8.4. Sexual or pornographic? Defining the topic of inquiry

8.4.1. Nudity and sexual body movement

I have already provided a first idea of how my participants described representations they have come across in childhood as sexual. Here I provide a more detailed insight into how their definitions are articulated:

[1.01] It was this woman on the bed, just naked, just like running around, just,
[1.02] like, naked, touching her body and things like that; and then it started to get
[1.03] really really [explicit], when she started touching the, the, you know, that
[1.04] below.

Phil (17, UK) defines sexual content in terms of nudity [1.01], the location of the activity [1.01] and the practices of those involved [1.02-1.03]. On an ethical level, Phil's definition is concerned with the exposure of private behaviour to the public. Other participants, like Amalia (18, DK) share the same definition (*'Nudity and often women with very little clothes, who are standing in a specific way to turn me on'*). George (17, UK) also thinks that all nudity, including sexual activity in most cases, is pornographic *([…] basically women having sex, men having sex, men and a woman having sex. But all this, pornography, it's just being naked, all these naked women).*

Nudity and genital touching are, for Phil, signifiers of what is sexual [1.04]. He does not seem at ease to use words like vagina, pussy or private part, and replaces them with the words '*that below'*. Sex terms are surrounded with a kind of secrecy or discomfort. Normative social behavior does not include the public exposure of a naked body, or tolerate terms describing body parts that are normally covered.

The aesthetics of appearance is an idea provided by John (17, UK):

[2.01] what they're wearing, if anything, that makes it a bit sexual, if they are

[2.02] wearing just a bikini, and they are in a swimming pool or something like that,
[2.03] that for me is sexy.

John talks in terms of cultural production, mentioning the setting or mise-en-scene of the representation [2.02] and also making references to nudity [ibid] and the movement of the body [2.03]. However, he does not characterize this as pornographic; instead he gives a description of what he defines as 'sexy'. Nudity or semi-naked persons and the context in which they are presented, makes the representation sexual or sexy. In this respect, it appears that sexual does not necessarily equal pornographic, as media campaigns and effects research frequently seem to imply.

8.4.2. 'Sex is personal': from private to public

Kate (19, UK) explains what she thinks pornography is:

[3.01] I still think of porn as a, I still see it, personally as it's own thing. I see, like,
[3.02] I suppose I've watched, I said I watched so much of those music videos, it's
[3.03] not a big idea; to see someone in a bikini, like, doing something, then for me
[3.04] I'd find It really uncomfortable watching porn, because I've, for me, like,
[3.05] sexual intercourse is really like, two people really, a personal thing, for me.
[3.06] D. Ok, after saying all this stuff how would you define pornography?
[3.07] K. Ah, two or more people having sex or oral sex on camera.

Pornography is content including intercourse [3.05; 3.07] and is different from other sexual representations [3.02-3.03]. Pornographic is then equated with explicitness and with particular actions. However, Kate also draws a line at the point that defines sex as something '*personal*' between '*two people*' [3.05], which makes it private. This is also where the discomfort is located [3.04]. The definition Kate gives for pornographic [3.07] implicitly includes three elements: that pornography does not exist if it is not technologically produced in some way; that it is not personal, as intimacy is lacking between those involved; and that it is not private, as it is

mediated. These elements reflect the way Kate ethically positions herself [3.05].

8.4.3. Sexual content as a commodity

Ken (18, UK) distinguishes between different types of content:

[4.01][…] when you think of pornography, I mean, you think of sex don't you? I
[4.02] mean that's what it is, so I suppose you'd just define it as sex and, uhm, yeah, I
[4.03] don't know, you can't really, write an assignment on sex can you? I don't
[4.04] know, actors and actresses doing what they are paid to do...

Here sex is an obvious, self-explanatory activity [4.02-4.03]. Ken is claiming that sex is not really a value-laden activity of particular interest [4.03], and that sexual content should not be dealt with as something more important than it really is, which is 'just' sex [4.02]. However, he also adds that pornography is an activity involving people acting; and it becomes pornographic because people are paid to have sex [4.04-4.05]. Daniel (19, DK) also refers to *'actors and you might consider them professional actors'*. This is talk about production but also implicitly about ethics. If those contributing to the making of pornographic content are actors and are having sex because they are paid to do so [5.05], it means that the activity lacks intimacy and romance; it becomes a product and is not any more an emotional situation.

At a later stage in the interview Ken (18, UK) makes references to certain kinds of sexual content, drawing on health discourses:

[5.01] K. […] So, the stuff I've seen, I don't think it's right but
[5.02] D. Can you describe it to me?
[5.03] K. What, the actual act? Just, like, the really dirty kinda stuff really, anal play
[5.04] and stuff like that, I've never, uhm.[…]
[5.05] D. What makes it dirty?
[5.06] K. I don't know, it's just, something that I've never, I don't really want to try. I

[5.07] don't know, I've always found it as weird and, cause it's where your shit

[5.08] comes out ain't it? Sorry for swearing.

[5.09] D. Please, feel free

[5.10] K. But I just see it as dirty like that, and it's like, and it must hurt as well,

[5.11] surely, I don't know, well, I've never tried it but - I don't intend to try it - but, I

[5.12] don't think it's very pleasurable for the girl or boy.

For Ken, anal intercourse is dirty [5.03] because it appears to be an unorthodox way of having sex, and this makes it pornographic. In her comment on what makes 'good porn', Paasonen (2011, p.207) argues that 'extreme depictions translate as the lowering and pollution of the object of desire in acts that are 'dirty, obscene, degrading, ugly or bestial' (Kalha, 2007, p.110 cited in Paasonen). Anatomically the anus is designed as the organ from where human excrement is disposed [5.07-5.08]; therefore, inserting male genitalia into an organ that is not designed for that purpose seems unnatural [5.07]. The same health-related argument is also supported in Ken's quote by the statement about anal sex being hurtful [5.10; 5.12]. If sex is supposed to be pleasurable, pain cannot be part of it. Ken's disavowal of anal sex is primarily expressed by his quote that this is not right [5.01], while later he mentions that he has never tried it and does not intend to do so [5.06; 511]. Ken is possibly working on his heterosexual identity at this point, as well as on his ethical self.

Finally, Gitte (19, DK) points at pornography as a commercial product:

[6.01] G. I see an industry where it is the last option I think […] when you don't

[6.02] have the mind or the quality to do that much else I think.

[6.03] D. you mean in your life?

[6.04] G. yeah, educationally I think..eh, that I think - not that I would do it - but it is

[6.05] a little easy..[…], to screw around, […], I mean it's ok to earn your money

[6.06] that way but it's a totally different person from me...

According to a recent study about porn actors' motivations for joining the industry, 14 out of 105 said that they followed such a career because of lack of opportunities, 22 because they were

curious to try or were given the chance to do it, 38 because they liked sex and 45 because of the amounts of money they could earn (Griffith et al., 2012). For Gitte, those who work in the sex industry are people who lack educational background or other professional skills [6.01; 6.04]; they are also people of low morals [6.05]. This makes her account an identity statement about her own educational and cultural capital [6.04; 6.06]. I would argue that Gitte is here making an argument about educational background being a requirement for finding a socially approved job. In this sense, this argument is located in an ethical context. Education is assumed to be a choice contributing to an individual's social wellbeing: it is a choice contributing to a certain 'art of living', to use Foucault's words, in that it invokes an ethical lifestyle.

8.4.4. Porn as a non-literary form

Although I asked the participants about their definition of 'sexual content', some of them would directly talk about what they considered 'pornographic'. One reason is that some of them had already been told by a 'gatekeeper' about the topic of my study; another is that pornography is a popular topic in the public debate and therefore a popular concern, especially when it comes to young people. Richard (21, UK) adds some more elements in his description:

[7.01] Pornography is for me, some sort of medium that is made about sex, about
[7.02] something sexual [...]. It's like, someone makes this shitty storyline about a
[7.03] postman who comes to the door and is about sex, you watch it for the sex, you
[7.04] don't watch it for the acting you don't watch it for the screen play, you watch
[7.05] it for the sex; so if the aim is sex, and it's written on watching sex, then it's
[7.06] pornography [...]. So you can fast forward the entire film to that one scene,
[7.07] where she takes the top off and that then becomes a porn film, 'cause you're
[7.08] watching it for a sexual motivation.

Richard draws on discourses about production quality [7.01-7.05] but also ethics [7.08]. For him, pornography is a mediated representation of sexual activity [7.01], where sex is the main focus [7.03], and thus serves to pleasure the audience sexually [7.08]. This view about the arousing

nature of the production is also shared by John (17, UK) (*'I suppose it's something that someone would get aroused to'*), Ellie (22, EL) (*'But to be pornographic, to focus on pleasure the man gets, is for me uhm, anything based on pleasure and joy of this kind of arousal'*) and Elisabeth (20, UK) ('*I suppose that it's something like, excites a person in that way'*).

According to Richard, pornography also includes a kind of storyline of a low cultural or artistic quality [7.02]. Richard asserts his cultural capital by comparing pornographic representations with non-pornographic ones: acting and the screenplay [7.04] are necessary cinematic elements that distinguish between a film *with* sex and a film *about* sex [7.03-7.05]. A film aiming to arouse apparently lacks cultural value. As such, his discourse is cultural, and he positions himself within a culturally elite group. As I discussed in the previous chapter, participants often distinguish between the different ways in which people engage with sexual content. In this particular case, it is the use of the content as a means to arousal [7.03; 7.08] that is the target of Richard's judgment: being motivated to seek arousal from sexual content is somehow deemed culturally illegitimate.

8.4.5. Normality, realism and naturalness

Participants like Nikolas (19, EL), Lea (18, DK) and George (17, UK) introduce notions of normality and naturalness in their accounts:

[8.01] [...] Sex is a natural thing, porn is not so much natural; basically it's
[8.02] better going out with a girl and having natural sex, than watch it on the
[8.03] internet, cos it doesn't prove that you're having sex on the screen, is just
[8.04] better to go off with a girl and have sex, cos at least you've proven you had
[8.05] sex, with a proper girl, face to face, instead of just watching it on screen.

Mediated sex as a substitute for not having a girlfriend is for George the source of abnormality [8.01]. Watching pornography [8.03] implies to this extent a lack of ability to have real sex. The naturalness of sex [8.02] is also a *proof* of belonging to the wider heteronormative social group,

and of one's status as a healthy sexual being [8.05]. Proof of having sex to one's self or the group is a proof of being a member of the community [8.03]. The reason why he feels he has to prove something might be worth examining, although this was not a topic I pursued in the interview. George uses health discourses to account for his personal standards [8.03-8.05]. In terms of Foucault's (1986) analysis of the technologies of the self, this account is an illustration of how an individual is expected to care for his personal and social wellbeing when it comes to sexuality.

Elisabeth (20, UK), on the other hand, works on the definition of sexual content via a dilemma:

[9.01] I think it's too realistic, it actually is, someone having sex is not like people
[9.02] pretending to have sex, but in some cases it's actually people having sex, it's
[9.03] like naturally happening, it's fake but it's happening, it's like an unrealistic
[9.04] situation but a realistic action.

There is a dilemma here about the naturalness (or lack of it) of sex in sexual content. In contrast to Anne- Marie (18, DK) who thinks that '*with porn movies, it is unreal the way it is set up, and the women, well they are not natural*', Elisabeth finds it realistic and unrealistic at the same time [9.03-9.04]. References to the aesthetics are also found in Daniel's ('*the woman would not be ugly*') and Manos' (22, EL) accounts ('*most of the times you see a woman with big breasts, nice built body, juicy lips*'). The representation of bodies in pornography has been discussed in terms of feminist (Ciclitira, 2002), cultural studies (McKee, 2005b) and psychological approaches (David & Johnson, 1998). The dilemma is probably located in the fact that sex might be '*fake*' as it lacks romance and intimacy, but is '*naturally happening*,' a real life activity. This statement reflects Elisabeth's media literacy; and it is also a statement about her normative identity, as she considers that sex should only occur as a result of intimate emotions between people.

8.4.6. 'Internet equals porn'

Several participants associate pornography with the Internet as by default a pornographic medium. George (17, UK) claims that pornography is 'something like a website', while Daniel (19, DK) also mentions this:

[10.01] Well, first like, actually boys like myself, searching the Internet for porn.
[10.02] Well, mostly I think of porn not as sex but as something visual, as, maybe
[10.03] entertainment is the wrong word but it is made for entertainment. [...] to me
[10.04] porn would be a guy and a girl.

Daniel is referring to porn as 'a guy and a girl' [10.04] and identifies the Internet as the medium of the representation [10.01]. I have already talked about my participants' subject positioning as healthy heterosexual adults, in relation to the normative and non-normative nature of sexual representations. Daniel however, is implying here that pornography is also what people (or at least 'boys') like when it comes to sex, a matter of taste but also of gender identity. He is here using cultural discourses ('*entertainment', 'visual', 'internet*') [10.02-10.03] to account for what is pornographic, while at the same time identifying heterosexual sex as a prominent criterion in defining what is pornographic.

There are some key points arising from this evidence. Different forms of nudity exposed in public are not necessarily assumed to be pornographic: they may simply be seen as 'sexy' or sexual. Physical contact with genitalia is a defining point where 'sexy' becomes 'pornographic'. Once nudity moves from private to public it is subject to interpretations deriving from participants' knowledge about sex. The reading of how the bodies move, or the reading of the process of people becoming naked in order to have sex, signifies engagement in sex, and thus something sexual.

However, my participants are also asserting elements of their media literacy in seeking to account for the conventions of the genre. Their reading of how sex is represented draws on judgments about explicitness, and about the illegitimacy of the profession of sex worker.

Moreover, there is an understanding of non-mainstream ('unnatural' or 'abnormal') sexual intercourse, as defined within health and ethical discourses. Last but not least, pornography is also read as a literary or cultural text: it has certain aesthetic elements; it is presented via particular filming techniques, and is understood as a cultural product. The complex ways in which people talk about sexual content, drawing on different discourses, suggest that the choices they make when positioning themselves towards sexual content also reflect the ways in which they are learning their own sexual conduct.

8.5. Is it art or is it porn?

Within the debate about what is considered pornographic there is a well-established debate about where one draws a line between erotica and pornography or between pornography and art. In an attempt to understand how my participants define sexual or pornographic, towards the end of the interview I introduced the topic of artistic sexual representations. For ethical reasons, I decided that I could not show any type of content to any of the participants (neither artworks nor content from adult sites or magazines). Providing people with descriptions or just asking them whether a depiction of people having sex is pornographic or artistic (as I ultimately did), is a limitation, not least because they could not necessarily visualize the kinds of representations I was describing. I here present some of the ways I initiated discussions, and I provide indications of the examples I gave wherever needed. As I did not have any particular strategy in choosing the participants who would discuss the first or the second group of examples, these are random cases from my sample.

Here is what I asked Julie (18, UK) for example:

[1.01]D. If I tell you that a famous porn star was part of an artwork last year. If you
[1.02] would see that art work, would you say that this is porn?
[1.03] J. It's not. I would class that, a porn film and a piece of art is two different
[1.04] things. [...] Cos it's like, a still picture, that artwork or whatever it is, that's
[1.05] just like, do you know what mean? Whereas that you're watching two people,
[1.06] like, do you know what I mean?

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[1.07] D. So art is usually still.

[1.08] J. And like, people can interpret that however they want. Say it was a picture

[1.09] of a naked woman, they can interpret that they way they want. Whereas if

[1.10] you're watching a porn film then that's is what is really, ain't it?

[1.11] D. I also saw a video where the artist was having sex with the collector of the

[1.12] artwork that was displayed in the gallery.

[1.13] J. (laughs) I was saying it's just a picture [...] But if there was an actual film,

[1.14] it would be like, then I would class that as porn.

My first example [1.01-1.02] refers to Jeff Koons' collection *Made In Heaven* (1989)*, including photos and sculptures depicting sexual activity with his wife, a famous Italian porn star (Cicciolina). The second refers to Andrea Fraser's *Untitled* (2003) [1.11-1.12], a project in which the artist video-recorded herself having sex with a collector in a hotel room. Both examples were part of the *Pop Life: Art In a Material World* exhibition, hosted by Tate Modern in London (October 2009-January 2010). I chose to talk about them because I think they are good examples that challenge the division between 'high' art and pornography. They are characterized as artistic, but at the same time they resemble depictions as found in adult pornographic sites. I provided Julie with these two, rather vague descriptions. However, she classifies only the first as artistic because it is a still image [1.04]. The second is for her pornographic because it moves [1.05-1.06] and as she further implies, it does not allow the audience to make their own interpretations because it offers them a ready made framework to interpret what they see as 'just porn' [1.13-1.14].

I offered different descriptions to other participants, again not in much detail, as my aim was to explore the extent to which the definition of pornography was simply about content, or also about the social context in which it is displayed or seen. To some participants (as in this case), I just mentioned examples of the kinds of depictions found in popular adult magazines (such as *Playboy*) or in art galleries (e.g. Renaissance paintings) in order to initiate a discussion about what might make something pornographic. In particular, I chose examples of female nudes. Here, for example, is how I initiated the discussion with Nikolas (19, EL):

[2.01] D. So if I give you a picture of a naked woman from a magazine and a painting

[2.02] of a naked woman from a book, would you say that one of the two is porn?

[2.03] N. Uhm, let me focus for a bit. I think that porn in magazine pictures is the

[2.04] underlying meaning, they don't really show what they want, that is not so

[2.05] normal, human. You know, what a man and a woman should have among

[2.06] them, something pure. These things are too much. [...] They try to provoke

[2.07] intense emotions (in the first case), without us making an effort to understand

[2.08] the meaning of it. While in paintings, it's something normal, it'd be like art

[2.09]and there are underlying meanings, we have to think, we have to look for it [the

[2.10] meaning], it's a different thing.

Nikolas raises the notion of meaning as a differentiating point between art and pornography [2.03-2.04; 2.07-2.08]. There is an assumption that magazine photos imply something that according to Nikolas is not 'pure', 'human' or 'normal' [2.05-2.06]. He is here assuming that a sexual relationship between two people should be subject to different conventions than pornography, and is also implying that such representations provide people with a ready made framework to interpret what they see [2.03-2.04; 2.07-2.08]. He juxtaposes this to the process of looking for meaning in art, where we have to 'think' and 'make an effort'. In such cases, the representation also resembles more what is for him a normal expression of sexuality [2.08]. As this suggests, it is the context as much as the content of the representation that makes something pornographic.

8.5.1. Talking about 'high' art

Some of the participants also make assumptions about the difference between 'low' and 'high' art in this respect. Jenny (17, UK) offers one such example:

[3.01] Possibly, it depends how you view what is art or if you view it as porn and,

[3.02] I don't know. I don't think I would be best pleased if I went to an exhibition

[3.03] and see it in my face, I'd be like, 'oh lovely, that's not what I needed to see'.

Jenny is implying that there are cultural conventions that would make people consider specific texts as art [3.01]. However, in terms of her personal taste in art she does not consider such representations as artistic [3.02-3.03]. In movements such as pop art, artists might place a lot of emphasis on the explicitness of a representation. In this respect one could say that Jeff Koons's aim in portraying sexuality so explicitly is to provoke intense reactions among its audience and not to create a piece that is celebrating nudity as something iconic. In this sense his work is very different from the work of Renaissance artists for example. Jenny's assumed discomfort towards such a representation [3.02] could be explained in terms of the 'horizon of expectations'. When attending an exhibition audiences have certain expectations of what they will see; in other words they expect certain things from art that are definitely not met by controversial forms of representation like the ones described here [3.02-3.03]. This also means that nudity has to be framed in particular ways so as to be considered artistic, for example as an idealised and not a naturalistic representation:

[4.01] I don't know, it depends how it was displayed or portrayed, 'cause if those
[4.02] doing a matter of, like, presentation, rather than slapping the image into a
[4.03] magazine and then have no writing, just generally for the pleasure of whoever
[4.04] is gonna buy the magazine[…], although the exhibition would be just to
[4.05] inform people.

According to Jenny, people expect to be 'informed' within the context of an [art] exhibition [4.04-4.05]. Her cultural account implies a social account: what is contextualized as art becomes more acceptable because it fulfills the social or contextual expectations of the audience and holds a more valid, more legitimate meaning. Even a sexual representation, when it occurs in a form of narrative aiming to inform, becomes more acceptable. Sarah (17, UK) also makes a similar statement: *'it's only get to be shown in that one place, whereas other things they get to be broadcasted on internet or on mobile phones'*. Certain things become exclusive, and are subject to a certain set of interpretative frameworks, if set in a circumscribed context such as in an art gallery.

8.5.2. 'It's been like that for centuries': interpretations of sexuality in art

Manos (22, EL) offers an explanation of how children interpret nudity in art:

[5.01] M. Well, the ancient sculptures, I think, though that in our minds they have
[5.02] always been shown as not sexually guilty, that it is art, that it's something
[5.03] else, that it's not, you know, it were several Aphrodites, Kouroi, kores, etc.
[5.04] They though have been acclaimed as sexually 'innocent', so my mind
[5.05] wouldn't go to the sexual [...] I think it has a lot to do with the context.

Ancient Greek and Roman sculpture often portrays nudity in very explicit forms: in most cases, male figures have naked and well-built bodies [5.03]; equally, female figures are usually semi naked (genitalia are not portrayed). Manos accounts for learning about nudity in art in an educational context [5.04] where art is not constructed as sexual. Manos describes how school frames children's cultural agency in a specific way that excludes sexuality and processes nudity only via an appraisal of classical or high art. Also his use of the term 'innocent' [5.04] as opposed to 'guilty' [5.02] signifies that classical nudes are almost purified from any sexual connotation that would otherwise undermine their cultural value.

Judy (20, UK) seems to some extent to share the same perception, although located in a historical rather than a pedagogical basis: *'a picture of a woman's body which is classed as art by lots of people, that's been that way for centuries'*. However, Phil (17, UK) offers an illustrative idea of the influential nature of cultural discourses: *'that's not art, that is porn, I don't know why it is made as that, you know, I just heard this was the name for it'*. These judgments show how particular cultural assumptions – and particular forms of cultural capital – may be embedded in people's judgments about art and pornography, and how young people acquire these over time, often in the context of education.

