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Now You See It: Using short films as a sexuality education medium to address gendered and sexualized violence

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Yksittäistapaus: lyhytelokuvien käyttö seksuaalikasvatuksen materiaalina seksuaalisoituneen ja sukupuolistuneen väkivallan käsittelyssä (Lotta Liukkonen)

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Terve seksuaalisuus on tärkeä osa ihmisen kokonaisvaltaista hyvinvointia. Tärkeystään huolimatta seksuaalikasvatus jää usein sivuun, vaikka sekä oppilaat, opettajat, että vanhemmat pitävät seksuaalikasvatusta tärkeänä ja koulua tärkeänä seksuaalikasvatuksen tarjoajana. Kun ymmärrys seksuaalisuuden merkityksestä identiteettiin ja sen osa-alueisiin kuten sukupuoleen, kasvaa uuden tutkimuksen sekä tiedon paremman levittäytymisen kautta, on seksuaalikasvatuksen sisältöjen tarkastelu tarpeen.

Viime vuosina naiseen kohdistunut sukupuolistunut ja seksuaalisoitunut väkivalta on noussut esiin kansainvälisiin keskusteluihin esimerkiksi ”metoo- ja #textmewhenyougethome- kampanjoiden myötä. Seksuaalikasvatusta seksuaalisoituneen ja sukupuolistuneen väkivallan tunnistamiseen ja siihen puuttumiseen tarvitaan, jotta jokainen nuori pystyisi huoltamaan omaa seksuaaliterveyttään parhaansa mukaan. Ilmiön ymmärtäminen ja siihen puuttuminen vaatii myös ymmärrystä yhteiskunnallisten valtarakenteiden muodostumisesta sekä työkaluja niiden purkamiseen. Kansainvälisen keskustelun luoman keskustelun myötä erilaiset toimijat ovatkin tuottaneet uutta materiaalia, jonka tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä seksuaalisoituneesta ja sukupuolistuneesta väkivallasta. Eräs tällainen toimija on *Yksittäistapaus*-filmikollektiivi, joka koostuu 11 lyhytelokuvasta, jotka käsittelevät seksuaalisoitunutta ja sukupuolistunutta väkivaltaa sekä keskustelumateriaalista, jonka avulla elokuvien teemoja puretaan ja reflektoidaan.

Tässä Pro Gradu-tutkielmassa analysoin *Yksittäistapaus*-elokuvasarjan yhden lyhytelokuvan, *Tyttöbileet*, kuvausta seksuaalisoituneesta ja sukupuolistuneesta väkivallasta sekä sen esiin tuomista seksuaalisoituneen ja sukupuolistuneen väkivallan piirteistä. Analysoin myös elokuvan ja keskustelumateriaalin soveltuvuutta seksuaalikasvatuksen kontekstissa; onko materiaali linjassa seksuaalikasvatuksen kasvatuksellisten tavoitteiden ja toiveiden kanssa, ja auttaako se toteuttamaan niitä?

Tutkimus on laadullisen sisältöanalyysin ja diskurssianalyysin piirteitä yhdistelevä filmianalyysi. Teoreettisena viitekehyksenä toimii queer-teoria sekä feministinen pedagogiikka, sillä ne ovat vahvasti linjassa *Yksittäistapaus*-kollektiivin dekonstruktivististen ja emansipatoristen tavoitteiden kanssa, ja voivat tarjota hyödyllisen viitekehyksen laadukkaan ja tasa-arvoisen seksuaalikasvatuksen toteuttamiseen. Tutkimuksessa on hyödynnetty myös opetus suunnitelmaa sekä muita kasvatuksellisia oppaita liittyen seksuaalikasvatukseen, jotta tavoitteiden ja seksuaalikasvatuksen toteutuksen analysointi mahdollistuu.

Avainsanat: seksuaalikasvatus, seksuaalisoitunut ja sukupuolittunut väkivalta, opetusmateriaali, tasa-arvokasvatus

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A healthy sexuality is an integral part of one's overall well-being. Sexuality education, while very important, often is ignored, even though pupils, parents, and teachers all regard school as an important source for sexuality education. As the understanding of the importance of sexuality on identity and the intersection with other aspects of identity increases, examining the contents of sexuality education is necessary.

In the recent years sexualized and gendered violence towards women has been the topic for international discussions through campaigns like #metoo and #textmewhenyougethome. Sexuality education about recognizing and combatting sexualised and gendered violence is necessary to ensure every young person has the tools and knowledge to maintain their sexual health to the best of their ability. Understanding the phenomenon also requires understanding about societal power structures and tools to deconstruct them. In the aftermath of these widespread conversations, agents have produced material with the objective to increase understanding about sexualised and gendered violence. One of these is the *Now You See It*-film collective consisting of 11 freely accessible short films about sexualised and gendered violence and discussion material to help reflecting on the themes presented in the films. The collective has been produced by a Finnish production company, Tuffi Films, and includes many contributors such as the Finnish National Agency for Education.

In this master's thesis I will be analysing the depiction of the various traits of sexualised and gendered violence in the short film *Girl Thing*, a part of the *Now You See It*-film collective. I will also be analysing the suitability of the film and the accompanying discussion material in the context of sexuality education: is the material aligned with the educational objectives and hopes of sexuality education, and does it have the potential to help achieve them?

This research is a film analysis that combines aspects of qualitative content analysis as well as discourse analysis. The theoretical framework consists of queer theory and feminist pedagogy as they are aligned with the deconstructive and emancipatory objectives of the film collective and can offer a beneficial framework for sufficient and equitable sexuality education. The research also examines some educational guidelines and curricular content to guide the analysis of the suitability of the material for sexuality education.