8.5.3. Interpretative frameworks for art

Lea (18, DK) offers a view based on taste when accounting for the differences between art and pornographic content:

[6.01] L. I don't really see it as art because it is such a common thing and
[6.02] well,..., everyone does it and yeah, [...] I don't think there is any deeper
[6.03] meaning in this, this is what you see... In art you always have to go beyond
[6.04] what you see, think about what's behind the image, and I don't think you see it
[6.05] in that...
[6.06] D. Do you think that someone could get aroused?
[6.07] L. Someone might be... people all are so different...well someone will. I think
[6.08] it very much depends on how it is portrayed, if it is a digital image, photo, or
[6.09] if it is painted.

For Lea art is something special whereas pornography is almost banal, or 'common' – a term which may also have connotations of social class [6.01-6.03]. Art is stereotypically associated with greatness, and is targeted at specific audiences, which to an extent explains Lea's assertion of cultural capital [6.02-6.05]. Luke (18, UK) also appears to be share this view ('*You can't really say that is art can you? cos it's not really art, it's just sex*'). Lea also reflects on a well-established notion that if something is labeled as artistic then it has to have 'deeper meaning', and that it entails a form of intellectual work to 'think behind the image' [6.03-6.04] (see Cupchik & Gebotys (1988) on interpretative styles in visual and still art). On the other hand, sex on screen, which is available to large audiences with unspecified criteria of class, might not be expected to produce meanings apart from those that are overtly shown [6.07-6.09]. Here again, appreciating art – as distinct from pornography – requires a degree of expertise or cultural capital.

George (17, UK), raises three issues in his account of art: the *intention of the artist*, the *practice of the viewer* (audience) and the *locatedness* of the artwork:

[7.01] Both are pictures but paintings basically are not pornography, it's something

[7.02] that people look at in an art gallery. It's just art, someone has decided to paint

[7.03] it and it's gone in an art gallery. People just look at it.

For George, as for Lea, the medium of sexual representation is also a defining point between art and pornography [7.01; 7.02]. Portraying sexuality via a medium (in this case, painting) that targets culturally specific, expert or advanced audiences defines whether the outcome would be considered as pornographic.

George's (17, UK) overall perception rests upon a rationalization, to do with the intention of the artist [7.02-7.03]. The intention of the artist provides the outcome with a certain cultural and aesthetic validity and makes it culturally legitimate. On the other hand, portraying '*just naked women*' (as he stated earlier) lacks any artistic intention, and therefore lacks legitimacy. As Gitte (19, DK) also mentions: '*That it is in art gallery, that makes it more accepted* […] *it's taken in because it was done by professionals*'. However, George also mentions the engagement of the viewer [7.03]: the viewer does not engage in any sexual way with a work of art. Daniel (19, DK) also agrees by arguing that '*I'm focused on, that now I'm going to see art, I'm going to have an objective view, my brain is analysing almost everything*'. What then makes something pornographic is the sexual engagement with the representation, as distinct from any intellectual thought or analysis. In the context of the gallery, the cultural legitimacy of art works appears to require the pedagogical engagement of the viewer.

8.5.4. What is pornographic is in the eye of the beholder

In contrast to the rest of the participants mentioned so far, Ellie (22, EL) has a different view of pornography, considering it a form of art:

[8.01] You can tell me that it's of low quality but it's not that I don't see it as art.

[8.02] I mean, if somebody got in the process of filming it, to do it in a way so that

[8.03] they show what they intend to and give a meaning to it, it is a form of art. It

[8.04] may be for private use only, not for public. But it still is a form of art, the only
[8.05] thing that changes is the type of art not the quality.

Ellie evaluates the process of filming (production) [8.02-8.03] as an artistic expression, even when it is produced for private consumption [8.04]. She also considers the intention of such production as inherently artistic. Ellie is here using cultural discourses about production [8.01; 8.05], but for her this also has implications for the subjective ways in which someone can see art. Artistic production here is not defined by quality but simply by the process of making something [8.02-8.03].

Similarly, Richard (21, UK) also applies elements of cultural discourses to distinguish between pornography and art but positions himself rather critically towards the first:

[9.01] There's a scene where she has sex but in no ways, that sex scene is all about
[9.02] Amelie developing as a character and through the sex, cos it doesn't
[9.03] concentrate on the boobs and things like that, it only shows a little bit, it
[9.04] concentrates mostly on the face and through the sex it shows how she is
[9.05] developing as a person, how she is, like her face changes, the music changes, it
[9.06] shows what's going on in the context of the whole film, in the context of a
[9.07] whole life, so it uses the sex as a moving on point, as development of the story,
[9.08] as a character development.

Richard brings back the recurrent theme of 'sex for the sake of sex' [9.02-9.03]. Through a comparison between a popular art movie (*Amelie*) and mainstream sexual content (adult movies), he makes an argument about the aesthetic criteria and the semiotic aim of the storyline in order to define what makes a movie artistic and not pornographic [9.04-9.08]. His primary focus is on the message the producer aims for the audience to decode [9.03-9.04], which is to do with character and narrative. For Richard though, this is not enough to understand the artistic validity of a cultural product:

[10.01] If you've never seen porn before and someone told you this was an art, you

[10.02] might think it was a graphic art exhibition, but you'd be like, 'oh it is art',

[10.03] cos artists do weird things, they may've never seen it before but they

[10.04] may've seen it before so I know where it's coming from, where it's based on,

[10.05] so to me that'd be porn.

At first sight it seems as if Richard makes an identity statement by asserting his status as an experienced male adult that has came across sexual content [10.04-10.05]. Here is a link to Zolberg's (1992, p.199) argument that 'knowledgeable appreciation [of art] is often left to professionals' [10.01; 10.03]. Richard is possibly using the 'third person effect' approach (Davison, 1983) to explain that different kinds of knowledge entail different understandings of what is art or pornography. In this sense he endorses a kind of expertise (deriving from experiential knowledge) in making meaning of something as pornographic. He juxtaposes his expertise to others who lack similar knowledge and are therefore inclined to be influenced in their perception about art and pornography by others, possibly art experts. At the same time, this excerpt also reveals an ideological dilemma: Richard, in the same way as Jenny (17, UK) did earlier, is implying that art has diverse conventions. However, he claims that his experiences with sexual content provide him with knowledge about what porn actually is; if the material in question does not follow these conventions, it would not be considered as pornographic, however sexually explicit it was.

In this section I have provided evidence that young people use a range of ethical and cultural discourses to account for the choices and judgments they make in talking about sexual content. These reflect assertions of cultural capital, which draw upon complex philosophical assumptions (the artist, the eye of the beholder), and dominant cultural hierarchies, as well as assumptions about what is legitimate and acceptable on a social level. Talking about art is a platform where people work on their identities as mature or as legitimate social agents; in that respect they invoke cultural discourses with which they assert why some products are art while others are pornographic. Through such constructions they make statements about themselves, which are revealed through whether they accept or reject what such content provides. As this further implies, pornography is an unstable concept, which is constructed in the act of speaking about it. Having discussed the object of inquiry, I will now move to the profile of the user as constructed

in the accounts I have gathered.

8.6. 'Just sitting there, staring at the screen, it's mega sad': masturbation as a sexual practice

As I have argued, the practice of masturbation has in general been associated with loneliness and unhealthiness, while masturbators have been identified as those who cannot establish romantic relationships with the opposite sex or are immature (see my discussion in Chapter 4). I am interested here in how my participants discursively construct the profile of the user of sexual content, how they position themselves towards the user-masturbator and what this might imply about the way they understand sexuality.

8.6.1. Males' construction of masturbation

8.6.1.1. Masturbating as a sexual practice

Manos (22, EL) is one of the few participants who talks about the use of sexual content for masturbation:

[1.01] *Well, I'll tell you that I was watching it only for masturbation. I mean, it*
[1.02] *didn't make me laugh [...] They were, uhm, yes, they [my friends] were doing*
[1.03] *the same use, for masturbation, but I think uhm, they were watching very*
[1.04] *much different stuff too, more than I did. They were watching orgies and*
[1.05] *lesbian - that kind of porn. [...] I think most of my friends had the same view*
[1.06] *as me. That it's an issue of masturbation, of pleasure, romantic or sexual.*

Manos is working on his subject positioning in a homogenous group of males who have certain perceptions about using sexual content [1.02-1.03], and about sharing the experience [1.05-1.06]. For him sexual content implies masturbation and this is the reason for using it. He is projecting a

heteronormative male self, uninterested in experimentation with non-mainstream sexual content, such as representations of orgies or lesbian sex [1.04-1.05]. This element of taste is the line that he draws between himself and his peers, also reflecting the standards of his sexual ethics.

Marios (20, EL) also discusses masturbation as a sexual practice when he was a teenager:

D. Why were you using it between 12 and 18 years old then?
M. For pleasure, masturbation, what else…

However in my question about the present he has a different response:

[2.01] Now it's just to get new ideas, for pleasure to an extent, but not for
[2.02] masturbation anymore, this is very very rare, I don't, uhm, I don't […], you
[2.03] know, from a point onwards you feel a bit bad, you know, […] Not bad, but
[2.04] it's weird, you go back to old times, so yes, it's kind of...

Although this extract refers to the present and should not normally be part of my data, there is an argument here about masturbation as an indication of a less acceptable or immature sexuality. Marios reports that masturbation cannot be included in the sexually active life of an adult male [2.01-2.02]. There is an underlying assumption about masturbation replacing sexual activity in youth [2.04] which reflects Marios' interpretative repertoire when defining childhood sexuality. Working on a sexually mature identity, Marios describes the activity with sadness, even nostalgia, yet ultimately considering it as an activity that makes a man feel *weird* or *bad* about what he is doing [2.03; 2.04].

8.6.1.2. Masturbation as a social practice

On another level, John (17, UK) understands masturbation as a social practice:

[3.01] J. If I get caught wanking by my mum, that is embarrassing.
[3.02] D. What makes it embarrassing, the activity?
[3.03] J. Yeah the fact that you're pleasuring yourself and your mum is seeing it.

John picks up my question about people's concern about being caught while masturbating with pornography. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, some apparently private practices are social because those who experience them are considering how their public profile will change once these practices become known (Goffman, 1967). Using terms like *'embarrassing'* [3.01] or *'get caught'* [3.01] signifies not only the privacy and alleged secrecy of the practice, but also its unacceptability, a sense of masturbating being bad or wrong. Although there is some notion of morality here, I argue this judgment is primarily ethical, in that it defines masturbation as a practice that distracts from an acceptable and beneficial way of living (see Foucault, 1978, p.105) on *'the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure'*). As I have noted, once children's sexuality became an issue of clinical inquiry, childhood was acknowledged as the age of sexual innocence and parents became its safeguards. Their role is to ensure their children's innocence for as long as possible, and protect them from the perversity of their own sexuality (ibid, p.30). This why John's comment on being caught *by a parent* and not just being caught masturbating [3.01-3.02] is of particular relevance here. There is also perhaps some work taking place here on his masculine identity, as the parental figure mentioned is that of the mother [3.01; 3.03], a figure he cannot identify with sexuality. Although I cannot argue that getting caught by the father or a peer would be considered less embarrassing, the figure of the mother (as the other gender) appears to be ethically significant.

Sharing experiences with sexual content in a peer context is apparently limited only to an exchange of suggestions about content (e.g. John, 17, UK *'I'll tell George, 'go check that'*). It never appears, however, as an exchange of experiences of masturbation; Marios (20, EL) mentions: *'no we didn't share this kind of experience, everyone was on their own, this was a*

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personal moment', while Luke (18, UK) reports: *'obviously we're not wanking together, but just [watching it] for fun'.* It seems that collaborative experience does not involve masturbation; on the other hand, it might be just a fun experience, something to 'laugh at' *('some of my friends watch it for a laugh, and obviously I'm part of my friends who watch it for a laugh'*, George, 17, UK). Although laughter to an extent might be diffusing the arousal, it might also be contributing to the way masculinities are negotiated within the group. Below, John makes an interesting statement about masturbating in front of peers:

[4.01] (laughs) I don't think I wanna see my mate wanking over porn to be
[4.02] honest, (laughs) I think George really feels the same, that it's a bit gay. [...]
[4.03] So if there was a video here of some porn, and me and George started
[4.04] wanking, wouldn't that be a bit gay, just starting wanking?

There appears to be an underlying stereotype about male sexuality here, that masturbation puts into question male heterosexual identity [4.03-4.04]. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' implies that males and females are expected to respond sexually only towards the opposite sex. In this respect, masturbation among a male group – even in response to heterosexual pornography - could then be seen as a homosexual activity. Further, the physical absence of females from the group means the absence of the object of sexual desire and this could provoke a fear of arousal among males. John (17, UK) implies that masturbation is not by default abnormal, but becomes abnormal if practiced with other males [4.05-4.06]. This could reflect a perceived requirement from me – as a researcher or as a female - to provide a legitimate confirmation of his position.

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8.6.1.3. Masturbation as a health risk

Richard (21, UK), on the other hand, accounts for masturbation in terms of a health discourse, opting for social activities offline instead:

[5.01] So if you're watching a porn magazine, it causes you a stress cos it's making
[5.02] you have to let that stress out, let the steam off, and because it's so easy to get
[5.03] addicted to it, I've got an addictive personality, so it's just easy to watch
[5.04] loads and loads of it, and constantly over the time it stops being a thing that
[5.05] relaxes you and starts being a thing that you have to do.

Richard seems to be accounting for watching sexual content in health terms, deploying an interpretative repertoire to do with psychological 'addiction'. He offers a noteworthy lay theory about masturbation, understanding it as a means to physical and psychological relief [5.01-5.02; 5.05]. He also finds a positive correlation between masturbation and sexual content, seemingly arguing that sexual content appears as a motivation to masturbation and therefore, a means to addiction [5.03-5.05]. Foucault (1978) argued that problematic forms of sexuality (like masturbation) were likely to become publicly known, in an attempt to inform the public about a problem. As this implies, expressions of sexuality are subject to different forms of interpretive framing once exposed to the public, health being one of them. This is an effective interpretative framework for explaining addiction to sexual content. If masturbation has the potential to lead someone to addiction, then experiencing sexual content has the same potential. In the process, it also has implications for health, and therefore becomes a topic of medical enquiry: the experience itself is pathologised alongside the health-defined conditions of masturbation and addiction [5.01-5.02].

8.6.1.4. Masturbation and loneliness

George (17, UK) offers a different approach to masturbation, implicitly making a case for a heteronormative model of sexuality:

[6.01] It's just to laugh, there's nothing wrong with it, […] and having a laugh,
[6.02] there's just people out there that find it, go and have pleasure from
[6.03] masturbation over it, which is not really a good idea to do. […] I just find it
[6.04] funny. Obviously I'd just find a girlfriend and get to know her a bit better then
[6.05] have sex with her at the right age.

George discusses a heteronormative model of sexuality, where a legitimate expression of sexuality takes place only within the context of a romantic heterosexual relationship [6.04-6.05]. The ethical nature of George's argument is evident in his claim that a relationship with a girl is *'better'* [6.04], while masturbation is *'not really a good idea to do'* [6.03]. While he claims it is fine to watch sexual content for fun [6.01-6.02], it is wrong to use it for masturbation; and he frames his sexual ethics [6.02; 6.04-6.05] in ways that also conform with established norms (*'the right age'*) [6.05].

Meanwhile Luke (18, UK) emphasises that masturbation is a sexual practice of lonely people:

[7.01] It's just for basic wanking, you can't put it differently, it's for lonely people
[7.02] who can't get sex really, it gives them pleasure but sometimes people can use
[7.03] it to pick up tips, like things that they could do for their girlfriend, make it
[7.04] more pleasurable for their girlfriend.

According to McKee et al. (2008), people either use sexual content to masturbate or as a way to spice up their sexual life. However, their profile of pornography users does not match the stereotypical *'old freaky man'* (Jenny, 17, UK) in a raincoat who goes to the cinema to masturbate with porn (ibid). Luke, on the other hand, positions himself within a group of males who watch sexual content to have fun, and profiles the user of sexual content as either a lonely or

less sexually savvy person [7.03]. He might also be drawing on this normative discourse to assert his healthy heterosexual subjectivity by contrast [7.02]. Even so, these male accounts of masturbation contrast with those of some of my female respondents.

8.6.2. Females' accounts of masturbation

8.6.2.1. ' Male masturbation is anti-feminist'

Tara's (20, UK) approach to masturbation employs a strongly political discourse:

[8.01] [...] it makes me feel like violated as a woman...I find it really like..., I come
[8.02] from feminist perspective, I feel like it's like selling, it's like prostitution [...]
[8.03] the idea that someone's buying this kind of magazines because they want to
[8.04] see that, because I don't know, maybe they want to go and just be by
[8.05]themselves in their bedroom [...], I don't know, it's like normal I suppose, but
[8.06] I find it, I don't like to think about it.

The issue of masturbation is not present very much in Tara's interview. It is nevertheless, mentioned at this point – and implied elsewhere - where she also makes a powerful identity statement. Tara understands sexual content in feminist terms [8.01-8.03]; therefore, the profile of the user (the male masturbator) is also understood in these terms [8.04-8.06]. To this extent Tara's account becomes not only a political one but also an ethical one – as when she makes an assumption about consent [8.01; 8.03; 8.05].

8.6.2.2. The psychiatrization of desire

In contrast to other female participants, Ellie (22, EL) shares her personal experience with masturbation and offers a social understanding of the gendered nature of the practice:

[9.01] For instance, my best (male) friend has told me the stereotypical 'I don't need
[9.02] to see a whole erotic movie; I know which moment I want to see, and then I'll
[9.03] go and masturbate in the way I know'.

Ellie shares a discussion she had with her best male friend. The reason she mentions this is because it serves as a platform to talk about female masturbation later on:

[9.04] We are not so comfortable with it; I mean I believe that women think a bit in
[9.05] terms of morality too, that masturbation 'is not for me' or 'what, by myself?',
[9.06] or 'what am I? Desperate?' As if feeling sexually aroused is something bad.
[9.07] [They think] that you shouldn't be thought of as sex maniac (λυσσάρα), that, I
[9.08] don't know, that you have to control your sexual instinct. […]You feel the
[9.09] desire to do it, and it turns you off automatically.

Ellie constructs her account primarily in ethical terms but also uses it as an interpretative repertoire to outline her more political understanding of female sexuality [9.04-9.07]. She talks about female sexual identity [9.04-9.05] in a way that challenges the pathologisation (Foucault, 1986, p.142) of female sexuality as a form of hysteria [9.07], which she appears to be disavowing by using the term 'lyssara' (translated here as 'sex maniac'). ('Lyssara' in Greek means a person that has the rabies and is attributed to women who constantly or desperately seek for sexual pleasure or to those who are hysterical about something.) In that respect, Ellie clearly illustrates the Foucauldian perception of sexuality as something to be self-governed [9.08]. As a result of this embedded notion of governmentality, the desire is rationalized and is not any longer subject to a hormonal function of the body [9.09].

Other female participants' accounts point in a similar direction. Eleni (19, EL) mentions that the

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practice of using sexual content and of masturbating is gendered:

[10.01] There is difference between boys and girls a lot, it is rare for girls to feel the
[10.02] need to use content, it's more the boys, almost all of them will see it […]. In
[10.03] general, girls do not see it, boys are those who use it and – very frequently to
[10.04] get pleasure - I mean they need it, at least I see big difference between boys
[10.05] and girls.

Eleni's account is built on the concept of males' need for sexual pleasure [10.02]. In traditional morality, females are not expected to gain any other pleasure than giving birth to children and therefore, the male sperm's ability to impregnate the female body can be seen as one of the reasons why male sexual pleasure has been constructed as a 'need'. In other accounts, males' experiences with sexual content are also mentioned, although not necessarily in relation to masturbation. Gitte (19, DK) mentions: *'I know my boyfriend sees it a little, but I'm not interested in it because I think it is enough to just have my boyfriend'*. Also, Trine (19, DK) says *'I can't find myself sitting seeing that, I would rather do it with a partner'*. Apparently, not all girls assume that boys masturbate with sexual content; nevertheless, they argue that it is a male activity or at least it is shared with males. Their accounts imply a governing of their sexual conduct; part of their heterosexual female identity is an adoption of a certain set of sexual ethics, one that excludes non-partnered sexual activity but might also exclude porn. These excerpts provide evidence that female sexual desire is pathologized, as it is associated with the sexual instinct and not with rational sexual activity. This pathologisation of desire is very clearly illustrated in Foucault's (1986) approach to governmentality; in his analysis this pathologisation entails the idea that 'the root of sexuality is a source of illness in the form of a hidden passivity. Sexuality is therefore not evil but the source of ills' (1986, p.142).

On a different level, Gitte (19, DK) raises the recurrent theme of the 'problematic' masturbator:

[11.01] Sometimes it makes a purpose [serves a purpose] for example for
[11.02] some mentally sick people that are not able to get a girlfriend or boyfriend,
[11.03] that is their option in many ways I think, to get aroused, so it's not all

[11.04] negative, it's not only negative I think...it's hard to describe, I'm a little the

[11.05] middle, I'm ok and not ok with porn.

Within the context of her 'normal' subjectivity, Gitte is rationalizing the practice of masturbation as socially unacceptable and pathologised [11.02]. Contextualising these issues as health-related means that they become issues that can be explained, and that society can control. Such contextualisation rests on what is culturally assumed as 'normal' or 'abnormal'. The conditions of a sexuality that does not include the physical existence of a second individual are understood as a threat to the reproduction of the social group (and consequently pornography is understood as a similar threat). By contrast, the two-person relationship is understood as the desirable relationship as it leads to individual and group wellbeing. Masturbation as described by my participants can thus be seen as a threat to 'normal' sexuality, and hence as a medicalised condition (Bogaert, 2006). As this implies, sexuality is considered to work as a mechanism shaped in a particular way (either as a threat or as a necessity), keeping the progress of the social group under control (thus reflecting a 'biopolitical'construction of sexuality, in Foucault's terms).

8.7. The relation between the content and the user: risk and harm in young people's access to sexual content

Davison (1983) has argued that people tend to identify more significant media effects on others than themselves. He named this phenomenon the 'third person effect'. In this respect he also argued that people are 'experts on those subjects that matter' (1983, p.9) to them in the sense that they have or claim to have information deriving from their own experiences or tastes, which other people lack. Similarly, participants in this study use their existing knowledge to make judgments about others. This knowledge typically implies a kind of power to understand and express an opinion about what effects might something have on someone else. In this case, my participants' awareness of the conventions of sexual content but also of the public debate about children's sexuality enables them to talk about others who possibly lack the knowledge (thus the power) to understand how sexual content might influence them. At the same time they are also

implying that they themselves are immune from such effects exactly because of their ability to understand what sexual content is and what potential effects it might enable.

8.7.1. Children as sexually innocent

Early pregnancy is a focus os popular and heated debate in Britain not only within the public but also within the academic debate (e.g. O'Hara, 2009; Bonell, 2004) Judy (20, UK) raises the issue of innocence in childhood, sexual activity initiation and teen pregnancy:

[1.01] I think yes, it can be harmful for younger people because it introduces them to
[1.02] sexuality that doesn't have to be introduced to; just sex as, like, if shown, like,
[1.03] in Britain that child pregnancy is, like, so large at the moment, and is just cos
[1.04] children don't have an innocence anymore. […] I definitely think if they see
[1.05] porn, they'll want to have sex because it's portrayed in such a way that, you
[1.06] know, 'oh you're really on to do it' and it's a big new thing that, human
[1.07] beings love new things that they want to eh, explore I suppose; I just think that
[1.08] it's just might be nice if you pick that up later on because uhm, innocence
[1.09] can never be regained.

Teen pregnancy appears for Judy to be a result of an introduction to careless sex [1.02], essentially an ethical matter. In this context, *innocence* is a contextual term for young people's lack of sexual agency. It also implies a need to be guided towards careful life choices. Innocence is also an issue for Tara (20, UK), which she raises as a rhetorical question, implying a pedagogical stance towards the topic: *'the innocence thing again, […], why getting involved with this stuff now when you are a kid?'* Connoted with childhood, innocence excludes knowledge of taboo topics such as sex, drugs or crime. For Judy in the extract above, sexual content almost contaminates childhood with knowledge that is 'inappropriate for minors'. Subsequently, she accounts for the growth of potential sexual motivation via sexual content [1.05-1.07]. Apart from the elements of health discourse in this statement, cultural discourses are also apparent: the representation of sexuality [1.05] and the process of young people being introduced into new

culturally loaded information [1.07-1.08] appears to be the key problem. Her account ends with a reference to innocence and its momentary existence [1.08], possibly implying the end of purity once someone becomes sexually active. Nevertheless, as she comments *'I didn't develop the opinion that it was harmful until much later, until I was at least 18-19 even, when I had a little bit more of the capacity to think about what it was'*. In this statement she appears to be asserting her advanced capacity to understand any connections between harm and the practice of watching sexual content. There is an underlying assumption that children's innocence implies an inability to recognize the harmful character of the experience. What Lesko (2001) terms the 'problematic status' of childhood is apparent in these accounts.

8.7.2 Effects on children's beliefs about sex

On a slightly different level, Lea (18, UK) is concerned about boys' reshaping of their perception of the ideal female body:

[2.01] L.[…] I saw a television show once, where an interviewer asked some boys,
[2.02] well they saw images of breasts, different kinds of breasts, and she asked
[2.03] which are the most beautiful, and they all pointed at those which were fake
[2.04] and completely perfect and I think that's a problem.
[2.05] D. Why?
[2.06] L. Because I think it is not natural, and I hate that more and more people are
[2.07] getting breast augmentations and breast implant; because it is just so
[2.08] unnatural and we should be able to accept our bodies the way they are...and I
[2.09] think that porn industry is helping that development actually, and more and
[2.10] more women getting breast implants.

Lea identifies a positive causal relation between young people's expectations about women's bodies and the exposure to sexual content [2.02-2.04; 2.09-2.10]. There are traces of feminist discourses in her use of terms like *'fake' and 'perfect'*, to refer to *breasts* [2.03-2.04; 2.06-2.07]. Of course, breasts are a cultural signifier of sexual content [2.01-2.02]. The knowledge platform

she draws upon is that of a specific group of opinion leaders (journalists) and the way they present sexuality-related issues. Lea is also making an identity statement about self-confidence and normality from an ethical point of view [2.07-2.10]: sexual content might be creating false expectations which possibly leads either to more cosmetic surgery or to girls' lower self-esteem.

Elisabeth (20, UK) also accounts for unrealistic expectations:

'*My boyfriend got to a point where he was using it too much. […] I think it gained him expectations, unrealistic expectations of himself*'.

She reflects upon a popular scenario regarding 'addiction', referring then to the mass availability of sexual content online [3.01-3.02]:

[3.01] I think it's a little bit too easy to find, like with the videos and stuff on the
[3.02] Internet. Like, if now if you're young and you could easily stumble across a
[3.03] lot scarier that could do you more harm than it could [before].

Elisabeth locates the risky nature of the experience in terms of the extremity of the content that could have an emotional effect on the user [3.03]. This is something that Ellie (22, EL) also mentions: '*A kid will be shocked in the beginning and then they won't understand what's going on*'. In both Elisabeth's and Ellie's quotes there is also an underlying reference to the idea that sex in pornography is rather non-mainstream, possibly non-romantic activity. Given that the preferred way for children to learn about sex is by learning about being romantic ('*You've learnt to think within the pink little cloud*', Ellie, EL, 22), any kind of non-romantic sex is by definition outside of this context. Peculiarity or shock signify discomfort over something that is not known or is out of the context of the mainstream, and thus out of control.

8.7.3. Children's a-sexual engagement with sexual content

By contrast, John (17, UK) appears to have a different view from the girls:

[4.01] I think children they don't watch it and think, 'oh that's sexy' they just
[4.02] watch it and think 'oh there's a naked girl and that's funny'. They just do it
[4.03] more out of entertainment, to laugh at, to have a giggle with their friends.

John makes an identity statement here about being sexually savvy, contrasting himself with children, who lack interpretative codes to read the representation as sexual (*'sexy', 'funny'*) [4.01-4.02]. This is also a statement about children's asexuality (they just want '*to have a giggle'*) [4.03]. Ken (18, UK) expresses a similar opinion:

'But, I mean, overall, I don't think it's a bad thing, I think it's frowned upon a lot; I think it's like; but everyone sees it as the dark side really, don't they?'

Along the same lines Sarah (17, UK) also talks about sexual content not being harmful to the young user:

[5.01] Not really, it doesn't harm you watching it, it doesn't hurt you [...] Cos it
[5.02] didn't like, I don't know, cos you know it's natural, you know it's gonna
[5.03] happen, it's like something that it's gonna happen like, later on in life, so it
[5.04] shouldn't really, be scared about it, or anything, so I thought, like, looking at
[5.05] it and thinking, well, it's gonna happen later on in life\[...] so I don't see why
[5.06] people fire up on it.

Sarah is talking about the experience being a kind of introduction to what is supposed to happen anyway in people's life in the future. She positions herself towards the public debate about children's experiences with sexual content [5.05-5.06] via projecting the naturalness of being engaged in sexual activity [5.02; 5.05], using a kind of developmental approach. It seems that Sarah is here engaging with the debate via a liberal approach to children's sex education, making

a statement about avoiding alarmist campaigns against sexual content and attempting to downplay the significance of the topic within the public agenda.

8.7.4. Legal engagement with sex

George (17, UK), on the other hand, focuses on a different aspect of the issue, one regarding the legal age of engaging in any kind of sexual activity:

[6.01] Obviously it's pretty disturbing for young children who might not sleep at
[6.02] night. They might find it, that, they could be ending in having sex at a young
[6.03] age. Maybe a 10, 11 or 12 year old could end in having sex at that age.[…]
[6.04] They're at a young age and they shouldn't be viewing sex, they
[6.05] shouldn't be watching sex until they are 16, 17 or 18.

George seems to believe that sexual content might have direct – at least short-term – emotional effects on young children [6.01-6.03] and also assumes that there might be longer-term effects such as children's earlier engagement with sex [6.04-6.05]. George's argument is consistent with Judy's and Lea's and also reflects on the dominant notion about sexual content offering premature sexual motivation to young children (Flood, 2009a provides a review of studies on this topic). George also makes a policy-oriented statement, drawing on a rather pedagogical discourse [6.05]. In positioning themselves as mature, well educated and sexually knowledgeable, the participants implicitly identify themselves as belonging in a different age group (adults) than the ones they are accounting for (children). Nevertheless, when asked to talk about themselves in the past they either again refer to their cultural or educational status (*'at that age I was learning about it in school, so it wasn't harming me in any way watching it'*, George, 17, UK) or lack of codes of interpretation (*'I didn't think it was harmful, I just observed it and got 'oh ok', literally just observed'*).

Finally, Luke (18, UK) raises the issue of the necessity of sexual content for some social groups. His case is worth mentioning because he appears to be making a clear class statement in his

account:

[7.01] L. It can be risky for children, like, especially like, growing up in a posh area;

[7.02] growing up in a posh area watching porn, and you are 10 years old.

[7.03] [...] cause they don't have anyone to have sex with, all the girls that are

[7.04] there, they wear ties and they're not gonna give it away until they're 18-19.

[7.05] D. How do you think it may harm them then?

[7.06] L. I don't know, it can't harm them, they're gonna need it more aren't they?

[7.07] They're wanking at a young age they're gonna need it more.

Luke appears to be discussing a problem of excessive use [7.06] for a particular group of 'posh' people [7.01-7.02] who are less sexually experienced [7.03-7.07]. This partly reflects his positioning of himself as more sexually experienced, but it is also defined in class terms. Lack of competence is for Luke a result of the alleged conservatism towards sexuality of 'posh' or elite social groups [7.04]. Even further, he denies the very existence of sexual activity among these elites [7.03] and considers this as a problem leading to excessive masturbation [7.07]. It is not clear whether this conservatism is a matter of upbringing or of morals, but it provides an interesting indication of how working class respondents might account for the cultural and ethical differences between themselves and more elite groups.

The material in this section suggests that respondents tend to adopt a third-person effect approach when talking about the risk of encountering sexual content (Davison, 1983). They frame the topic mostly in health terms and adopt a pedagogical stance towards children's need for protection from experiencing sexual content. Such statements are made through references to claims about the temporariness of childhood and of innocence. This notion of purity reflects not only moral discourses as established by the Church during the 18th and 19th centuries, but also claims about the need for an ethical lifestyle and the individual's care for their own physical and mental wellbeing (Foucault, 1986). In these respects, the participants seem to adopt a political position within the debate about children's sexuality and project a kind of superiority to other people. Being aware that they are constantly understood as a social group in danger, the respondents are almost denying the fact that they once were children. Governing the self almost

requires a denial of the status of childhood and an adoption of the status of adulthood, which connotes maturity, social legitimacy and an awareness of the ethical demands of adult society. These respondents then establish themselves as adults, and thus, now claim power over children in the domain of sexuality.

8.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to unpack the discourses underlying my participants' accounts in an attempt to examine how they make sense of their engagement with sexual content and how they understand their own sexual subjectivities. In this respect I attempted to identify discourses located within ethical, cultural or other contexts and to explain how these discourses shape participants' accounts of the topic.

I examined first, how my participants define the sexual or pornographic. Nudity and sexual activity are associated with naturalness or unnaturalness, normality or abnormality, romance and intimacy or roughness and violence. Such codes apply also to the comparisons they make between pornography and art. Moreover, being a porn actor is regularly juxtaposed to being educated or having skills to find other socially acceptable jobs. Mediated sexual activity is seen from a health and an ethical perspective, while the aesthetics of the content – including nudity – are viewed from an ethical and a cultural perspective. At the same time these constructions of the experience and of sexuality overall, reflect certain strategies of self-regulation on behalf of the participants. They frame their sexual conduct ethically within a context in which where they are expected to talk about but also practice sex within particular socially acceptable conventions.

On another level I examined how respondents construct the user of sexual content. Masturbation is associated with embarrassment, loneliness, immaturity, and the inability to engage in a real-life relationship. It has in most cases been discussed in terms of ethics and health. Sexual content as a source of knowledge about sex or as a means for people to 'spice up' their sex life is also associated with younger ages and with lack of knowledge about sex (and hence an inability to claim sexual agency in the adult world). Moreover, the pedagogical traits in their discourses are

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mostly of an ethical nature: both males' and females' accounts revolved around the ethical and health implications of using sexual content in influencing one's life destination (for example, finding a partner).

Finally, I examined participants' constructions of risk and harm in using sexual content. Here childhood is associated with notions of innocence and with appropriate sexual development. Risk is identified in young people's possible experiences with extreme representations of sex, while the experience overall is discussed in the light of potential effects on young people's beliefs and expectations. Assumptions about addiction to sexual content are also apparent in some cases. By contrast, two accounts appear to challenge the moral panics within the public debate about young people's experiences. Such arguments about effects are applied as interpretative tools in rationalising their stance towards the topic, and as manifestations of the 'third person effect'. In accounting for younger children as 'others', as distinct from themselves, the participants work on their identities as adults, sexually mature and ethical heterosexuals.

Four key findings transpire from this analysis. First, it appears that the young people in my interviews do not really talk about sexual content or pornography in particular. This is not, I would argue, because of the sensitivity or private nature of the topic: they seem quite prepared to talk about sexuality more generally. Rather, they respond to researchers' questions about what might be sexual or pornographic by making wider arguments about sexuality. They provide detailed accounts about themselves as persons, as adults or as members of a particular social group. Their interest is not so much to talk about whether or how they use sexual content or what they do with it. On the contrary they use discourses they borrow from public agendas, to explain how they are different from what is said about them in the media or in other public arenas. In this respect, the evidence provided here shows that arguments about effects or about the politics of sexual content are indeed apparent in young people's scope of knowledge; but that they work on a different level than researchers and thinkers have so far indicated. The argument that pornography can lead to addiction, for example, or create unrealistic expectations or even that it is a form of prostitution, are used as codes with which people explain how and why they are different from what these arguments assume.

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Moreover, the ethical, cultural or social conventions they follow when talking about sexuality reflect concerns about their position in a wider social context that is primarily defined in terms of appropriate sexuality. I have shown in chapter 2 that researchers are concerned with what kind of representations children see, where and how much. This chapter however, provides evidence that young people are not primarily interested in such 'exposure', or about what, where and how much sexual content they have encountered. They can provide this information when asked but their main priority is to provide the context of the experience. This signifies that sexual content in young people's lives is part of the discourse about sexuality and not something that is seen in isolation, or as an influence in its own right, as for instance effects research implies. Their judgments go further in explaining how they read such experiences, what they mean for their personal ethics and values and what it means for them to belong to a wider group, that of adults, who share such knowledge (precisely because they are old enough to do so). This process could be explained within the context of Buckingham & Bragg's argumentation about the rise of a new 'culture of the self' in relation to the public discussion of sexual matters, where the experience counts as a form of witnessing, or as an opportunity for personal growth (2004, p.42).

On another level, participants do not seem to focus particularly on issues like the effects of pornography, women's objectification, or abuse in the sex industry as something that directly concerns themselves. Rather, they use these arguments to talk about *other people*, whom they define in particular terms (e.g. as children, masturbators, paedophiles). This process reveals attempts to jump out of the 'confident characterizations' (Lesko, 2001) within which adults see them - a concept I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. By contrast, most research studies and media campaigns draw on exactly these characterisations to talk about children's sexuality - for example in the pathologisation of masturbation or of female arousal, and in claims about the asexual status and innocence of childhood.

As I have noted, some researchers, policy makers and media argue that young people see and are 'bothered' by extremely violent sexual representations. Further, they assume that this indicates some sort of problematic behavior, or harmful influence on children's attitudes. By contrast, I here tried to show that what might be extreme, violent, weird or bothersome is blurry and there is not one clear definition given by participants. Furthermore, it seems that participants explain

how they develop and live according to certain ethics through which they distance themselves from what is generally considered as abnormal, unhealthy or inappropriate. It appears then that what researchers claim will happen or potentially happen in such instances is contested by the accounts of the participants here. For example, the EU Kids Online II survey (Chapter 6) asked how respondents coped with 'bothersome' experiences with sexual content. Mass communication researchers confidently build a correlation between feeling bothered and coping with such an experience; young people are aware that this is a forbidden or problematic experience. They are almost expected to feel bothered and as a result to cope with it. Further, policy-oriented projects like EU Kids Online are expected to provide solutions for policy makers, parents and regulators, namely to propose new safeguards of proper childhood. In the process, linking children's negative emotional reactions with effective coping strategies, or the need to develop coping strategies, makes their policy recommendations stronger and more valid. By contrast, my study offers an analysis of the social locatedness of young people's emotions, and thus might offer an explanation of why they feel in the first place that sexual content is problematic and that they somehow have to deal with it.

This chapter has necessarily ranged across the sample, taking short extracts from the wider corpus of data. The next chapter takes a more in-depth approach to sample cases, discussed in the context of narrative analysis. I discuss a selection of my participants' accounts in greater detail, aiming to examine the narrative strategies they deploy in accounting for their experiences and perceptions.

Chapter 9: 'What's your story?': participants' narratives and the construction of identity

9.1. Introduction

A recent BBC News Online Magazine article 'Should children be taught that porn is not real?' is an illustrative example of media campaigning against teenagers' allegedly increasing use of pornography. This example includes a personal testimony from a 20-year-old girl who has allegedly been harmed by pornography as a teenager. This is provided as evidence to support claims about the risk/harm of porn and to legitimize the authors' argument further. This 'personal story' invites the reader to engage with the problem by fulfilling the journalistic values of evidence. Personal stories have become powerful, popular tools in media stories- developing as media genres themselves (e.g. sex story columns in teen magazines and tabloids) (Plummer, 1995). The article as a whole exemplifies the values of 'logos', 'ethos' and 'pathos' espoused by Aristotle. It includes survey statistics presented as evidence of the phenomenon ('logos'). Stakeholders' views that operate as gatekeepers of morality and their statements invoke moral discourses ('ethos'). Meanwhile, personal testimony addresses readers' emotions ('pathos'). Story telling is a favoured journalistic strategy in tabloids and popular TV programs. Given the large numbers of personal testimonies that are featured in media reports about child pornography, sexual abuse and addiction, it is clear that peoples' stories are seen to provide powerful evidence to fuel campaigning against what is reported to be risky and harmful for children.

In this chapter, I present four individual stories drawn from my data, which offer different perspectives on telling sexual stories. Through an analysis of these stories I am aiming to address my third research question about how they construct their identities through their accounts of how they process the discursive nature of pornography or sexual content in the media. I intend to show that in telling stories, participants work on different identities or perform 'identity work' and thereby position themselves within the public debate about children's sexuality. The chapter is divided into seven sections. First, I discuss narratology and the notion of sexual narratives as the theoretical framework underpinning my analysis and discussion (9.1). Then, I briefly discuss

what kinds of themes participants raise in their stories (9.2). Following this, I provide a summative overview of the four stories (9.3) and then go on to look closely at the individual narratives (9.4-9.7).

9.2. Narratives, narratology and sexual stories as identity statements

9.2.1. Telling sexual stories

Plummer (1995) argues that as sexual stories appear more frequently in the media, media have increased their interest in sex-related topics. Sexual stories can be investigated in research in their own right for they are narratives of 'intimate life, focused especially around the erotic, the gendered and the relational' (1995, p.6). In his work about intimacy, Giddens (1992) argues that people in post traditional societies make choices that define who they are as individuals, and thereby constitute 'the reflexive narrative of the self' (1992, p.75). I argue that in this study, the stories young people tell about themselves reflect specific life decisions they make or have made regarding the ways they project themselves as sexual agents. In Chapter 4, I discussed Foucault's approach to the act of talking about sex as a form of confession. Today, it seems that people talk about sex more openly, especially in online environments (in the media, through art, or via online platforms and communities) (van Doorn, 2010); however, offline discussions about sex are still to an extent set within a context of privacy and sensitivity. Participants in my research frequently mention that talking about pornography is a sensitive, delicate, and/or taboo topic and that sex is a private or intimate activity. They also suggest that some social groups talk about sex more openly than others. For example, they mention men's ease in talking about sexual content in contrast to women's discomfort, and parents' difficulty when talking about sexual content with their offspring. Arguably, talking about sexual content is also a matter of secrecy and connotes inappropriateness. If one is to talk about it, it is perhaps invariably seen as a form of confession. In research these confessions can be seen as a kind of social performance and therefore, a kind of carefully worked-upon narrative through which people can choose to tell certain things about themselves.

9.2.2. Narratology and the significance of narrative in audience research

To study participants' narratives in this study I draw also upon Bal's (1997) theory of narratology. Although her analysis is predominantly applied to drama and classic literature, her approach to storytelling provides a useful methodological ground for my data analysis. Bal argues that the acts of narrating and listening to stories (and asking questions about them) are cultural processes and ways of constructing meanings and identities (ibid, p.9). This derives from the fact that narratives are finite texts formed in language: they contain signs that carry specific meanings, which according to Bal, form narrated events (Bal, 1997, p.5). There is a connection here with Foucault's definition of statements as groups of verbal performances (signs) linked with rules of grammatical and logical correctness (1969/2002, p.121). Foucault attributes social existence to such statements, namely an ability to exist in relation with a domain of objects (ibid, p.120). In this sense, the conceptual platforms upon which I draw in approaching the narrative analysis here share common imperatives to do with the role of language as a carrier of meanings.

As Squire et al. (2008, p.1) argue, narrative research offers a flexible framework to 'bring meanings into useful dialogue with each other'. A narrative is a two-part process. What is being told is defined by the way it will be later on approached by the listener (Squire, 2008, p.41). The analysis and reporting of who tells a story, why, and how, entails a recognition of cultural conventions; therefore data interpretation may suggest what researchers think participants reveal, given their own cultural and social capital (Bal, 1997, p.11). My research employs one kind of storytelling, the retrospective view (Labov & Waletsky, 1967). Participants provide accounts of themselves both in the present and in the past by telling stories that include events which take shape as a form of narrative. The retrospective nature of their stories allows them to work on the logical organisation of the events. It also allows them to rework the construction of themselves and others as subjects of discourses and ideologies (as discussed in Chapter 8). Part of the analysis then concerns an examination of how the narrators perform or negotiate their identities (Riessman, 2008) as well as how their accounts function within a broader context of social and cultural story telling (Plummer, 2001).

As I stated in Chapter 5, the combination of thematic, discourse and narrative analysis I am using

here implies that all three kinds of analysis complement each other (Wetherell, 1998). A discussion of the themes that participants raise has implications about the discourses they use and the identity work they do – that is, how they position themselves in a particular way towards a topic. Approaching participants' use of certain terms via a discourse analytical approach provides evidence about the cultural and ethical conventions within which they make statements about themselves and others. An analysis of participants' narratives thus inevitably invokes discursive and thematic approaches as well.

In this study, I argue that the participants 'sexual stories' reflect experiences, knowledge about sexuality and common sense arguments about the topic, which constitute interpretative repertoires – ways of making sense of themselves as social-sexual beings. It is through such repertoires that they make meaning of the experience of watching sexual content. Finally, these elements are combined: knowledge about the topic, the discursive construction of choices and the ways participants work on their identities, all seem to entail a narrative format that is simultaneously a kind of social performance. Further, the production or performance of self within these narratives reflects the fact that it takes place within a specific context (the interview) and for a specific audience (the researcher) (Riessman, 2008, p.7). As Hall (1997) argues, identities can be mediated and negotiated through popular culture in circuits of cultural production that promote dialogue between media texts and audiences. Identities are thus fluid and are negotiated through narratives (Andrews, 2007), which serve as vehicles for individuals' constructions of their personal or collective experiences.

In this chapter, then, I will be looking at certain participants' stories in more detail in order to identify their discursive constructions of self in relation to sexuality. Further, I will be looking at ways in which they account for the government of their sexual conduct (itself another kind of social performance), through their narratives about upbringing, romance, sexual development and addiction.

9.3. 'Tell me your sexual story': the narratives in participants' sexual stories

Different sets of stories challenging established norms about gender emerged when I compared interviews with males and females. For instance, there is a common perception that boys need to have sex and use sexual content more than girls; hence, they are assumed to be the ones who are or can be most likely to be influenced by sexual content (see Chapter 1). On the other hand, girls are assumed to be less knowledgeable about sexual content, and to use it for their sexual pleasure to a much lesser extent. Rather than directly confront these norms I aim to illustrate how they fit into or are contradicted by participants' narratives.

9.3.1. Boys' stories

It is frequently alleged that the primary target of the sex industry is males' sexual desire; however, all males in this study prioritise being in a relationship rather than getting pleasure from sexual content. This does not mean however, that they do not do both. Nevertheless, they engage ideologically with using sexual content in different ways. Most of them in fact are (as I showed in Chapter 7) critical towards the kinds of pleasure sexual content offers: they make statements like 'people who watch a lot of porn, they need to let steam off' (Richard, 21, UK); 'they do weird stuff, like anal' (George, 17, UK); or 'people might think they can do what they see' (Jonas, 18, DK). This empirical evidence questions the legitimacy of monolithic feminist arguments (e.g. Dworkin, 1989) about how patriarchy is exercised within gender relations.

It is possible to identify two groups of male narratives here. The first concerns the role of sexual content in different life stages. This group of participants is positive towards using sexual content and provides accounts of systematic patterns of use. Marios (21, EL) for example, tells a story about how he started using sexual content out of curiosity and became more sophisticated in his uses as he grew older. Daniel (19, DK) also reports how he developed as a 'critical user' of sexual content. John (17, UK) explains how watching sexual content is a typical male activity, although engagement in a relationship changes males' attitudes towards it. Harry (20, UK) also accounts for his use and attitudes towards sexual content by putting it into a context of 'proper

upbringing'. There are other stories, like Jonas's (18, DK), who primarily asserts his male individual and collective identity through talking about his taste in sexual content and patterns of using it. Meanwhile, Manos (22, EL) accounts for the role of sexual content in his childhood and teenage life from a class perspective.

However, other males project a romantic self and position themselves negatively towards sexual content. In this second group, participants are working on how they have been taught to negotiate their sexuality within a context of normal subjectivity. This group's stories place more importance on the ethical government of sexual conduct. Richard (21, UK), for example, tells a story of his online addiction (to both gaming and pornography) and how a Christian upbringing helped him to cope. George (17, UK) and Nikolas (19, EL) assert the significance of their upbringing in developing an interest in engaging in relationships with girls instead of masturbating using sexual content. Luke (18, UK) tells a story about his sexual relationships, and again prioritizes this over the use of sexual content. Finally, Ken's (18, UK) story also concerns values of being brought up properly and learning to be a caring heterosexual male. To sum up, boys' interviews form two groups; but both entail stories about male sexual development, about upbringing and about appropriate sexuality.

9.3.2. Girls' stories

Girls' stories meanwhile can be grouped into four distinct types. Some stories do not draw on personal experiences, but on how participants perceive and respond to the wider public debate. Eleni (19, EL) provides a didactic account of the use of sexual content and its role in young people's lives. Elisabeth (20, UK) tells a story about upbringing and about relationships with boys, and elaborates on why she is ambivalent towards sexual content. Amalia's (18, DK) account contains a comparison between her own and other people's perceptions of sexuality, defined primarily in terms of morality. Finally, Kate (19, UK) recalls how she developed sexually, and within this locates her experiences with sexual content during early and later teenage life: here the extent of knowledge about sex in each case is the defining issue.

A second group tells stories primarily about values and upbringing. For example, Gitte (19, DK) talks about how her upbringing informed her critical stance towards the use of sexual content as well as those who work in the sex industry. Lea (18, DK) asserts her upbringing as influential in explaining how she came to think and talk about sexual content. The same applies for Judy (20, UK), who frames knowledge about and experiences with sexual content as an issue defined by an individual's upbringing and social development. Finally, Tara (20, UK) also prioritises her upbringing when it comes to discussing appropriate forms of sexuality and her perception of using sexual content.

A third group tells a story of personal engagement with sexual content. For instance Ellie (22, EL) talks about how she developed sexually through the use of sexual content. Trine (19, DK) tells a story about how she came to know about sexual content, how it suits her sexual preferences and the role it has played in her relationships. Finally, Elisabeth (20, UK), although not entirely positive towards sexual content, tells a story about her preference for romantic, erotic stories.

The fourth group's stories exemplify a combination of rare exposure to sexual content and well-established views within the public debate. Zoe (19, EL) tells a story of how knowledge about sex formed her personal views. Sarah (17, UK) combines social knowledge about sexuality and accidental experiences with sexual content in seeking to contextualize people's relationships in terms of appropriateness and in terms of gender roles. Finally, Jenny (17, UK) tells a story about how experiences with sexual content are portrayed in the media and the public debate, and largely avoids offering a narrative of personal experiences. These girls report rare or no exposure to sexual content; rather, their perceptions derive from their knowledge about pornography or other types of sexual content in the media gleaned from other sources. I consider important to at least mention them here because their narratives confirm that pornography is a very widely discussed topic and that young people might have an opinion about it without necessarily having had any experience with it.

As this implies, my male and female participants tell different stories, but each account is also diverse in itself. Their narratives are typically multi-faceted combinations of discourses that

reflect the desired self that participants aim to project. In analyzing this range of narratives, I seek to identify the underlying patterns that shape their accounts and to provide illustrations of how (in line with the notion of governmentality) they go about constructing aspects of their 'sexual self'.

9.4. Looking closely at stories

I have chosen here to examine more closely four accounts that I think are amongst the richest of the dataset. The first is George's (17, UK) narrative, which is an overall statement about life decisions, informed by ethics and a particular upbringing. The second case is that of Ellie (22, EL), who accounts for sexual content as a means to sexual development. This account is in my view a response to the public and academic perception that sexual content holds no pedagogical or other value for young people. Tara's (20, UK) story is an illustration of the 'iconic child' that reflects how young people are expected to construct themselves on the basis of certain values about appropriate (or proper) sexuality. Finally, Richard (21, UK) is a Catholic who tells a story about coping with – and growing out of – his pornography and gaming addiction. While some of the material quoted here has been discussed in earlier chapters, my aim here is to consider the broader context of these interviews, and to analyse my participants' 'sexual stories' in a more holistic way.

9.5. George (17, Midlands, UK): sexual content and romantic relationships

George (17, UK) and his friend, John (17, UK) were both in the interview room, and were interviewed one after the other. Although cross analysing the two interviews would offer a valuable insight into peer dynamics regarding the negotiation of sexual identities and sexual selves, my focus here is on individuals' 'narratives of the self'. George says he usually likes '*going out with friends, chill out watch the TV, obviously we have a few friends around, go out with my girlfriend sometimes, playing video games*'. George discusses the use of sexual content as a private matter, although it seems that his engagement with it is either on the level of the

individual ('*what I do*') or on the level of 'others'. Overall, he distinguishes among four types of users: children, masturbators, paedophiles, and jokers. His classification is gendered ('*me and my mates watch it for a laugh'[...] 'I don't find it right for a girl to watch'*) because experiences with sexual content themselves are understood to be gendered (cf. Buckingham & Bragg, 2004).

9.5.1. Relationship as a socially approved sexual status

Being 'in a relationship' comes up as an issue while George is discussing different types of sexual content:

[1.01] G. It's just to laugh, there's nothing wrong with it, nothing... nothing wrong
[1.02] on going and watching it and having a laugh, there's just people out there that
[1.03] find it, go and have pleasure from masturbation over it, which is not really a
[1.04] good idea to do.
[1.05] D. Why?
[1.06] G. Cos I don't think it is, I just find it funny. Obviously I'd just find a
[1.07] girlfriend and get to know her a bit better then have sex with her at the right
[1.08] age. So say if she's 16 and wants to have sex and I'm 17, I'll have sex with
[1.09] her, with her consent. It will be on her consent if she wants to have sex. And
[1.10] that's how I would do it, I'd have a laugh over pornography.

George differentiates between those who use content for masturbation, and who are wrong in doing so [1.03-1.04], and those who joke about it, which – on the contrary - is not wrong [1.01-1.02]. 'Wrong' and 'right' are morally defined; but they are related to the reasons why people use sexual content. In general, wrong and right when it comes to sexuality are constructed within the context of a heteronormative relationship, understood here as a socially acceptable sexual status. This notion is here illustrated in George's statement about finding a girl with whom to have sex within a relationship [1.06-1.09] and laughing at pornography [1.10]. Laughing is an act of disavowal in this case: it implies a normative position from which one disavows what is considered not normative. In this sense being 'in a relationship' alters the individual's social

status and provides him with the power to disapprove of what is assumed to be non-normative. Sexual content for George connotes problematic sexuality, that is, an inability to engage in a socially acceptable model of relationship. However, laughter also implies sexual competence and offers the individual a choice to accept or reject what sexual content offers (McHoul, 1986, p.70). As McHoul (1986, p.69) argues, 'public discourses on sexuality are specifically designed for the already sexually competent'. George's identity work revolves then around sexual competence, located in being in a romantic relationship instead of getting pleasure from sexual content [1.08-1.10].

He also argues about consent. George positions himself as an iconic, 'what-all-girls-want' male, romantic and respectful. In this sense, consent works as a signifier of romanticism and respect [1.08-1.09]. Consent has been a contested issue within the pornography debate, as according to established anti-porn feminist arguments, female sex workers do not in general engage in consensual sex (e.g. Morgan, 1980). Additionally, although there is no overt evidence about this, I would assume that the setting of the interview - that is, the sexual health center - might have influenced George's performance. As Cornwell (1984) argues, people's public and private accounts are constructed and reconstructed in the process of the interview; and the institutional nature of the place where interviews are conducted could be assumed to influence the framing of what the participant chooses to discuss, or regards as socially acceptable. At a sexual health center experts or practitioners provide information about sexual health and consent in sexual activity. They promote 'healthy relationships' as a result of a loving affair within the legal age of consent (Mellanby et al., 2001; Chilman, 1990). Therefore, in order to be consensual, sex has to take place at a certain age and within a relationship where the partners know each other well. This makes George's self-positioning towards sexuality an ideological one, with clear personal standards and a well-thought-out, self-governed sexuality.

For George, the advantages of being in a relationship operate both on the political and the emotional level. George identifies his discomfort in watching sexual content, by contrast with real-life, face-to-face engagement:

[2.01] [...] you're at least face to face with the girl, they know you're gonna love,

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[2.02] basically.

The mediation of the screen is discomforting for George as it lacks the human touch and does not include emotional involvement [2.01]. Sex for him requires love or the intention to love; however, a stranger on screen does not provide physical contact or emotional attachment. This is where his choice of a 'real girl' is prioritized over masturbation. In contrast to his previous positioning in relation to health, now his positioning relates to emotions; yet it remains ethical. In a sense, the commitment (and trust) guaranteed or at least connoted within a loving relationship, imply George's claim for legitimacy as a sexual agent, which is achieved via his projection of a normative heterosexuality.

9.5.2. Sexual content and the relationship to peers

On another level his account rests on a binary opposition between 'them' (or 'people') and 'us' (himself and his friends). Sharing the same values with friends lends further legitimacy to his account and establishes his position more prominently within the peer and wider social context:

[3.01] D. What do you think sexual content's purpose is then?
[3.02] G. Pornography purposes, is just to get people to watch it, basically get
[3.03] pleasure for masturbation. To get people to watch it for that, which is probably
[3.04] not the right way to watch it for. I just watch it..., obviously people watch it for
[3.05] a laugh, like me, and obviously people get their friends and watch it for a
[3.06] laugh and find it more pleasurable to go and do stuff with their girlfriend.

Here as well, George is working on the collective identity of the group [3.05-3.06]. Researchers note that identity is in some cases about identifying ourselves with those whom we assume to be similar to us in some ways, while differentiating ourselves from others (Jenkins, 2004; Hogg & Abrams, 1988 inter alia). In this instance, the group's positioning towards sexuality is projected as superior in contrast to other people who possibly masturbate over porn.

Further, social conventions to do with trust and intimacy appear in George's argument that talking to girls about sexual content threatens the relationship:

[4.01] I wouldn't discuss it with a girl, no. [...] If you say something and they
[4.02] keep it, obviously say if, to a girl it's a big difference cos it might upset them,
[4.03] they might not want to be friends with you in that way, if you discuss porn with
[4.04] them. [...] Cos they don't think they can trust you.

George's talk here is gendered. Porn talk is allegedly masculine and might alienate a female [4.02]. If sexual content is socially condemned, then talking about it might create a negative impression of the person who chooses to discuss it [4.03]. It is then assumed to influence individuals' social and gender performance; this according to George is not socially acceptable because it is not consistent with his ethical standing. Gender performance also has – according to him - social effects, in that it influences the individual's social relationships [4.04].

9.5.3. Girls' use of sexual content

So far the discussion has not focused on females' use of sexual content. As the following extract shows, George remains consistent in his opinion about the effects of sexual content on a relationship, even when a woman asks a man to use sexual content:

[5.01]D.[...] So what if a girl comes to you and say 'you know George I'm curious
[5.02] how porn is?' would you like to watch it together?
[5.03] G. It's basically, it comes in the way, it's like a lad coming right in the
[5.04] middle of you two, breaking you two up and your relationship, and that lad
[5.05] going off with that gal that you were supposed to be with. Basically that's what
[5.06] porn does, it comes in and it could break you up. Could end your relationship
[5.07] basically. [...]
[5.08] Basically you don't have a strong relationship without sex obviously,
[5.09] face to face sex. Basically porn, it just has a false impact on you, basically it

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[5.10] just ruins everything you've done with each other, it just ruins it.

George has an ethical approach to relationships. Sexual content is given life and acts as a third person interfering in a relationship [5.04; 5.10]. Healy (1996) argues that males are keen to present themselves as 'proper' boys - that is, not just heterosexuals, but healthy heterosexuals. An indication of this here is George's didactic discourse [5.05-5.06; 5.08-5.10]. Sexual content is seen as a threat to commitment – and commitment in this case is linked to social acceptability. I have discussed in Chapter 4 how sex became a domestic, private activity (Foucault, 1978); George implies that having sex is something private between two people, without the interference of others, even if that takes the form of sexual content in the media.

Further, projecting his choice of engaging in a relationship and leaving sexual content out of it indicates his strategy of protecting his position and power as the only male partner within a romantic relationship. Sexual content is then seen as a threat to masculinity and it is personalized as 'another male'. Moreover, disavowing sexual content in this sense, also implies a disavowal of its assumed power to influence a relationship [5.08-5.10]. Laughter provides possibilities for disempowering the influence of sexual content via having the capacity to unpick it. However, as I have shown in chapter 7, it could also signify irony or discomfort. Following Giddens (1992), George's identity work operates as a regulatory process, defining his behaviour so as to be in line with social norms. In this respect his use of the word 'false' is a reflection of the alleged attitudinal effects of pornography on individuals. It is also a term signifying George's media literacy, which means his capacity to question the constructed nature of content and the outcomes it has for individuals.

As the discussion continues, George highlights the *naturalness* of having sex with a girl, in contrast to masturbation over sexual content:

[6.01] G. Sex is a natural thing, porn is not so much natural; basically it's better
[6.02] going out with a girl and having natural sex, than watch it on the internet, cos
[6.03] it doesn't prove that you're having sex on the screen, is just better to go off
[6.04] with a girl and have sex, cos at least you've proven you had sex, with a proper

[6.05] girl, face to face, instead of just watching it on screen.

[6.06] D. You said that you've proved to yourself that you're having sex

[6.07] G. I've proved to myself that I'm having sex with a girl yeah, is better than

[6.08] watching it on screen.

The mediated nature of sexual content is rejected through the use of terms like 'natural' and 'not so natural' [6.01-6.02]. Naturalness is here linked with physical touch but also with 'normality'. The comparison of biological sex with the use of sexual content and masturbation is the rationale behind his heteronormative identity. Naturalness, associated with socially appropriate relationships and physical contact, is characteristic of a socially acceptable relationship. The 'legal' status of his age (as he has already cited) is evidence of his legitimacy as an adult to engage in sexual relationships [6.03-6.05], while it is also evidence of moving away from the status of childhood, which in his narrative is associated with problematic sexuality or asexuality. George is positioning himself as an adult (sexually active by law) in an attempt to take a distance from stereotypical ideas about childhood (Lesko, 2001); and this in itself plays an important part in establishing his subjectivity as an ethical, socially acceptable adult [6.07-6.08]. One way to 'prove' this is to have a partner, which also proves that the individual is having sex. Having sex 'at the right age' as he mentions later on, implies a status of adulthood, of heterosexuality, and of a male who regulates his sexuality in a socially approved way – in line with Giddens's (1992) argument about young people being expected to make choices about life destinations and relationships.

Through this case I have tried to illustrate how a young man negotiates and performs his social identity in his 'sexual story'. George's discursive repertoire revolves primarily around ethical discourses. This kind of discourse defines the way he projects himself towards the researcher in the social event of the interview. Through this gender performance - implying how genders adapt and develop as subjectivities within an unfixed, yet given, social context (Butler, 1990) - George is telling a story about why he is a legitimate socio-sexual actor, with a right to exercise his sexual agency in a (heteronormative) social context.

9.6. Ellie (22, EL): Learning about the body and sex through sexual content

Ellie has studied pre-school education in a big town in northern Greece where she grew up. During childhood and teenage life she engaged with educational activities like learning foreign languages and was a member of a choir, socialising with friends. She claims to have been using new media since the age of 7. As a teenager she enjoyed chatting and 'looking a lot for music, reading about astrology, reading magazines online and so on'. When Ellie was 15, popular teen magazines were also available online. These magazines typically include information about relationships, sex and anatomy and provide girls with considerable information about sexuality. These magazines have been subject to considerable academic analysis in these terms. For example, Jackson (2005) has examined how teenage girls construct sexual health problems and sexual identities via letters to teen magazines; while Carpenter (1998) has examined scripts of sexuality and romance in *Seventeen* magazine from 1974-1994. Batchelor et al. (2004) suggest that youth media construct young people's sexuality in particular ways, for instance providing information about sexual health and about consent in sexual activity. However, they suggest that there are limited representations of young men, gay and lesbian communities. Such academic work indicates that teen magazines offer young readers a particular kind of knowledge about sexuality.

9.6.1. Understanding sex

Ellie's story outlines a chronological and progressive path to adulthood. Her narrative is systematically developed in a sequence of life segments, defined in terms of how she used sexual content to learn about female and male bodies and sexual activity. I have already shown that for some girls sexual content is a means to knowledge about sex and is experienced either by accident, or deliberately, out of curiosity. Ellie's account includes a rare account of her masturbatory practices. Our discussion begins with Ellie's statement about sexual knowledge:

[1.01] D. So I now want you to tell me when you remember having seen something
[1.02] that you considered sexual for the first time.

[1.03] E. I don't really remember, there was always a kind of knowledge you know. I

[1.04] mean, even when watching a kiss on TV you were thinking that something

[1.05] romantic/ erotic was going on.[...]You would see naked people in a bed and

[1.06] you would understand.

For Ellie, kissing or lying in bed carries a symbolic meaning of sexual activity [1.01]. There is a kind of general social/cultural knowledge which she draws upon to make meaning of the content she has seen [1.03-1.06]. Sexual content in the media is a confirmation that sex really exists and is a link to preexisting knowledge about sex that people have already acquired from sources such as family, media and school. As Ellie subsequently notes:

[2.01] I think I started realising what the process was, cause you know as a teen,

[2.02] that they are doing it on a bed; but I linked it to the actual activity - how it's

[2.03] done, what's the aim and so on - when I was 10 or so. 10-11. [...] for example,

[2.04] when I was in the second year of primary school, I would understand that 'oh

[2.05] these two are in bed and they are having sex' but didn't know what sex was; I

[2.06] could imagine it was something enjoyable, something saucy, but it was unclear

[2.07] in my mind. I didn't know how it was exactly.

Ellie begins her story about sexual content by reflecting on herself as a young female who receives different information about sex and attempts to organise it in a logical sequence [2.02-2.05]. She explores her sexual development via a flashback to her early experiences with sexual content in the media as a 'teen' [2.01]. This makes the narrative a story about growing up sexually through access to sexual information. It is a narrative about the transition from childhood to teenage life, from one socially (and not just biologically) defined status to another (Lesko, 2001). This raises the issue of how a female teenager is expected to develop her social identity (Currie, 1999). I suggest Ellie is retrospectively elaborating on issues that concern girls in general at the ages between 11-16 (e.g. what girls do with boys, or how the body changes). The biological changes of the body during teenage life are, as Lesko (2001) argues, discussed in a context of 'confident classifications' about individuals of this age and frame how adolescence is perceived as a transitional status which is no longer childhood and not yet adulthood. It is also

at this stage of life that sex education curricula intensify young peoples' education about sexuality and parents may wish to talk with their offspring about it (e.g. Blakey & Frankland, 1996; Walker, 2001). In this respect, teenage life is conceptualized via technologies such as sex education, and framed through discourses about appropriate sexuality, reproduction and risk, all of which seek to prevent teenagers from engaging in casual sex.

Consequently, it is a social expectation that teenagers will be interested in sex, but also that this might cause problems or risks. In the beginning of the discussion, Ellie is reflecting on a younger self that lacked the knowledge to interpret what sex means, an indication of how individuals distance themselves from their self at a younger age - the 'other', framed as social beings in the making (Lesko, 2001). In what follows there is a discussion about the first sexual representation Ellie saw:

[3.01] E. Well, she was a vampire and he was a cop and and he was running after
[3.02] her. At the end they fell in love and they have sex at some time. [...] I then
[3.03] realised that this is somehow related to you and your desires; meaning that
[3.04] this is an erotic act and also has an influence on you.
[3.05] D. What kind of influence? Physical?
[3.06] E. Yes that's what I mean, That physically it does something to you. A kind of
[3.07] desire.

Ellie is describing a scene, possibly from a Hollywood-style movie, as she does not refer to any kind of explicit sexual representation. She highlights the 'love' factor [3.02], and what seems to strike her is that sexual activity is associated with love [3.02-3.03] The interaction between a male and a female leads to love, and then to sex. This kind of sequence helps her make meaning of love as directly related to sex. Here she interprets this set of knowledge about love as being linked to something physical and expressed as a physical desire [3.06-3.07]. Through this new set of information she is working on her understanding of what love and sex are – and in this respect, this reflects my earlier argument that arousal can be seen to be social, and not merely physiological [3.05]. Ellie is experiencing desire, which is also a sexual feeling. She is working on her emotions; and this 'emotion talk' is part of her identity formation as a female teenager.

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9.6.2. A developmental approach to sexuality

The following extract shows even more clearly that Ellie's story is about sexual development:

[4.01] E. Yes, I think in my case it begun as a consideration, then I linked that to
[4.02] myself, that I grow up that I'm gonna have periods, I mean I saw porn and I
[4.03] knew pretty much what was happening even before I had periods. [...]
[4.04] D. You were thinking about it at the time, or do you just realise now?
[4.05] No, no I knew at the time, because I remember I started like that, meaning that
[4.06] I wanted more to see after that. The erotic movies, I think I wanted to see so as
[4.07] to understand how sex is done. It was really in my mind, thinking that 'as in a
[4.08] while you'll have periods, after a while you'll want to have sex, so you'll have
[4.09] to know how it's done'.

Unlike other participants, she relates watching sexual content to her sexual development – an indication of her anticipating a time when she will be sexually grown up [4.02; 4.05-4.09]. Again there is a link to Lesko's (2001) argument about how teenagers seek to project a self that is distinct from that of the child. However, it is also a statement about how biological changes correlate to sexual development, what Lesko called the 'confident characterisation' of the stages of growing up (2001, p.4) - telling us what adolescents will be like in the near future [4.08-4.09].

In her account of the process of experiencing sexual content, Ellie is also reflecting critically upon the values and norms with which a person grows up. She projects a self that is curious about sex, and a self that focuses on bodily changes. In relation to my question about the pedagogical role of sexual content, Ellie offers some more information showing her primary interest in sex:

[5.01] D. So it had a pedagogical role for you too
[5.02] E. Almost yes, concerning how I started looking for it. Because on the one
[5.03] hand there was what I told you, that I saw it (sex) in a movie, that I knew was a
[5.04] bit inappropriate for minors but wanted to see it, it caught my attention, cause

[5.05] it caused me something physical. But then, it was also that I had to understand
[5.06] what is going to happen to me, I felt that as nobody is going to explain it to me
[5.07] I have to do it. So I was reading about it, before I saw porn I was reading
[5.08] Askiti's (a Greek sexologist) books so as to understand a woman's cycle and
[5.09] so on. That's how I linked it all together.

For Ellie, sexual content performs a very specific role. It is a tool for exploring her body and experimenting with the idea of sex [5.05-5.06]. Partly the reason why Ellie sees an educational aspect in sexual content is because of the lack of sex education in Greece [5.05-5.07]. Nevertheless, her interest in looking for information in legitimate sources such as sexology books implies that there is a kind of work entailed in forming a sexual identity. It also implies that Ellie, in the same way as George, is assessing the legitimacy of the sources she uses to find out about sexuality - and this reflects a further claim for her legitimacy in talking about sexuality overall. Thus, she discusses how she formed an opinion about sex before watching pornographic content; and she places particular significance on the sources of her knowledge about sex, such as sexology books [5.08].

Moreover, avoiding masturbation or any kind of engagement with actual sexual intercourse makes the experience of watching sexual content less wrong ('I'm not doing anything anyway, it's something I only see, back then I didn't know exactly how it was, it was very unclear'). It makes it an educational process. This statement is ethical as Ellie claims that she is not engaging physically with sex, which would be not acceptable for her at a young age. The mediation of sexual activity puts the developmental process in a safe context; it almost seems as Ellie is learning about sex by virtue of being protected from physically engaging with it. This reassurance that what she was doing is not inappropriate (as compared with actually having sex at a young age), alongside a more open stance towards human sexual development might explain her positive emotions during the experience:

[6.01] E. I was looking to learn, I was watching, learning, thinking about it a bit; I
[6.02] was trying to decide what I liked, I used to think about it a lot.
[6.03] E. I think a year after that, I was 13 or so, when I begun watching more [...],

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[6.04] maybe earlier, I'm not really sure.

Ellie describes how she looked at more explicit types of sexual content [6.04] in her attempt to learn more about sex – a practice that may be especially significant in countries where sex is taboo. She makes a statement about forming her sexual tastes through accessing sexual content [6.02]. In this sense, she argues that sexual content provides information about diverse sexual tastes and functions, serving as a space where people could possibly explore their sexual orientation.

Large numbers of participants in surveys about taste in pornographic content report their preference for mainstream heterosexual activity, foreplay and sex positions where male control in sex is obvious (Chronaki & Tsaliki, 2013). From an effects point of view, Ellie's interest in looking for more explicit or diverse representations might be interpreted as evidence of addiction or desensitisation towards sexual content [6.03-6.04]. However, this process of sexual development might also be seen in terms of the ideas discussed in Chapter 7 about sexual content as a cultural form that might extend the user's 'horizon of expectations'. Ellie tests her horizon of expectations by experimenting with different kinds of content, which might lead to a change in this horizon – although it is also a matter of choice for the individual to either reject or accept this kind of change. In effect, it appears that Ellie works on a form of self-directed sex education, using different media sources. She elaborates on her curiosity to understand the biology of sex:

[7.01] E. I was doing that by myself, I've seen the erotic movies that don't focus on
[7.02] genitalia and basically my knowledge was to the basics, you know: what does
[7.03] the penis look like?[...]Basically I wanted to see for once or else I'd be left
[7.04] clueless about it. Cos even my dolls have a kind of a plastic slip you know?
[7.05] (laughs) [...] And I also wanted to know how it is and how it changes
[7.06] D. And how did you react?
[7.07] E. I think you have anyway a body reaction, cos by default the reason you're
[7.08] looking for it, means you're ready to have a physical reaction like this.

She claims that arousal is something that happens physically and leads the individual to look for

content that will offer sexual pleasure [7.07-7.08]. By contrast with theories of desensitisation (Griffiths & Shuckford, 1989), it is her lack of knowledge about the 'covered' parts of human body that led her explore further the human anatomy [7.03]. As she mentions, even dolls' genitalia are covered [7.04], something that implies that there is an attempt to keep young people away from sexual knowledge [7.05]. She is, in other words, pointing at the contradictory expectations that adults have of children, who are presumed to be in need of knowledge about proper sex but also expected to remain asexual.

To sum up, Ellie's account is a chronological narrative of sexual development. She combines sexual and social knowledge in a social performance of gender (displaying how girls are expected to act). Gender performativity provides a platform where she unpicks how she developed sexually within a context of biological and cultural understandings of children's sexuality. In this respect this story is both a narrative and an identity statement: like George, but in a different way, Ellie is claiming authority to talk about sexuality and position herself among adults. Ellie's story offers an account of the kind that rarely appears in research where using sexual content is seen as an addictive habit, or as a source of negative male attitudes towards sex and women.

9.7. Tara (20, UK): a story about upbringing and 'cosmopolitan' identity

9.7.1. A cosmopolitan identity

Tara (20, UK) studies in London. She lived in Thailand from the age of 10 and moved to London at the age of 18. Therefore, the years of her life that we discussed took place in Thailand. I chose to include the following introductory extract to highlight that Tara's traveling around with her family appears to be significant for the ways she establishes her identity. From the beginning of her story Tara introduces me to family activities, in the context of talking about her musical preferences:

[1.01] Yeah, I changed a lot I guess, but they are like the sort of Rihanna, and like,

[1.02] you know, commercial, yeah Madonna, Jay-Z, but then there was also like

[1.03] indie, rock that I do like to get into as I get older, so rock stuff... at home I used

[1.04] to listen to different music because my family travelled a lot so my parents play

[1.05] a lot of world music and things like that...it is a bit of a contrast I guess...

Moving between countries, a young person's social relations may change. Family bonds on the other hand may become stronger because of these continuous changes. As Hagan et al. (1996) argue, family migration has effects on children's social capital. In this extract Tara makes a statement about her cultural capital. She is positioning herself politically, and perhaps also in terms of class, by labeling popular artists as 'commercial' [1.01-1.02]. Her assertion of class is combined with a notion of sophistication - possibly related to age maturity. In other words, she is working here on a cosmopolitan identity signified by sophistication and diversity in musical taste [1.03] deriving from her family's travelling around the world [1.03-1.04]. At this early stage, Tara is clearly signaling that that her talk will most probably revolve around family influences rather than the dynamics of the peer group.

9.7.2. Sexual, sexualized and pornographic content

In the next extract Tara makes a statement about what is sexual or sexualised, and also distinguishes between sexualised and pornographic:

[2.01] Uhm, I guess I find like advertisements often very sexualised, uhm, lesser in

[2.02] Singapore than I do here though, I mean, on the internet, occasionally, I mean,

[2.03] once or twice I did like come across sites, like by accident, where I was like

[2.04] 'that's not right', you know, like especially on Neopets, actually, like, it was..

[2.05] [...] Well yeah, and one of the things was definitely like a pornographic site

[2.06] which should not be there, so I guess I accidentally stumbled across it. That

[2.07] was the most striking thing I have ever noticed but generally it was like not

[2.08] really an issue.

Tara's use of the term 'sexualized' here is especially notable. Although sexualisation is arguably not a new phenomenon (Buckingham, 2011), the term itself has only recently risen to the top of the public agenda. As a notion, it has been embraced by academics too, including those representing the effects (e.g. Papadopoulos, 2010), feminist (Gill, 2012) and audience reception traditions (Bale, 2012). Tara's statement indicates her awareness of the public debate as the use of the quasi-academic term 'sexualized' shows. In Chapter 7 I discussed the different interpretations of the term 'pornographic', and looked at how most kinds of representations of nudity or sex are classified bluntly as pornographic. By contrast, the term 'sexualised' [2.01] not only legitimates critical discussion on the topic, but also functions as a bigger 'umbrella term' encompassing anything from sexual to pornographic. Tara's claim about 'sexualised' images helps to project a knowledgable, mature and sophisticated self, possibly derived from her academic status and upbringing. In what follows she asserts ethical criteria in accounting for sexual content and expands on her opinion further:

[3.01] I felt it was not appropriate for a children's site. I mean Neopets is not
[3.02] necessarily a children's site, all different ages use it but it was just definitely
[3.03] not, I, I don't know, it's because some very young children use it as well.

Tara's argument is built on the fact that what is appropriate might be something is related to personal ethics and values ('felt' [3.01]). Indeed, as Neopets is not a porn site but a gaming one there might be a serious issue about where sexual content appears, and Tara is addressing exactly this issue. In this sense she is making a comment on policy or at least a comment on what is usually classified as 'appropriate for minors'. The notion of 'appropriateness' might in this sense reflect Tara's agency to talk pedagogically about younger children. Such identity statements might be seen as part of a process of age performance where individuals position themselves in relation to their age and the age of others (Alanen, 2001). In taking this point further, Tara again refers to her upbringing playing a role in the way she thinks about sex and sexual content:

[4.01] D. Ok, let's say that they come across a site, a porn site, mainstream porn, do
[4.02] you think that this is risky for children? That it could hurt them?
[4.03] T. Uhm, I guess it depends, I think it's more about how your view is

[4.04] initially...about how you are brought up to think about it, if you are brought up

[4.05] to think about it as a normal thing that happens all the time, then I think it

[4.06] would be risky that they saw one and then they would, like, keep looking for it,

[4.07] as that was a bad thing. Whereas if, like me you are brought up with such a

[4.08] taboo then, like, ok I might come across it, but I would immediately close it

[4.09] down and I wouldn't get involved with it, I wouldn't want to get involved with

[4.10] it.

Tara explains why she thinks it is problematic to use sexual content; yet this is presented as a problem for which she claims to have found the solution [4.08-4.09], namely, upbringing. As I have discussed already, Foucault (1978) discussed how parents have been attributed the responsibility to bring up their children within a context of specific values in relation to sexuality. Tara presents a case of family upbringing within which the child learns about 'appropriate' sex and the ways to deal with 'inappropriate' forms [4.01-4.06]. Projecting her normal subjectivity, she juxtaposes this with what is deemed less normal, namely to think about sexual content as something normal [4.05]. The notion of 'normality' obviously falls within a framework of right and wrong, a moral code that derives from upbringing; and this is indicative of how self-regulation works. Tara appears to argue that a less liberal parenting style [4.05-4.08] might provide a better upbringing. 'Taboo' [4.08] is another quasi-academic, ill-defined term that appears frequently in debates about sexuality: it broadly refers to issues that are not openly discussed in public, or are veiled with a notion of secrecy – and while sexuality is one such issue, others relate to race and gender, categories that entail relationships of power between social groups.

Through her talk about upbringing, Tara retrospectively constructs a self, defined by certain ethical values:

[5.01] I never, well I don't really want to see it, I really don't want to see it. I find

[5.02] it really shocking and really gross I guess yeah...hm. I'll never go looking for it

[5.03] on purpose. I feel really awkward when I, even like on magazines I don't like

[5.04] to look at them cause it makes me feel really awkward.

There is an emotional engagement with content here. Emotions (disgust, shock) relate logically with the nature of the perceptions developed within these contexts and play a significant part in positioning her further during the social event of the interview. Her choice of words like 'never', and 'really' is not only an indication of strong opinions [5.01], but also implies character stability through different ages, which can again be seen as a kind of 'age performance'. Her assertion that sexual content was inappropriate to see and her claim that she never wanted to see something like that again [5.01-5.03], implies that it is more the practice of doing something wrong rather than the actual depiction that troubles her. In this sense, the words she uses to describe sexual content, namely 'shocking' and 'gross' [5.02], represent social and ethical responses to the incident of the activity.

Claims about what is 'shocking', 'gross' and 'unacceptable' again imply their opposite, a context of 'normality', and of Tara's own normal subjectivity. Although nudity or sex is not 'naturally' gross, it comes to be perceived as such once it is exposed in public. In this respect, my point about the social nature of emotions (Chapter 7) is further supported. A further element that might disturb a normal subjectivity is the motivation for actively looking for sexual content (as opposed to encountering it unexpectedly); and here again, Tara attributes a negative connotation to someone who might do this [5.02]. Via this clarification she might just want to make it even clearer that, as she is strongly opposed to using sexual content, she would not look for it on purpose. By contrast, coming across sexual content accidentally might be less wrong. In all these respects, emotions and age performance are processes projected through assertions of ethics and knowledge about sexuality, which in this case further invoke Tara's moral capital which she defines as a result of her upbringing; and this moral capital in turn offers legitimacy to her claims of a rightful engagement with adults' discussions of children's sexuality.

9.7.3. A feminist argumentation

Tara's expression of discomfort is also an indication of her construction of a political self. Her argument in this respect generated a number of 'why' questions on my behalf, primarily about the emotions that the experience provoked:

[6.01] D. Why do you think you feel gross about it?
[6.02] T. I guess cause it seems more explicit, as opposed to, I mean, like that kind of
[6.03] stuff should be kept private or like, I mean, it makes me feel as if it's like a
[6.04] woman, you know like especially if it's a naked woman or something, it makes
[6.05] me feel like violated as a woman...I find it really like... I come from feminist
[6.06] perspective, I feel like it's like selling, it's like prostitution, but you know like
[6.07] on a piece of paper, you know, and I also find it, like, the idea that someone's
[6.08] buying this kind of magazines because they want to see that, because I don't
[6.09] know, maybe they want to go and just be by themselves in their bedroom if you
[6.10] know what I mean? and that kind of idea, I just don't like thinking about that,
[6.11] cause it's just is, I don't know, it's like normal I suppose but I find it, I don't
[6.12] like to think about it.

She is here accounting for explicitness, and the binary of private and public when it comes to sexuality [6.02-6.04]. The notion of explicitness also plays a role in her feminist argument [6.05]: 'violation' is a popular term in anti-porn feminism. It is thus a political term. Explicitness then has to do with a way of positioning oneself towards sexuality ideologically: this issue is not just nudity but the context within which it is shown. The same moral standards about sex appear in her references to the privacy of sexual intercourse [6.03]. Further down she explicitly claims that this is a feminist argument [6.05], and she positions herself within a very specific intellectual context that relates to an equally specific view of female sexuality. Her argumentation draws on a 'second wave' feminist approach to pornography as equal to prostitution (e.g. Dworkin, 2004) - an argument that is also apparent within academic research (e.g. Spector, 2006; Weitzer, 2010). Her argument thus connects both with the public and the academic debate and this possibly adds to the credibility she claims for her position. Prostitution, for her, is systemic and involves not

just the female who 'sells' her naked body but also the person who buys it for consumption [6.08-6.11].

Therefore, the problem of pornography is not just that it entails a kind of sexual activity (which according to Tara should remain private), but also that it is subject to financial exchange (which makes it prostitution). Tara also comments on the lack of females' consent or choice in this sexual relationship, which is another argument of the anti-porn movement. Therefore, in claiming legitimacy for her political argument, Tara also makes reference to her moral capital and continues with references to her academic status. What remains to be seen is the actual link between these and her upbringing.

9.7.4. Sexual ethics: An issue of upbringing

It is clear so far that Tara is not accounting so much for what she has seen, but for what she believes about sexual content, and about how her views have been shaped. Through her account two value-laden aspects of herself are highlighted: the ethics of her upbringing and a socially and politically acknowledged cultural capital. She is positioning herself in that respect within a kinship concept, and also in relation to the concept of sisterhood that ran through the 'second wave' women's movement. Tara chooses to position herself within a feminist ethical context, where women are 'appropriately' sexual and iconically activist in favour of women's rights.

[7.01] D. so I'm trying to figure out what made you stay away from it...
[7.02] T. I guess it has lots to do with my parents...my parents aren't conservative
[7.03] like, I wouldn't say like a strict English family or anything…

The above extract is the point where she makes a first link to her upbringing. She clarifies that her parents are not conservative [7.02-7.03]. She might here be dealing with stereotypes about sexual prudence and attempting to create a specific profile of her parents, since her behaviour is, according to her, a result of their influence. As seen in other cases, the binary 'liberal-conservative' is directly linked to the question of upbringing. There is a disavowal of

conservatism and an equal scepticism about families or parents being too liberal: parents that are neither too conservative nor too liberal are profiled as 'right' parents. This argument appears in cases where participants (for example George, Gitte, Richard among others) make references to their parents' influence concerning sexuality. In this study, those who express such views have been, in most cases, rather negative about sexual content.

Tara's story is related to the emphasis on 'parental mediation' of children's sexual and moral development, discussed in Chapter 3. As I have shown, there is a long history here, linking the practices described in Foucault's (1978) genealogical analysis with the kinds of ideas promoted by the EU Kids Online project in seeking to ensure children's safe use of online technologies (Hasebrink et al., 2011; O' Neill et al., 2011). The latter approach tends to suggest that effective parental mediation involves parents' participation in children's online activities, implying neither a strict nor a permissive approach, but one that emphasizes pedagogy and the need for guidance. This is the kind of approach Tara also appears to favour:

[8.04] If they saw that me or my brothers were using it they would definitely take it
[8.05] away, so, hm, and they would really condemn it…I think, I just, I always think
[8.06] if I do it and my parents knew I'd feel really ashamed for myself.., so, and…
[8.07] […] because we are just really close as a family and I, I would not like, ah,
[8.08] I, yeah, [...]Uhm, has maybe something to do with the fact that we travelled
[8.09] around all the time, because, I mean we were in Singapore for 8 years, but
[8.10] before that we were in places for like, 2 years, 2 years, 2 years in different
[8.11] places, […] and so it was, like, my morals and values I suppose had to come
[8.12] from them, […] I just knew that my parents would look down on me for doing
[8.13] that and because they are very into, like, you know, keeping you not innocent,
[8.14] not naïve but innocent yeah, for as long as possible I suppose…

Tara offers a rationalisation of how her moral capital developed by explaining the likely consequences that would follow her parents catching their offspring watching sexual content [8.04-8.06; 8.12-8.14]. This is linked to an assertion of how the strong bonds within the family have been shaped [8.08-8.11]. Rejection of things that might contradict the family's morality is

part of the rules of the household, and consequently part of Tara's regulated upbringing. 'Shame', which Tara claims she would feel if her parents knew she have been using sexual content, is, as I discussed in Chapter 7, a social emotion. It reflects a change in our public profile after others have learnt that we did something we were not supposed to. In this case, shame is a reflection of the negative stance of parents in the event of the children's purposeful search for sexual content. As this shows, Tara appears to have a clear explanation about how she developed as a person through her parents' guidance – even though she talks about it as something she could not avoid given her circumstances [8.11-8.12]. It might therefore be a point that differentiates her upbringing from that of others, and she uses it to provide an explanation of why she came to be the person she is:

[9.01] I guess if you know people for two years, it's not that you build up eh…, 'you
[9.02] know, this is my childhood friend', you know? And we talk about everything
[9.03] together.

For Tara family has been the only stable factor in her development and this has led to a comparative lack of peer influences. Tara's parents have been her main resource in her social development and therefore it is their perspective through which she sees the world and understands herself within it. By contrast, in all the other participants' stories, where there is talk about upbringing there is a good deal of discussion of the role of friends, and the sense of belonging to a community that seems to be required in order to claim one's rightful position within the public debate about children's sexuality.

Towards the end of the previous extract Tara repeats that her parents would 'look down' on her for watching sexual content [8.13-8.14]. The explanation she offers relates to the notion of innocence, a quality that generally appears to be dealt with as a virtue in the public debate – although of course innocence might equally be reframed as ignorance. The perception of childhood as a status of innocence in the 18th century is as Foucault argues (1978) linked to religious discourse, but it also becomes part of governmentality. On the one hand parents are obliged to protect the child from the 'forbidden knowledge' that will corrupt it; yet on the other hand, the child needs to follow parental guidance in order to preserve this innocence. In both

cases, the objective appears to be strengthening children's control over their own desire. Some of this approach seems to inform Tara's account of her parents and her upbringing.

To sum up, Tara's case illustrates the governmental context of children's lives when it comes to sexuality. She aligns the iconic innocent child with a political and social actor (her feminist identity), thereby establishing her status to speak as an ethically, academically and politically legitimate subject in the public debate about children, women and sexuality. Both the innocent child and the intellectual female reflect kinds of struggle undertaken by allegedly 'problematic' social groups (children, women) to claim their right within an adult, male-dominated society. In this sense, talking about sexuality becomes an activist act, and signifies an activist lifestyle overall. This is one of the few times that such an angle is revealed in my participants' accounts. In general, children so far are discussed as passive victims of pornography. Tara offers evidence that pornography can also prompt a form of activism, where young people play an active and significant role in defining the part pornography might play in their life.

9.8. Richard (21, UK): the 'addictive' personality and the problem of pornography

9.8.1. Profiling the addicted internet user

Richard (21, UK) grew up in east London and in a town in Surrey. He finished college and started working when he was 18. His daily life includes work and socializing with friends; he also has a girlfriend (Elisabeth, who was also interviewed). In my view, Richard offers the most interesting example of reproduction of the popular argument about the effects of pornography and of the threat it poses for people. Richard's Catholic background makes his story one about how religious upbringing and sociocultural literacy influence participants' identity work and eventually their life choices.

[1.01] R. I was a big geek [...] I play X-box a few hours, a little bit, a few hours, but I
[1.02] don't play internet games cause I know I'll get addicted again, cos I've got an
[1.03] addictive personality, if I do things I might get addicted to it

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[1.04] D. Cos you know the term addicted =

[1.05] R.   [well, when I first got my Playstation I started playing for a few hours

[1.06] a day, and then my entire evening was playing Playstation. Then I started

[1.07] playing Warcraft and it was a few hours a day, and then it was my entire day, I

[1.08] would wake up and my entire day was Warcraft, so 25 or so days when I was

[1.09] addicted to it like a cold turkey. Then I bought my X-box, an hour here and

[1.10] there, and I got addicted in the next six months. So I try not to play that much.

Although he uses the term 'geek' [1.01] (see McArthur, 2009; Margolis & Fisher, 2003) which usually signifies a computer savvy person, his use of the word at this point appears to have a double meaning: first, to inform me that he is an avid user of technology; and second to make a statement about the probabilities of becoming addicted. Richard implies that addiction is a trait of a person and not caused by the medium. This is a recurrent issue that appears in the rest of the interview as well. Since I challenge his use of the word addiction, his narration of a more detailed story about his 'addictive' experiences with games [1.05-1.10] might be intended here to establish the legitimacy of his statement. In challenging participants' choices in using words like 'addiction', my aim was to get further insight into their understandings of such popular concepts; although it is clear that the use of this term was meaningful for Richard on a personal psychological level, and not merely a matter of rehearsing socially acceptable discourses.

Richard is describing a continuum of circumstances that might well be seen to provide evidence of his 'addictive' personality. As Richard knows the topic of discussion, an assumption might be that he is introducing me to himself as a particular type of media user. The term 'addicted' appears to be already working as a problematic, but at the same time temporary, situation. It seems that once he found a solution to this problem (self-regulation), he then became knowledgeable about how to stay safe [1.10]. To further legitimize his argument about the negative consequences of excessive use of the internet, Richard makes a claim about his eyesight problems:

[2.01] That's why I wear glasses. [...]My eyes wouldn't be that bad if it wasn't

[2.02] staring at the screen so much.

The effects on eyesight were among the first arguments to be raised with the rise of electronic screen-based media (e.g. Howitt, 1976; Chevallier & Mansour, 1993; MacBeth, 2003). The story Richard tells about how he and his siblings have a genetic eyesight problem seems to provide further support ('*My brother and sister, cos theirs it's genetic, my brother and sister have eyes that are way better than mine*'). Richard then unpicks his argument about media by answering my question about how he uses the Internet now and what is his daily routine:

[3.01] Yeah cos otherwise you could spend your life in the internet. It's like
[3.02] watching, I don't watch TV, TV's shit, it just wastes your life, it's like watching
[3.03] Friends, it's just takes hours of your life and you're not doing anything.
[3.04] By searching on the internet, hours of your life and you're not doing anything.
[3.05] Hence on games, because you don't have to be active, but there's an aim and a
[3.06] goal and there's an end point. And films are good because I very much enjoy
[3.07] watching films, they have plot, screen play and things like that. Uhm, so it has
[3.08] an aim and a goal I like it. Whereas Internet surfing, has no aim, no end point,
[3.09] has no goal.

Here Richard is applying his argument about gaming to support a broader statement about media in general. There might be a link here to what McLuhan (1987) has written about the distinction between 'cool' and 'warm' media: the extent to which the audience interacts with the content or the medium, appears to define, for Richard, the usefulness of the medium itself. For example, when someone is watching a TV programme or surfs online, they are seen to be just observing, receiving messages, and this represents a significant loss of time from other activities (such as socializing) [3.01-3.04]. This statement mirrors the popular argument about media effects on viewers' social skills (e.g. Bryant & Zilmann, 1986) and serves to contextualize Richard's overall discussion. It appears though that he is also positioning himself within a peer culture where gaming is popular: he claims that if media use has a goal (like gaming), or makes meaning (like movies), then it is not waste of time. This argument implies a strongly goal-directed use of media and links back to Chapter 7, where I discussed how participants imply that media (and sexual content in particular) can be seen from a uses and gratifications perspective.

Richard uses the interpretative repertoire of addiction, and presents the process progressively as one of acknowledging the problem, solving it and then applying this prior knowledge to future life choices. In cases like Richard's, participants were keen to offer me some 'lay theories' about how people act or think, especially in the context of media use. According to Plaks et al. (2009), people use lay theories to help them make sense of complex and ambiguous behaviour: lay theories are linked to a meaning system, which is also related to certain sets of morals, and stereotypes that people develop. Furnham (1988) offers a broader definition of lay theories as the common-sense explanations that people give about social behaviours. This psychological term seems to offer a useful way to describe the quasi-expert positions Richard and other participants claim in their narratives (like Gitte (18, DK), or Kate (19, UK)).

9.8.2. Experiencing sexual content

Such lay theories also offer Richard a means of positioning himself within a narrative about his own past experience of sexual content:

[4.01] D. Yeah ok so you saw it when you were 11. How did that feel?
[4.02] R. It didn't like, it was like a turn on thing, I think at 11, it was more like, 'oh
[4.03] Herby is naughty'. Something like that cos I knew it was bad, I knew I'd get in
[4.04] trouble so […] if my parents would walk in yeah, I'd get in trouble, definitely.
[4.05] […] So it was easier to forget about it along the way, not bring it out, never
[4.06] mention it.

In the first few lines Richard is making two key points. First, he claims that he could not relate arousal to sexual representation because of lacking relevant knowledge at the age of 11 [4.01-4.02]. However, he was knowledgeable enough to know that this kind of representation was a 'forbidden fruit' [4.03-4.04]. Referring to the term 'naughty' implies knowledge about the 'adult' nature of the content even though he might not necessarily interpret the sexual meanings provided. The experience was thus interpreted as troublesome, implying that access would cause

problems with his parents [4.04; 4.06]. This part of the story ties with Foucault's analysis of childhood and sexuality in two ways. First, it suggests that children - as dependent upon parents – should confess their experiences to adults (parents, the priest or the doctor) in order to be protected from harm (Foucault, 1978). Secondly, it provides an indication of how self-governmentality technologies work, implied by his reference to the experience being 'bad' (Foucault, 1986).

[5.01] My parents never spoke about that, when I was year 7, there was this kid in
[5.02] my class and he just talked about it the whole time, and he kind of got the
[5.03] impression from being in school and from adults that they had their secrets
[5.04]and that he can't watch the 15s (films that require audience to be over 15).
[5.05] Obviously I have watched films so I knew, cos I was into films, I knew what
[5.06] was in those films and why it was a 15. So I knew that it was a taboo, and that
[5.07] it was against the rules. [...]I wasn't allowed to watch films, my parents didn't
[5.08]let me watch when I was younger. So as soon as I was at the right age I could
[5.09] watch it. But, so if my parents knew it was 12, even if that shouldn't be the
[5.10] rating, I wasn't allowed to watch it.

Richard tells me another story here, probably as part of his work on self-regulation. He uses the example of film watching [5.07] to assert his media literacy. This example helps him rationalize and explain how rules of media use worked for him as a child. However, he describes a rather authoritarian approach to parental mediation, which coincides with the approach of media regulators [5.04-5.06]. One can observe a biopolitical perspective on media use here: there are certain rules imposed by authoritative institutions (family, law) that the child has to comply with [5.07]. This restrictive parental mediation frames his media use in a very specific way, creating a definition of the 'taboo' and therefore of what he should not see, and thereby at the same time the appeal of 'forbidden fruit' [5.06-5.07].

9.8.3. Addicted to pornography

In what follows, Richard provides another lay theory about addiction to sexual content:

[6.01] You're not letting steam off, you're getting yourself even more wired up and
[6.02] then the more you do it, the more you feel the need to let off steam, so it adds
[6.03] extra stress on your life: Say if you meet guys that hardly ever wank, uhm, it's
[6.04] because they don't feel the need to wank that much, whereas people that watch
[6.05] a lot of porn, they feel the need to wank more, which means they feel the need
[6.06] to let off steam, which means they get more pent up and more stressed up.

He is here raising another approach to addiction theory, according to which heavier use of sexual content results in more frequent masturbation. This approach has been embraced by some researchers within the effects tradition (e.g. Štulhofer et al., 2010), alongside assumptions about the problematic nature of masturbation (e.g. Marshall, 1988). As we have seen, Foucault's (1978) analysis shows that masturbation has been regarded as a sexually problematic activity since the 18th century. For Richard, masturbation is an indication of non-healthy sexuality, leading to heavier use of sexual content and consequently to addiction [6.01; 6.02; 6.06]. This health discourse is, as I show later, strongly related to a moral discourse in Richard's perspective; an indication is in his references to the 'need to wank' [6.04-6.05]. Richard then distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy people and identifies a causal relation between watching porn and masturbating of the kind typically assumed in effects research.

Later in his argument he introduces the concept of the vulnerable individual. Reiterating his claims about his addictive personality, he makes a statement about people who are vulnerable (cf. Livingstone & Palmer, 2012) or at risk of experiencing effects from pornography (*'it's so easy to get addicted to it, I've got an addictive personality, so it's just easy'*). Again a lay theory about the problem works as the rationale behind his perspective about sexual content, and serves to position him within the public discourse on addiction.

Richard offers then an account of his personal case with excessive use of content. His story

reveals some of the typical traits of an 'addictive personality' found in research (e.g. Livingstone et al., 2010b, p.31):

[7.01] R. I never liked doing it, but when you're bored, like, when I'm bored I eat,
[7.02] that's what I do when I'm bored now, I eat, cos I was a lot bored then, and I
[7.03] was doing a lot on the computer, I'd be like, oh I'm on my computer there's
[7.04] no-one in the house
[7.05]D. [and I can watch porn

A combination of boredom, and the excitement of being temporarily without parental supervision, is how Richard rationalizes his desire to look for sexual content [7.01-7.03]. To use Giddens's (1992, p.91) argument, albeit rather simplistically, Richard's 'recognition of a choice (*to eat instead of watching sexual content*) means overcoming 'negative programmes' that support addictive patterns'. He establishes a healthy and ethical self via disavowing the pleasures sexual content might offer. This extract implies a process of 'acknowledging a problem', as is usually found in psychotherapy discourses. From this perspective, two points could be made. First, Richard's recurrent positioning as a 'reformed addict' allows him to assume a role as a legitimate social actor within the public debate about pornography addiction. Second, his account points to a self-governing strategy, through which he understands sexual conduct as problematic and replaces it with a healthier activity [7.02-7.03].

Richard's overall account also emphasizes the role of ethics in his upbringing, which seem to work as a way for him to rationalise his (allegedly 'wrong') experiences with excessive gaming and using sexual content and explain his ways of coping with them.
He accounts for what he has become so far (a self-driven, healthy individual) via a re-assessment of this restrictive, regulatory upbringing:

[8.01] D. Why do you feel you were doing it?
[8.02] R. Curiosity, boredom, slight rebellion, I think it got to the stage where I had to
[8.03] do it.

As I have noted, Lesko (2001) described the ways society defines adolescents through a range of 'confident characterisations' of this stage. Adolescence is defined as a transitional state on the road to adulthood and connotes biological and psychosocial changes. Here Richard is reflecting on these familiar characterisations (boredom, rebellion) as the rationale for his watching sexual content. On the other hand, enjoying masturbation implies a problematic psychological status but also has a moral aspect:

[9.01] I was born in a Christian home so I have very different views from all the
[9.02] other guys you'll meet. I don't believe in sex before marriage, so I'm not
[9.03] having sex, I believe it's wrong. I believe that porn, although I'm not of those
[9.04] guys who judge about it, so I'm not a judging guy, but I don't think that porn is
[9.05] right so the whole I've been watching porn I felt bad about watching porn. [...]
[9.06] I shouldn't be doing it and, not to say that I am perfect, I am not perfect and I
[9.07] have done this things loads of times, the reason my attitude towards it is
[9.08] different, the way I've done is different because is, everything in me tells me
[9.09] it's wrong, so it's really hard to take pleasure and enjoy something if you know
[9.10] it's wrong.

Richard prioritises a self-governed self as a way of being protected against several kinds of negative effects from sexual content [9.01-9.02]. This self is also used as a competitive advantage in comparison to 'others' who lack his religious background. Part of being a religious person includes holding a certain set of virtues such as not judging others [9.04-9.05] and doing what is right. As I have noted, allegedly peripheral sexualities like masturbation have been subject to medical enquiry and been the focus of regulation by churches, educators and other authorities. This form of regulation provides a model for the contemporary government of the self, not so much in terms of moral values as in terms of claims about the individual's physical and mental wellbeing. However, as is proclaimed in several religious texts (like the Old Testament), humans are subject to desires too (which is one difference between the human and the divine). As one of these desires is sexual satisfaction, this makes Richard feel guilty, and prompts him to mention his imperfection [9.08]. Evaluating the activity as wrong [9.11-9.12] and diffusing its wrong nature by claiming imperfection, appears to be a key dimension of how

Richard constructs his religious and moral self and identity.

Richard's story is an illustrative example of how self-regulation works for young people but also of how they relate to the public debate. He develops a number of arguments in his attempts to construct a religious adult self, which he believes (or has been told) is the preferable way of positioning within society. Unlike the rest of the respondents, Richard chooses to contextualize his position through religious and medical discourses that reflect a specific set of ethics. The objective however, is – as in the other cases - to claim his rightful position within society, and to claim a legitimate voice with which to speak, now that he is given the opportunity to do so in a public forum, the academic interview.

9.9. Conclusion

Wolfreys et al. (2006, p.70) argue that narrative is 'an account of events either real or fictional'. The way a story is told provides a chronological sequence of events (Squire, 2008, p.44) which take some time to be presented and may be narrated more than once (depending upon their significance for the person who is telling the story or for the aim of the story). In this way the story assumes a diegetic form and has a flow during which certain themes may reoccur. Furthermore, the narrator inevitably talks about events from a certain perspective; identifying with, approaching or distancing from them. According to Genette (1983), the diegetic form of a narrative, along with the logical sequence of the events narrated, form its basic structure. In this process respondents suggest a degree of causal relationship between the events and thereby provide logical explanations of why things are they way they are.

What these four stories demonstrate is that in talking about sexuality and sexual content, young people project a certain self in a type of social performance. Irrespective of how a researcher might interpret their narratives, what is important to highlight here is that these so-called 'taboo' experiences need to be examined further as social processes and not just as indicators of harm or effects. My participants told me stories about their romantic selves, their addictive personalities, their upbringing or sexual development. What I have presented here is my own analysis of an

aspect of their lives that they chose to share. Their narratives are structured linguistically, temporally and logically in such a way as to project a desired self and position themselves within certain types of discourse. What I have highlighted is the way in which young peoples' accounts of experiences with sexual content tie up with the dominant perceptions within the public debate and how they choose to position themselves in relation to this.

George used the interview as a platform to present his ideas about healthy sexuality and about how a sexual relationship should develop. In terms of identity, he moved between childhood and later teenage life and asserted his ethical position in order to differentiate himself from 'others'. However, George's interview also offers an illustration of how some young people engage with the public debate through knowledge derived from media. Sex talk - like any other taboo talk - is simultaneously a platform for expression and means of claiming and exhibiting a socially acceptable self. By contrast, Ellie talks primarily about her individual path to adulthood through her experiences with sexual content. Ellie's story differs from George's in that it is more a story based on sexual development and less a story about building her social status. Meanwhile, Tara projects a cosmopolitan self built on ethics derived from her parents' moral codes. This cosmopolitan identity is combined with intellectualism arising from her academic background. Both are worked upon as parts of her ethical subjectivity. Further, her endorsement of a feminist position implies an attempt to join a wider group with shared perceptions that are assumed (at least by some) to be more widely legitimate. Finally, Richard combines the personal and the collective. He tells a story about himself – indeed, provides a form of confession - in order to make a bigger argument about sexuality and ethics. He seems to share some similarities with George in terms of how he defines being sexually healthy, although he makes this argument via disclosing personal information (about his apparently 'addictive' personality).

Polanyi (1982, p.519) has argued that a narrative might possibly be organised 'around the presentation of the teller's proper or desirable self'. In this study, the academic interview operates as a public forum – albeit one that is different from the school, the pub or the political meeting. It offers a particular type of legitimacy to what respondents say. To this end, it implicitly invites a specific kind of social performance; where subjectivities become iconic or desirable selves that individuals hope will be disseminated to a much larger and intellectually

advanced audience than they are able to reach themselves. It is in this sense that they ask 'where will your research be published?' or 'will you write a book with all this?' – although of course this may also imply a concern about confidentiality and how far their accounts will be disseminated. In this context, participants' presentation of a desirable self represents an attempt to claim a legitimate position within the public discourse about childhood and sexuality. People have different ways of claiming such a right, primarily by positioning themselves in terms of age, as adult or mature. Age performance represents a strategy of distancing oneself from the 'confident classifications' of childhood and teenage life and what these statuses connote. It is also a social performance allowing individuals to make claims about their life choices and about the values through which they frame these choices. In this respect they use quasi-academic terms or lay theories that increase the legitimacy of their identity statements.

Moreover, legitimacy is claimed also via strategies of self-government. Foucault's approach to technologies of the self becomes clear in this chapter. These young people's accounts about sexual content in the media are framed in a way that reflects how they have chosen to govern their sexual and social conduct. Yet this is not a purely individual matter: the technologies of governmentality are systemic. My argument is that self-government is processed through a system of discourses – as I discussed in Chapter 8 - which underlie participants' accounts of sexuality and of the self, their 'sexual stories'. In these accounts, arguments about sexual development or pornography addiction, political arguments against pornography, and assertions of 'relationship' as the ideal status of a heteronormative individual, form discursive technologies through which young people talk about their ethical selves and position themselves in a socially acceptable context. Such a finding does not necessarily challenge popular 'moral panics' or feminist arguments about pornography. However, it does seek to explain how and why such arguments provide people with convenient discursive narratives, which they use to make claims about themselves and to establish their own legitimacy.

Overall, these accounts also reflect how children attempt to develop their own interpretations of the agenda of public debate around children's sexuality; the interpretation of such an agenda might involve a more personal reflection on their feelings, desires, identities, gender or representation. As I will argue in the next chapter, such a finding might fit into Plummer's

(1995, p.17) concept of *intimate citizenship,* suggesting 'a cluster of emerging concerns over the rights to choose what we do with our bodies, our feelings, our identities, our relationships, our genders, our eroticisms and our representations'. As Alanen (1992) argues, children - unlike other social groups like homosexuals, black people or women - have been constructed as a social group which is developmentally and socially incapable of supporting or even fighting for their civic, political or sexual rights. In this direction, I would argue that children reflect on a particular agenda and discuss their concerns, choices and values through a range of 'literacies' that they possess (Buckingham & Chronaki, 2014). This also represents a form of work upon the individual's social development; through such performances young people claim or demonstrate their right to become mature and accepted members of the society. However, they do so by developing their accounts within well known classifications within which they are understood as a social group.

Chapter 10: The role of peers: Talking about and experiencing sexual content with friends

10.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will be discussing the double role of the peer group in experiences with sexual content. Although the thesis primarily examines the ways individuals perceive sexual content and work on their public and private selves throughout this process, there are some points in the interviews where my participants discuss their experiences in the light of the peer group. They do this in two ways: either as a shared experience, or as a topic of discussion. Therefore, this chapter is divided in four main sections. In section 10.2. I briefly discuss the existing literature about cultural practices within the peer group and relationships with peers. Section 10.3 is a brief methodological note about the sample of data for the discussion in this chapter. In section 10.4 I discuss the body of data considering how people talk about sexual content within the group and in subsequent sections I examine what kinds of ideas they share and how values and perceptions circulate and take shape in casual discussions. In section 10.5 I discuss the second –very limited- body of data considering any shared experiences with sexual content. Throughout, I elaborate on people's self-projections both during such incidents and in the ways they report on their own and others' responses retrospectively.

10.2. The role of the peer group in young people's cultural practices- Existing literature

There is an argument that young people go through a process of constructing the self during childhood and youth, as they move from the space of family to that of peers (Livingstone, 2002). Adolescence in particular is said to be a period when people 'negotiate their separation from the family and develop independent social competence' (Buckingham, 2008, p. 3). The peer groups they engage with, the argument goes, seems to have influence on the way people live and talk about their experiences.

On a broader level, the peer group is frequently seen as one of the three main sites of

socialisation, alongside the family and the school. Within such an approach it is argued that the child is subject to different forms of control, constraint and regulation, aiming to transform him or her 'into the tangible and intelligible form of an adult competent being' (Jenks, 2004: 85). Theories of 'secondary socialization' argue that children's later socialisation largely depends on context, and since the peer group is a space in which cultural norms are circulated and established it is one key space where children's personality characteristics are modified (Durham, 1999). From a developmental psychology view, peers and partners are also thought to play an important role in the development of sexuality and identity (e.g. Connolly et al., 2000; Subrahmanyam et al., 2004).

Some scholars have criticized such theories as essentialist and deterministic, and thus inadequate in addressing the complexity of gender identities and relations within the group (e.g. Connell, 1989). Other researchers have examined young people's distinct culture in terms of its historical construction and its nature as a location of social identity. Such an approach takes into account the processes and institutions in which young people function as social agents and in this respect it considers in what ways young people's social identity is constructed, performed or negotiated by them (Austin & Willard, 1998). There has also been an increasing shift to poststructuralist paradigms, drawing upon Butler's perspective on gender as something continuously processed through acts and performances (e.g. Renold, 2004).

Within this perspective there has been significant work on male peer culture and the production and projection of masculinity within different contexts, including sexuality. For example, researchers have talked about the culture of 'laddishness', in analyzing gender differences regarding academic achievement (see Martino, 1999; Jackson, 2002), and some have problematized the easy narrative of the 'underachieving' boy (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Smith, 2002). Their accounts reject the idea of males being a homogenous group, by suggesting that – as with femininities - there are multiple masculinities that arise and co-exist within certain social settings like schools (e.g. Connell, 1989; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998).

For example the concept of 'hegemonic' – predominantly heterosexual - masculinities has been examined by several researchers, mostly from the perspective that males are expected to 'do boy'

(Renold, 2004) within an oppressive peer culture (e.g. Renold, 2001; Frosh *et al.*, 2002; Jackson, 2002). As I have shown in this thesis, there are particular responses to sexual content that are either judged as 'masculine' and 'what boys do', or are a reflection of how males negotiate heteronormative sexual subjectivities. I have described how collective practices such as watching porn to 'have a laugh', or watching porn to get ideas about sex, or even to prove one's heterosexual identity, shape what participants construct as masculine, because they are seen to count as such (Francis, 1999, p. 337).

One of the most interesting parts of the analysis concerned discussions about gayness and the threat of homosexuality, in the event of participants masturbating with porn in front of peers. Some researchers have examined how certain 'doing boy' activities, instead of being considered as masculine, are subject to peers' judgments about people being 'losers' (Best, 1983), 'sissies' (Elder, 1995) or 'nerds' (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1999) among other labels. In this respect although masturbating with sexual content is supposed to be a purely masculine practice, it appears to fail to fulfill the expectations of dominant heteronormative masculinity, especially when it takes place in front of peers. Along the same lines, it is also a failure when one chooses to leave the group, in order to watch sexual content and masturbate alone, especially if that happens frequently.

Some researchers adopting such an approach draw on concepts of 'reflexive positioning' (positioning of the self) and 'interactive positioning' (being positioned by others) (Davies & Harré, 1990). However, in adopting such an approach, researchers assume that there are particular identities or subjectivities that young people resist, for example in the opposition between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities and femininities (Renold, 2004). For example, Renold (2004) argues that young boys who engage with queer identities or 'softer masculinities' may 'resist, subvert and indeed actually challenge […] the power relations embedded in hegemonic masculinities […] via collective peer group support and solidarity'. To this end, there is an understanding of gender and identity peer relations as existing within a context of relations of power which people actively choose to adopt, negotiate or resist. In this kind of context, it might be argued that Foucault's analysis would prove less effective or useful. However, I would argue that one could also follow a Foucauldian approach here, by

understanding peer relations as relations where power is a *productive* and not merely an oppressive technology: such practices might indeed reflect the 'capillary' or omnipresent nature of power.

A Foucauldian approach to the role of peer culture

There is however another approach, through which researchers examine how the individual constructs and negotiates his/her subjectivity without necessarily resisting the peer group or other pressures. In Thorpe's study about discourses of femininity in snowboarding culture, the author examines how an understanding of Foucault's concept of *productive power* can provide more optimistic representations of the construction of gender identities in the context of sports (Thorpe, 2008). She explores how the self is formed as a subject of power relations, and how technologies of the self emerge within this context – a process that Foucault calls subjectification. In Thorpe's analysis and in Pringle's (2005, p. 271) terms, the process of ethical subjectification is inherently political, on the grounds that 'caring for the self implies caring for others also'. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, the ways technologies of the self work in Foucault's analysis have to do with how the individual cares for himself/herself so as to offer as much as possible to the wider group once he/she is in the position to do so (e.g. as a citizen or in making future citizens). In this sense, the ways in which individuals perform or exist within the peer group means that there are both individual and collective processes going on simultaneously. It is this co-existence of individual and collective identity that I will attempt to explore in the following pages.

According to Thorpe (2008), Foucault has been criticized – not least by some feminists – on the grounds that he is reluctant 'to talk about 'resistance'' (Thorpe 2008, p.218) and does not provide an analytical framework with which 'to challenge the limitations of existing identity formation' (ibid). It is in this light that I attempt to examine whether the individual's engagement with the peer group is a process of 'resistance' or an ethical process of 'care of the self', or at some times both. One of the overarching assumptions in this discussion is that technologies of the self play a role in how individuals regulate themselves through a set of (bodily,

psychological, or subjective) operations that take place individually or with the help of others. However, this does not mean that self-regulation is necessarily something oppressive or negative; rather, it is part of the way in which individuals work on themselves in seeking to achieve a certain status in terms of of morality, ethics, happiness or even belonging (Foucault, 1988b).

10.3. A methodological note

Data in this chapter is processed through a combination of thematic and discourse analytical approaches. As this chapter is a recent addition to this thesis, it is inevitably different in terms of structure and analysis. I have already discussed extensively the methodological and analytical choices I made in this thesis in previous chapters. For this chapter, I chose only the extracts where participants make reference to peers and divided them into two categories: one referring to *discussions* about experiences with sexual content and the other referring to *actual* shared experiences with sexual content.

The reason I chose both kinds of extracts is because both contribute to the ways individuals talk about their experiences with sexual content. The key terms that I used to extract any relevant quotes for this discussion are 'peers', 'shared' and 'friends' as such a search allowed me to locate them more easily and accurately. I then organised the quotes into either *discussions about experiences* or *shared experiences* and created an analytical framework through which I looked for the nature of the information shared (e.g. what exactly they talked about or shared) and for the ways the information has been processed (e.g. how they talked about their experiences or the context of the shared experience). The development of such an analytical framework allowed me to apply a combination of thematic and discourse analytical approaches.

For the classification of quotes into categories I also took into consideration additional variables. For example, when participants narrate shared experiences with sexual content they mainly talk about their own and others' emotions and responses. On the other hand, when discussing how they talk with peers, they mainly focus on what is said and on views exchanged within the group.

In both cases however, as I will show later, participants subjectively position themselves in pedagogical or ethical ways.

10.4. Negotiations of the sexual and the pornographic within the group

To provide a numerical picture of the findings, 13 participants report having a shared experience of sexual content, 7 males and 6 females. Of those, Ken (18, UK) explains his shared experience as a glance at a mobile phone belonging to a peer who was showing sexual representations publicly at school. On the other hand, 2 female participants also or solely focus on discussions they had with friends, either in the process of getting to know what pornography is, or in terms of patterns of using content. Although a survey or any other kind of large scale measurement would probably indicate that shared experiences are more a male activity and less a female one, I cannot make such an assumption here given the limited number of my participants; however, this tendency is to some extent reflected in my sample.

10.4.1. The collective and the individual

The first issue I would like to address is the role of the individual within the group. In my sample, none of the participants declared a homosexual identity or even a negotiation of one. All participants seem to have built narratives of appropriate, dominant heterosexuality. To this extent there are several cases where the way in which participants define their existence within the group is via working in particular ways on their heteronormative identity.

In this excerpt Eleni (19, EL) is describing her first experience within a peer group of boys:
[01.01] E. The first time, I said, 'turn it off, turn it off'… I didn't know what was
[01.02] happening, I was disgusted… and I also remember that the guys who were
[01.03] watching it, were having a laugh…
[01.04] D. It was more like a test among them…
[01.05] E. Yes, showing-off, being macho, and I think this happens only in Greece,

[01.06] that only boys watch it; probably because in Greece boys begin having

[01.07] relationships at this age and it is them who are keeping it going... (Eleni, 19, EL)

As one can see, Eleni is focusing on how she reacted towards the content in accordance with established norms of dominant female heteronormativity [10.01-10.02]. Appropriate femininity almost imposes a critical (or 'disgusted') response to sexual content. There is also a gendered discussion about how boys and girls are responding to such content, and that this is a process for the boys of displaying their masculinity [10.04-10.05]. Peer influence exists in terms of the fact that boys invite a girl to see sexual content. In Davies' terms (1989, p.235), there are regulatory heteronormative codes (boys laugh, girls feel disgusted) that inevitably lead boys and girls to position themselves within dominant discourses of what it means to be 'proper'. However, Eleni offers a rationalization of what happens and why [01.01-01.02; 01.06-01.07], which implies a certain degree of identity work that takes place exactly because of the gender dynamics within the group. In this sense, Eleni is forced to use the power of knowing about gender performance productively in order to rationalize her reaction but also those of her male peers, and to account for herself (Rail & Harvey, 1995, p. 167).

In Sarah's (17, UK) account, on the other hand, there is a co-existence of a notion of belonging and community alongside a projection of an appropriate female self.

[02.01] S. [we were all girls, obviously, it was one of my mates' dad's DVDs, and

[02.02] we just thought it was funny to see who can watch longest, so I think I

[02.03] saw like, for 10 minutes and the other three watched it until it was finished.

[...]

[02.04] D. Why did you do it, to have a laugh?

[02.05] S. Just have a bit of fun really, see, uhm, I watched it in the beginning bits,

[02.06] before getting into the intimate stuff but, I thought I 'll watch it to see what it

[02.07] is, but after a bit I just thought I 'm not watching this. It's kind of off-putting

[02.08] D. Were you a bit curious, or knew what it was?

[02.09] S. I knew what it was, I just wanted to have a bit of a laugh with some of my

[02.10] friends (Sarah, 17, UK)

Sarah is describes engaging actively with the girls' group in a boundary-testing process [02.01-02.03]. At some point in the excerpt however, she turns the attention to herself and how she as an individual sets her personal ethical standards as regards the activity of watching sexual content [02.05-02.07]. After an ethical statement about the self, Sarah restates her desire to be part of her group of peers [02.08-02.10]. There could be an assumption that Sarah is trying to avoid being labeled as a less appropriate, or less normal female. Her inability to see the video to the end implies her assumed identity as a girl who draws the line fairly quickly when it comes to sexual content, and who uses ethical discourses to account for this identity. One could argue that Sarah seems to perform a set of operations on her conduct (by rejecting the content) so as to attain a status of purity or morality (see Markula, 2003).

Finally, Manos describes how he learnt about sexual content from a friend but talks about it as an individual experience. The emotion of shame derives from the taboo nature of the content - that is, the social construction of the content as something forbidden [03.03-03.04]:

[03.01] D. How did you feel when you saw the representation? Given that you were
[03.02] there with a friend
[03.03] M. Well basically I felt ashamed, because you know it's, uhm... it's the
[03.04] forbidden, what shouldn't be done, but I think that after this feeling, I turned
[03.05]to...uhm...cos I looked for it on my own, we were also exchanging information
[03.06] about sites with a couple of friends, so I think it became something normal. I
[03.07] wouldn't though talk to elders about that, only with peers. (Manos, 22, EL)

In this case the collective experience is of different nature. Although Manos is introduced to the content in the context of a group [03.03-03.04], it is followed by an exchange of information which allows him to be part of the group but at the same time use the content in privacy [03.05-03.06]. Manos' group experience and exchange of content is also a statement of heterosexuality; yet there is a fine line between the two activities, which entails a statement about his heterosexual identity, but also about his ethical standards when it comes to sexuality. Peers in this excerpt act as some sort of community where there is a common understanding between

people sharing the same views, where there is no place for elders who seem to differ in their views [03.06-03.07]. However, Manos accounts for himself in relation to the group in order to make statements about ethics, heteronormativity and age-defined behaviour (watching sexual content is something normal for him and his peers).

The three cases discussed here do not allow for generalisations or even assumptions about what all young people do regarding their group experiences with sexual content. However, there is an indication that although there may be peer pressure in being introduced to or watching sexual content, young people sometimes prefer to make it a personal and less collective experience. They talk about the dynamics of the peer group as relatively safe place where they have the opportunity to explain how they personally differ, either by asserting their ethics (Sarah, Manos) or by performing a gendered self (Eleni).

The other issue I will address is the notion of belonging that the peer group offers to the individual; it is interesting to see how the individual negotiates this notion.

10.4.2. The notion of belonging

The fact that peers play a role in how young people negotiate the meaning of their experiences is self-evident. However, I would argue that this is especially apparent in their accounts of how the whole group negotiates the experience of watching sexual content.
George (17, UK) tells a story about how the emotion of guilt on the part of the individual for watching sexual content vanishes when he realizes that this is not only a common experience but also a shared one [04.04-04.05].
[04.01] G. I felt guilty for a day and then the next day, after that I 'd just watch it for
[04.02]a laugh again
[04.03] D. You mean when you did it for the first time?
[04.04] G. For the first time, I felt guilty the day after but the day after that I was fine,
[04.05] you know I was watching it with my mates and we were having a laugh (George, 17,
UK)

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In chapter 9 I have analysed George's narrative as one about a romantic, heterosexual young man, who rejects the use of sexual content in favour of an intimate relationship with a girl in real life. Therefore the emotion of guilt as mentioned in this excerpt derives from George's sexual ethics that do not permit him to watch it for entertainment when he is alone [04.01-04.02]. On the other hand, the small community of peers makes the experience a different one: George's personal ethical standards in relationships do not interfere with the projection of a heterosexual identity in front of peers. According to Durham (1999, p.212) in peer culture 'the consumption of the necessary products that openly establishes their acceptance and understanding of sexual norms' is a vital part of peer interaction. Also, according to Powell (2010, p.139) young people's displays of gender 'are subject to surveillance and policing among peers', and that makes the peer group an 'opportunity to publicly display dominant heterosexuality' (ibid); this might well be the case with George. At the same time, we have to consider that the peer group is a site where people attempt to position themselves in a particular role, or at least a site where the individual can also talk about himself and how he stands within this context. In this sense, George is positioning himself within the group in terms of belonging, but also outside the group in terms of how he defines the appropriate relationship (see chapter 9).

Daniel's (19, DK) case is not so different from George's; in chapter 7 (section 7.4.3) Daniel notes that his first experience with sexual content was short stories, and was only later introduced to visual content by his best friend:

[05.01] Daniel. I couldn't watch it [on TV] at home so I was usually watching it with
[05.02] one of my friends.
[05.03] D. Ok, together or alone?
[05.04] Daniel. Together, together, no masturbation included but we were talking
[05.05] about it.
[05.06] D. Having fun
[05.07] Daniel. Well, yeah, yeah. And I think it was important to me because it was
[05.08] the first experience I had with another person, watching porn, so I realised it
[05.09] was my best friend, and I realised it wasn't anything wrong for me, it was

[05.10] common to do that, and of course I met the other boys talking about porn in

[05.11] school and later on, I now know that first they talked about it when they were

[05.12] 11 years old and they have tried to watch pornography (Daniel, 19, DK)

The first thing Daniel does is to state that his shared experience did not include masturbation [05.01-05.05]. Johansson (2007) has argued that male fellowship is in some cases built upon homophobic tendencies, which according to Henriksson and Lundahl (1993) involves a strategy of defining one's self as 'normal', and entails a process of resistance 'that facilitates the personal identity process' (Johansson, 2007, p.66). On the other hand, as I have already discussed, the fear of homosexuality as projected in my male participants' accounts also works productively: group experiences become a site where men regulate their sexual conduct (in this case arousal) and through such a process, position themselves as healthy heterosexual individuals. In this sense, this becomes an individual process of one's work with oneself and less something imposed by the group.

As the narrative continues, Daniel explains how the fact that he saw sexual content with his best friend reassured him that what he was doing was not wrong, but something young men do anyway [05.07-05.10]. The fact that he started discussing it with other boys too is also accounted for in positive terms. Stern (2008, p.10) suggests that 'adolescents' concerns about self-acceptance also motivate them to seek feedback that reassures them that they are not alone in their thoughts, feelings and experiences'; and it is this reassurance that diffuses their fear that they might be less normal. However, Daniel uses 'I' instead of 'we' in his account, which signifies his focus on himself and the fact that he – with the reassurance of the group - is a normal heterosexual male. To this end, he works on how he stands within the group but elaborates on what kind of effect this experience had on the way in which he negotiates his sexual subjectivity as a male.

Finally, Kate (19, UK) elaborates on the group dynamics and the group response to sexual content:

[06.01] V. We found, all of the girls found a gay magazine under their bed, and we
[06.02] looked at it and had a good laugh, cos again, like, I don't know whether it's
[06.03] because we felt uncomfortable but we 'd, like, girls giggling about stuff and it
[06.04] was really funny, and it was like "oh my god this hotel is horrible, bla, bla"
 (Kate, 19, UK)

Kate here is accounting for a common practice of 'laughing-over-watching-porn' that I have already discussed in previous chapters (chapter 7 and 8) [06.01-06.02]. She seems to be speaking on behalf of the group and attempting to rationalize their reaction towards the content. The response itself seems to signify a certain degree of being/acting cool [06.02]; however, there is also a sense in which, as Thorne (1993) argues, in practicing friendships children may cross lines in ways that disrupt gender-appropriate behaviour. Kate's friendship group here is one of cheerleaders, who have a certain status within the wider peer group; and she accounts for a notion of belonging, as well as performing a feminine identity. In this case it seems that it is not just an individual's identity work but a matter of collective, gender identity and thus of group ethics that seem to characterize the whole group.

Watching sexual content with peers or exchanging information about it, therefore happens also in the context of how people work on their self-government in the process of defining their position within the wider debate about sexuality and sexual ethics. This probably means that peer-influence or even 'peer-pressure' helps an individual frame their personal ethics regarding sexuality. Yet one cannot argue that peers are an isolated source of influence of young people's experiences any more than one can argue that parents or the school work in isolation. Influence from all these groups co-exists and the dynamics created are the defining points through which a person develops their personal ethics.

10.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed a small number of cases of participants referring to peer group dynamics, both in the shared viewing of sexual content and in collective talk about it. As this is a thesis about young people's negotiation of the self, there is not a great deal of data where people mention how such experiences are processed in the group. In talking about group experiences and group dynamics, young people mostly talk about how they negotiated their conduct productively within the power relations existing in the peer group. In most of the cases in this study participants do more work on the ways they project themselves and their personal ethics rather than on the group's collective identity. As the data seem to suggest, there are maybe some identities or power relations (or 'peer pressures') which people resist, but this is not always the case. On the contrary, in many cases young people use these power relations productively, so as to either adjust to the group and process their personal ethics or standards in sexual matters or to claim a certain status on behalf of the self.

Peers play undoubtedly an important role in young people's identity construction and negotiation of the self. Power relationships that exist within the group lead people to construct different individual and collective identities, in terms of belonging to or leading the group, or distancing themselves from it. Moreover, the peer group is a contextual factor defining young people's self-projections and identity work, especially when it comes to the issue of sexuality. However, it is important not to view this in terms of a clear distinction between individual self-determination on the one hand, and the influence of peers (or 'peer pressure') on the other hand. I would rather argue that in fact, young people themselves choose the instances in which they project the notion of community and belonging and when they prefer to make a claim about how they perform as individuals.

From one point of view, participants seem to have built narratives of appropriate heterosexuality, both via normative discussions about gender performance or appropriate femininities and masculinities and via self-regulatory techniques of personal sexual ethics. In both cases their accounts might be seen as responses to a call for heteronormative behaviour; but at the same time the response to this call seems to be a way of engaging with the group's collective identity *and* a

way of projecting the individual's sexual identity. To this extent, the relation between the individual and the collective is dynamic and reciprocal: each constitutes the other.

Finally, the peer group - while it has not been a major focus in this study - is a space where identities contest and co-exist. In choosing to affiliate with or take a distance from the group, young people come to construct themselves as sexual beings, but they do not necessarily do this in consistent or coherent ways.

Chapter 11. Conclusion

11.1. Aims and research questions

This thesis has attempted to unveil the phenomenon of young people's experiences with sexual content. It takes into account that talking about sexuality in any kind of context, not least an academic one, is subject to particular conventions which both restrict and produce the kinds of discourse that are available. Children's sexuality will always be a taboo topic, which prompts conflicting views and different social and personal values. It thus requires an acknowledgement that it is an ethically defined topic; and researching it also requires that one will question widespread and well established perceptions about ethical or appropriate sexuality. Such an investigation requires a very careful and detailed analysis of the reasons why people think and talk about sexuality in the ways they do. No matter how careful the analysis is, however, it is quite possible that it will go against other researchers' values and eventually, dominant societal values as well.

Despite the obvious difficulties of such an endeavour, I have tried here to address a key question: *how do young people account for their early experiences of encountering sexual content in the media*? Given my theoretical starting points, it is likely that my conclusions to some extent confirm what other audience reception researchers have already said and contradict the dominant effects and 'risk communication' agendas. To this extent, my contribution might be seen as just another contribution to the ongoing and never-ending discussion about pornography, sexuality and children, where researchers from different traditions present conflicting arguments that keep adding fuel to an already heated debate that operates on an academic, political and policy level (Tsaliki, forthcoming). However, what might make it an interesting and original contribution is that it offers further insight into how young people themselves define and perceive what is sexual or pornographic and how this is related to adults' constructions of the same topic. In this respect, I have tried to examine three aspects of my main research question:

1. What do young people prioritise in talking about sexuality?

2. How do young people's accounts of experiences with sexual content relate to widely circulated discourses about childhood and sexuality?

3. How do young people construct their identities through their accounts of how they engage with and respond to pornographic or sexual content in the media?

As I have discussed in this thesis, mainstream research on this topic is mostly concerned with effects, risk and safety, notions that point directly to the need for both the media and childhood to be regulated. And in this sense, research is then about different kinds of regulation: researchers make the case about how to regulate the media, how to regulate childhood and/or how to teach children to be self-regulating. The dominant discourse about sexuality inevitably frames it in terms of regulation. As shown in the theoretical chapters, the appropriate expression of sexuality has long been located in the context of the private life of (two) people involved in a relationship defined by romance, trust and love and in most cases confirmed by institutionalised practices like marriage and childbearing. Today there is a more liberal view of partnering, including the acknowledgment of various forms of homosexuality, heterosexuality and polyamory as legitimate forms of expressing one's sexuality. However, any expression of sexuality is still assumed to belong to the private space, and its mediation in a more public context is bound to be subject to regulation. This is the case for instance with mediated nudity (even in the form of art), mediated sexual activity or even the mediation of one's sexual identity (e.g. in the case of transgendered people). In this respect, pornography and any kind of sexual content in the media need to be seen as forms of mediated information about sexuality, and thus subject to the particular - usually ethical - conventions of the kind I have discussed throughout the thesis.

Research of this kind does not aim at providing results representative of the general population. It mostly points at existing research gaps and offers a more in depth analysis of how experiences with sexual content are constructed and disseminated, and how they are made meaningful. Quantitative research, of the kind extensively discussed in this thesis, can offer a broad picture of children's experiences with sexual content, for example in terms of how many children have

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such encounters, and which kinds of children are more likely to do so. The results of quantitative research also succeed in feeding policy, political and media agendas to a greater extent than qualitative studies. Studies like the EU Kids Online project claim to offer information, but also solutions to what they define as problematic situations; and to that extent they may be used to inform policy strategies, alongside political and media campaigns that seek to create a framework for protecting children from what is perceived as corruption, even if this corruption might well be that of their own sexuality.

There is no point in denying that children will sooner or later have experiences with sexual content. But instead of being constantly alarmed about this, it is important to look further at how they understand their experiences and how their knowledge is articulated. In seeking to do this, I have contextualized this study within a Foucauldian framework, which locates sexuality as part of a self-governing strategy through which children learn how to moderate their social and private lives. This social constructionist approach has enabled me to address my research questions without assuming a pre-given moral position, or assuming that my own constructions of sexuality or of mediated representations of it will necessarily be shared by my participants. This enables me to look beyond the mere fact that children do encounter sexual content, and to explore how they interpret and engage with it.

11.2. Key findings

There are three sets of findings emerging from this research. The first set concerns young people's reporting of knowledge about sex, and their experiences of mediated sexual content. The second concerns their constructions of the sexual self; and the third is about young people's constructions and negotiation of identities in the process of talking about their experiences.

Gaining sexual knowledge and experience

By the time young people encounter sexual content in the media they already have some sort of knowledge about what sex is, even if it is a rough or a blurry idea. As such, they interpret mediated sexual content via ready-made frameworks of meaning. These are formed of knowledge about sex gained from legitimate sources like the school or the family; and in some cases of established knowledge informed by religious or moral discourses. In other cases, participants report learning about sex from mainstream representations of romance and love in the media.

In terms of their actual experiences I have also found that they are aware of the generic conventions of sexual content, and differentiate between different types of sexual content in various ways. Their accounts might not provide details of the actual depictions, but this reflects the fact that the interpretation of what they have actually seen is in any case subject to individual perceptions about sex and sexuality. Therefore, definitions of different types of sexual content (such as a video of two naked people having anal sex, or of hardcore sex between two or more people) are not straightforward; and talking about what one has seen is likely to be a very complicated process.

My participants' accounts point to emotional responses that play a key role in how they process the experience: some feel disgust or fear, while others feel awkward, embarrassed or guilty; and yet others may feel excited, amused, aroused or indifferent. All these emotions however are socially located and are informed by people's embedded perceptions about sex, as constructed by the knowledge they are gathering from the previously mentioned sources. This social locatedness of emotions means that sexual content is not 'just another text' but a particular text interpreted within the social conventions that frame sexual activity per se.

Meanwhile, sexual content is seen to serve a diverse range of functions. It can be seen as a learning resource, especially in cases where sexual education is absent from the curriculum or from family discussions. It may be used for masturbation, either because users are not engaged in a relationship, or as a means to sexual satisfaction. Further, my participants describe sociable

uses of sexual content; and they assert that young people watch sexual content in the media for fun. At the same time, their accounts of these different uses revolve around judgments about the aesthetic qualities or transgressiveness of particular representations.

Constructing sexual content in the media

On one level, sex is obvious and this makes the nature and objectives of sexual content obvious and self-explanatory as well. However, my participants discursively construct the notion of sexual content or pornography in different ways. I found that elements like nudity and the aesthetics of the body are understood in ethical and cultural terms; and these play a key role in how people define what counts as sexual content in the media. Also the fact that the private parts of the body or the sexual activity move from private to public is something that causes discomfort and is per se discussed as an ethical issue. Moreover, there is a notion of sex as a commodity, and of the production of sexual content as a commercial industry. Young people's cultural capital and their sexual ethics this inevitably play important roles in how they discursively construct this issue (e.g. in defining anal sex is dirty) alongside how they construct pornography as a non-literary form (e.g. in defining pornography as trashy or as taboo).

Further, participants use primarily ethical and cultural discourses to explain how they perceive sexual content as the opposite of real life sex, and they associate the discomfort it causes by being exposed in public with abnormality, lack of realism and unnaturalness. Also, by making judgments through ready made interpretative frameworks to do with the inherent differences between art and sexual content (e.g. the nature of depictions, the intentions of the artist and the intentions of the user or viewer), my participants were also asserting their cultural capital and taste.

Masturbation is a key issue in making broader arguments about sexuality and appropriate sex. Here, looking at how people construct their sexual selves in ethical, health and political terms shows more clearly how they deploy self-government strategies. Participants see masturbation in various ways – for example, as a health problem, as a sexual practice of a heteronormative male,

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or as a social practice. Finally, experiences with sexual content are also seen through the prism of risk and harm, albeit largely for people other than the participants. They make ethical and pedagogical judgments about childhood in accounting for the risk of people being influenced by sexual content, either in terms of their attitudes towards sex, in their sexual behaviour or in the ways they are learning about it.

Constructions of identity: self-projection in talking about sexual content

In the final analytical chapter I identified participants' strategies of presenting the self and positioning themselves in relation to the wider debate about sexuality. I found that overall, they engage ideologically with using sexual content in different ways. For instance, male participants provide accounts of systematic patterns of use or position the use of sexual content negatively via accounts of how they have been taught to govern their sexuality. Girls provide more diverse accounts by telling didactic stories, stories about upbringing and values, or about the ways they engage with sexual content; finally there is a group of stories based on wider public perceptions and less about personal experiences.

Looking closely at stories from my dataset, I found that there is a type of story in which the use of sexual content is understood in contrast to forming romantic relationships. Here people talk about the advantages of being in a relationship which offers real life sexual pleasure and is a proof of belonging to a wider heteronormative group. Therefore, there is a projection of a self that is mature enough and legitimately able to engage in appropriate sexual relationships. A second type of story in this sample provides a developmental approach to sexual content. Through stories like this young people project more liberal selves, and work on notions about becoming sexually mature through engaging with sexual content.

Moreover, there are stories about people's cosmopolitan and political selves, describing how experiences from different cultures or sophisticated academic knowledge has contributed to their positioning towards the public debate about sexual content. In this case, there is a projection of an intellectually and ethically defined self which imposes a specific set of governmental

techniques in the area of sexual conduct. Finally, there is a fourth type of story, illustrative of how embedded popular perceptions about media effects are. There is here a process of reporting a problem, working for its solution and reflecting on it as a life experience. In such stories people project a mature and ethical self, managing to overcome a problem through self-determination and the help of moral codes.

11.3. Limitations of the study

As with all kinds of research, there are several aspects of this study that could have been conducted differently. In this instance, most of the limitations derive from the sensitivity of the topic. First, this research was not conducted with individuals currently considered as children (9-17 years old). In fact the youngest participants were 17 years old. This makes this study one *about* children but not *with* children. Obviously, it would have been preferable to gain children's accounts at first hand: these would have been more spontaneous and perhaps less 'contaminated' by the limitations of memory and the retrospective construction of self. No matter how hard or how honestly participants try to account for their childhood, the kind of identity work they do and their work of self-projection is inevitably influenced - if not defined - by their current age. However, this was impossible for ethical reasons, and this will probably continue to be the case in future research.

Second, because of the sensitivity of the topic my participants may have been hesitant to open themselves to a stranger, and perhaps especially one from the world of academia. The influence of the relationship between the researcher and the interviewer on the research process has been discussed throughout this thesis. The discussion of a sensitive topic, however, reformulates these dynamics, especially when there is a gender difference between the two sides. These factors cannot be overlooked or omitted during the data collection or in the analysis. However, making the interview strategies more effective by becoming more casually acquainted with the participants could increase the degree of trust in the researcher and hence participants' openness. This was possible in some cases here, but not in all of them.

Another implication mostly deriving from the sensitivity of the issue investigated concerns the nature of the sample. Because of the difficulties in recruiting people willing to talk, I had to gather my sample from different countries. Although this is merely an illustrative sample, there are some indications of cultural differences, especially between the participants from Greece and those from Denmark and the UK. However, I have not been able to make any assumptions or arguments of this kind because of the small sample size from each country. Possibly a single country sample would have allowed for more reliable arguments regarding the cultural factors influencing people's accounts or experiences.

An additional implication concerns the nature of the data. As with almost all research in this area, my analysis focuses on a set of self-reported accounts, and one cannot ignore the limitations arising from the lack of actual, measurable facts. As such, my assumptions and arguments are based on what the participants choose to tell me about themselves, which clearly cannot be taken entirely at face value. However, this is a limitation in any kind of research involving human participants that does not involve participant or non-participant observation.

There are also limitations regarding the analysis. As in most cases of qualitative research, the analytical approaches adopted here do not generally provide strictly defined analytical frameworks or procedures. Therefore, the interpretation of the findings is inevitably influenced by the personal values, experiences and views of the researcher, and by the theoretical standpoint from which the research derives. Nevertheless, my choice to offer a three-level approach to the data possibly compensates for any perceived limitations resulting from the inherently interpretative nature of the analysis.

Finally, there is the question of my coverage of the topic. As I have indicated, the question of 'pornography' – or even more broadly, of mediated sexual content – raises a great range of issues. It is in my view difficult to cover all aspects of such a broad topic, within the limited time of a planned interview process. There were surely topics that were not addressed which might have been of greater interest for the participants. However, this could be the objective of further research in the same area.

11.4. Issues arising: Broader theoretical implications

In terms of children's encounters with sexual content, the findings of this thesis largely confirm what Buckingham & Bragg (2004) found in their study about children's experiences with sex-related information in mainstream media. To a certain extent, they also confirm the findings of mass communication research such as the EU Kids Online projects (Livingstone et al., 2011). For example, I found that within my sample young men have indeed had more experiences with sexual content than young women; men's experiences were mostly intentional and less accidental, and this was explained by almost all participants as something 'that boys do'. Further, I found that older children (in later teenage life) have had more experiences than those at a younger age. At the same time, I also found that for my participants, 'sexual content' could be anything depicting sex-related information, ranging from phone sex adverts and romantic fiction to hardcore pornography online. However, when it comes to the question of whether experiences with sexual content can be risky, the participants in my study tended to identify this as a problem for others, primarily younger children, rather than themselves.

There are three key areas that I wish to address in this respect. The first concerns the need to explore the nature of what is 'sexual' when sexuality is publicly represented and discussed. The second concerns the acknowledgement of young people's media literacies and their use in making judgments about sexual content. The third has to do with the notion of young people's 'sexual citizenship', and their attempts to resist adults' classifications of childhood as either asexual or inherently sexual.

Young people's definitions and perceptions of sexual content and of pornography reflect wider constructions of sexuality.

As I have discussed in the analytical chapters, perceptions about and definitions of pornography go back to definitions of and perceptions about sexuality. Participants make an effort to define the 'obvious' notion of pornography, a term that everyone talks about but which nevertheless remains always dubious and contested. Their accounts include statements about the various

forms of pornography, such as well-known classifications of sexual content, and evidence of how multifaceted much of the content is. They include claims that pornography is both realistic but at the same time constructed; and that it can be inscribed in different formats such as romantic fiction, images or videos. They also elaborate on how people - including themselves - use it to masturbate, to engage with peers and sexual partners, to spice up their sex lives or just have fun with.

It transpires that to talk about pornography we need to talk about sexuality in the first place; and this is something that young people acknowledge in the course of making judgments about the content, the industry and the users of sexual content in the media. As Buckingham & Bragg (2004) argue, talking about sex in the media is typically understood as a matter of bearing witness, and of positioning onself in relation to the whole matter of sexuality. As one of the participants said 'it places you within a sexual social group', in other words it places you within the group of people that are aware of sex and sexuality, which is essentially the prerogative of being an adult. Talking about pornography becomes almost matter-of-fact for them, because apparently they have a lot more to say about sexuality and about becoming sexual. So the key finding is that in talking about pornography young people are effectively defining or constructing themselves as sexual beings. However, this is something that mainstream researchers (from the effects or risk communication approaches) need to consider a lot more seriously before making assumptions about how harmful pornography can potentially be for them.

Young people make meaning of sexual content in the media through a set of specific media literacies.

Young peoples' knowledge about sex obviously does not derive solely from sexual content in the media. They already know about sex, at least in principle, and experiences with sexual content may simply provide a confirmation and a visual representation of its existence. There are also ready-made discursive frameworks that they employ when accounting for these experiences. Sexual content is typically evaluated within an ethical – and sometimes an ideological - context, in terms of particular social norms or codes. These norms undoubtedly have implications for how

these young people interpret their experiences; and as Buckingham & Bragg (2004) argue, they operate with a complex – and sometimes contradictory - combination of knowledge deriving from the family, the school and the peer group as well as from the media.

What is more, they know the conventions of the genre defined as 'pornographic'. These more explicit representations of sexual activity provide information about sex that participants will at some point encounter for the first time, and in this respect they may have to employ different sets of codes than those of romance, love or affection to make sense of them. They need to learn the particular conventions of this genre of representation, with respect to issues such as realism, narrative and the process of production. I would argue that such a process is part of becoming an equal member of the adult community - that is, a citizen. However, to be considered a citizen, one has to comply with the social rules of performance within the context of acceptable expressions of sexuality.

In fact, one could talk about young people developing a set of 'pornographic literacies': their socio-cultural knowledge includes the frameworks with which they learn to interpret mediated representations of sex or sexual activity. Media literacy allows young participants to understand how sexual content in the media is constructed and the conventions within which the pornographic works. This sits alongside other kinds of knowledge about sex deriving from legitimate institutions such as the school and the family; and interpreting sexual content in the media entails making judgments that draw flexibly on these various kinds of knowledge.

Young people's claim to 'intimate citizenship'

As I have already mentioned, my participants mostly make broad arguments about sexuality and sexual content rather than just about pornography in particular; and in doing so, they account for themselves both as persons and as 'sexual citizens'. The idea of 'intimate citizenship' suggests an agenda including issues about rights and responsibilities related to people's pleasures, desires and belonging to a community of legitimately sexual beings (Plummer 1995, p.151). Children have long been denied a status as sexual agents. In their attempt to claim their intimate

citizenship, and jump out of adults' 'confident characterizations' of them, they employ discourses frequently found in public agendas, in seeking to explain how they are different from what is said about them in the media or in other public arenas. In the course of their argumentation, judgments about the effects of pornography or the politics of sexual content appear, but they work on a different level than is proposed in mainstream research. In claiming a position within this citizenship agenda, the young people of this study construct themselves as competent performers of appropriate expressions of sexuality. This process is illustrated in their accounts of the context of the experience, signifying that experiences with sexual content in the media are part of the more general development of sexuality and not something that is seen in isolation, or as an influence in its own right.

In talking about sexuality and sexual content, young people project a certain self in a type of social performance. Of the various aspects of themselves, they choose which to share to make a point about their position in the debate about children's sexuality. In the process of this 'identity work', their stories typically move from childhood to teenage life and narrate the path of achieving an ethical sexual lifestyle. In some cases, people work on more liberal selves where encounters with mediated sexual content are seen to play a significant part in the individual's socio-sexual development. Meanwhile, others present accounts of their family upbringing or academic background in discussing how they have developed an ethical sexual self. Finally, some provide experiential morality tales, analyzing how they developed an ethical or acceptable way of living after going through problematic situations like 'addiction' to pornography. In all cases, these stories are stories about one's desirable self; and the interview process is assumed to provide a legitimate opportunity to 'have one's say' in the wider public debate, and hence as the right place to project such an ethical self.

Apparently the key to this kind of citizenship is the regulation of sexual conduct – or, perhaps more accurately, the regulation of social and ethical conduct in relation to sexuality. In this respect the sexual is implicitly ethical and therefore social. The politics of children's sexuality are constructed as sets of ethical standards that one needs to demonstrate in claiming a rightful position in the public debate. Foucault discussed the regulation of one's conduct (governmentality) as a combination of regulating both one's physical and political

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(social/ethical) conduct. The process of regulation is inherent in individuals' attempt to achieve community belonging; and children's self regulation is equally a path to becoming a member of a particular (adult) community. This is what makes children's self-regulation an inherently social process and the self-government of one's sexual conduct part of a whole system of regulatory technologies.

11.5. Looking ahead

The contribution of this study in relation to what the two dominant paradigms have so far offered is pretty much clear: this study provides a much more detailed understanding of how and why young people talk about any depiction they consider sexual in the way they do. It also explores this in relation to how participants talk about sexuality more broadly. In this respect, it both confirms and extends the findings of previous studies from a cultural studies perspective (e.g. Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Bale, 2012). Even so, I am not convinced that this kind of analysis is likely to contribute to any radical change in how children's sexual agency is perceived within mainstream academic work, by the media or by the regulators. Keeping childhood under constant supervision and exhaustive investigation preserves its exotic and iconic status. The continuous emphasis on childhood as something different from adulthood, and on a developmentalist approach, implicitly sees it in relation to unquestioned adult norms. At the same time, childhood is seen almost voyeuristically, as something that promises an ever better – ethical, social, political - future. In this respect all kinds of constructions of childhood, and the framing of children as 'the generations of the future' or even 'the legacy of mankind' is merely a reflection of how we want to think about social progress and how the individual contributes to that.

Sexuality is at the same time a personal and a collective narrative. It is a matrix of personal and shared experiences, a puzzle of shared perceptions that become personalised. It is at the bottom line both a personal and a collective responsibility: a personal responsibility to the self, to becoming a self-governed, ethical individual; and a shared responsibility because a self-governed individual becomes an ethically and thus socially legitimate member of a society. It is in this sense that personal ethics are social and political, in the broader sense of providing belonging

and contributing to how a society works and responds when it comes to issues like sexuality.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, this thesis is a contribution to an ongoing debate which becomes more and more heated, while arguably without making any radical changes in the politics of children's sexuality. Research on the effects, and the potential risk and harm, of pornography on children will most probably keep informing the policy agendas, gathering research funding to generate more 'evidence' on the matter; it will most probably also add more fuel to the media and political campaigning against pornography. On the other side of the spectrum, audience reception researchers and cultural studies scholars are increasingly producing accounts investigating children's sexual subjectivities, their sexual rights and their claims to different kinds of citizenship. For example an interesting forthcoming book project aims to challenge parallel ongoing debates about children's sexualisation and children's experiences with pornography via cross-comparative critical analyses of current research findings from different traditions of research (Tsaliki, forthcoming).

In this respect considerate it is important to reiterate that there is a strong need for researchers and policy makers to put young people's experience of pornography – and what I have called their 'pornographic literacies' - on the agenda of discussions about children's sexuality. There is rich data on the kinds of knowledge and competence young people use in defining their public selves and claiming their position in discussions about sexuality, which would offer a more holistic view of the matter. It would also help moderate the alarmist campaigning against pornography and provide a more balanced account of children's sexual development.

The dominant academic and policy institutions defining how adults and children should talk about children's sexuality still largely ignore young people's perspectives. A more effective dissemination of critical approaches to research on the matter and their inclusion in the policy and policy-oriented academic agendas would offer alternative insights that could feed into both sex education and media literacy education. In my view, this would provide a constructive alternative to a debate that constantly talks about how bad and how wrong it is for children to have access to sexual knowledge - including the knowledge that derives from media.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

"Young People's Accounts of Experiences with Mediated Sexual Content during Childhood and Teenage Life"

A.Demographics

4.Age

5.Location

6.Family and cultural background

7.Use of media

8.Internet use/context of use/technological efficacy

B.Use of sexual content

9.   First experiences: online/offline, context, emotions

10.   Context of use (childhood, teenage life vs present)

11.   Discussion with/confession to parents (childhood, teenage life vs present)

12.   Parental mediation

13.   Experience sharing- Peers, Partner (childhood, teenage life vs present)

14.   Preferences-taste (childhood, teenage life vs present)

15.   Risk and Harm: for the user/for those involved/for children (childhood, teenage life vs present)

16.   Illegal types: use, type, emotions, context (childhood, teenage life vs present)

17.   Views about sexual content and its use (childhood, teenage life vs present)

18.   Types of sexual content (childhood, teenage life vs present)

19.   Illegal types -Knowledge, views (childhood, teenage life vs present)

20.   Public debate- knowledge, agencies, impact (childhood, teenage life vs present)

21.   Public debate-views from different social groups: peers, family, church, media (childhood, teenage life vs present)

22.   Consent- understanding of consent: User's consent or/and consent of those involved in the industry (childhood, teenage life vs present)

23.   Risk and Harm-for the adult user, for the young user, for themselves as..., for those involved in the industry (childhood, teenage life vs present)\

D. Definitions of sexual content and of pornography

24.   Define sexual content from experiences-define pornography (childhood, teenage life vs present)

25.   Characteristics/Criteria for definition (childhood, teenage life vs present)

26.   Purposes of sexual content as defined by them (childhood, teenage life vs present)- i.e. "Would you characterise at that time the same that you do now say that is pornographic?")