Keywords: sexuality education, sexualized and gendered violence, educational material, equality education

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## 1. Introduction

Sexuality education is an integral part of one's well-being. The definition of sexuality, though often reduced to sexual attraction, according to World Health Organisation is defined as a multifaceted aspect of a human being, including both biological aspects, such as sex and reproduction, as well as emotional and social ones, such as gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, pleasure, and intimacy. In reality, human sexuality and the experience of sexuality within an individual is a complex combination of different expressions and experiences of sexuality and gender, that can be manifested through varying behaviours and practices, fantasies and beliefs, that are often guided by social, emotional and biological traits, but also heavily affected and guided by the economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual atmosphere (as cited by Loeber et al 2010, p.170). Even though often regarded as a personal matter, human sexuality is heavily interwoven into our society and affects us all on both an individual and a collective level. The collective, societal nature of sexuality can be seen in what the effects of comprehensive, good quality sexuality education can be. These include, as listed by a World Health Organisation agent, Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) (2016), the reduction in teenage pregnancies and abortions, decrease in sexually transmitted infections among young people, decrease in HIV infections among young people, decrease in sexual abuse, decrease in homophobia, awareness of human rights, respect, acceptance, tolerance and empathy for others, gender equality, confidence and self-esteem, skills in contraceptive use, empowerment and solidarity, critical thinking, skills in negotiation, decision-making and assertiveness, parent-child communication, and sexual pleasure and mutually respectful relationships (p.1-2). Even though sexuality education has often been synonymous with reproductive education, centring biology and excluding the social aspects of sexuality, more recently researchers have argued that topics which consider the complexities of sexuality and sexual development such as gender, diversity, relationships, empowerment, consent, social pressure and attitudes towards sexuality should be included and implemented in curricular content. Particularly strengthening psychosocial competence in young people and training in communication and decision-making skills through comprehensive sexuality education is important to promote sexual well-being and understand the implications of sexuality to individual lives (Leung et al, 2019). According to Spišák (2016), providing a safe environment to discuss sex and sexuality, including sexualised imagery and sexualised and gendered violence, can help in developing and valuing pupils' own sexuality as a rich and rewarding part of life.

As sexually oriented content has and continues to become more and more prevalent and pervasive, it is important that young people are being provided the tools to reflect and process the imagery and content they consume. In prevalent heteronormative societies, the media often objectifies women's bodies, which is meant to depict women as sexual objects to attract potential heterosexual male consumers through male sexual gratification, and the more we are exposed to such material, the more we start to adapt those notions ourselves, with men viewing women as sexual objects (Wright et al, 2016, p.956). When this notion becomes internalised and normalised, not only is it easier and more justifiable for men to feel entitled to the bodies and sexualities of women, but also react punitively towards women who frustrate their sexual goals or rejects them (Wright et al, 2016, p.961). Among women, being repeatedly exposed to sexually objectifying media content can lead to higher rates of self-objectification (Ward et al, 2018). In other words, girls and women will start seeing their own sexual agency and sexuality being tied to male sexuality, placing their own worth to what is attractive to men. This being said, according to Ramsey and Horan (2018), the desire for attention is associated with self-objectification which is further associated with sexual empowerment.

In the recent years there has been a shift in the way our society characterizes and defines sexualized and gendered violence, as well as in the way in which the phenomenon is discussed, notably through social media campaigns and societal movements such as #metoo (Kingston, 2018) and #textmewhenyougethome (Martin, 2021). According to Phipps (2019), #metoo is undoubtedly an important media phenomenon, emphasizing how behaviours that used to be socially accepted or dismissed are no longer considered admissible. Violence and harassment are now recognised to be a gendered and sexualised phenomenon, in which the gender of the person, as well as other identity-based factors, such as belonging to a gender minority, affects the type of violence that they are being subjected to. Women encounter violence in relationships, within families and workplaces, and sexual violence most often affects women and girls and gender minorities. Men are more likely to encounter violence in public places. However, men are usually the perpetrators in violence against both men and women (and other gender identities). (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare website, 2020, retrieved 6.3.2021). Even though gendered violence does occur among and affect people of all genders, women and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected (Rollston et al, 2020).

The need for education to end sexualised and gendered violence became increasingly palpable in March 2021, when Sarah Everard was captured and murdered in London. The case received widespread social media attention, both bringing light to the threat of violence

that women (and gender and sexual minorities) must live under, as well as a defensive reaction of denial of such a structural problem, with #notallmen trending on the popular social media platform, twitter (Martin, 2021). Women being subjected to violence is not a new phenomenon but reports of violence against women have often been framed as individual instances instead of being a social problem (Morgan and Simons, 2018). Gaining perspective on how power is distributed within the structures of society based on gender and other aspects of identity (such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, and ability) and how people of certain identities have access to use that power more freely than others will help gain perspective of one's own role in ending inequality. Furthermore, it is important to understand that certain behaviours uphold the structures that in turn uphold the power imbalance and prevent the liberation of and oppress marginalised groups. This way responsibility and accountability can be assumed instead of viewing these instances of violence as existing in a vacuum (Morgan and Simons, 2018; Lombard, 2018). For example, believing in discourses such as "boys will be boys", jokes that minimise feminine characteristics, dismissing sexist behaviour or not believing women in their accounts of violence creates an environment in which sexualised and gendered violence is normalised. On this basis it is increasingly easy to also dismiss other behaviour that is perceived to be more harmful. For many, the understanding of gendered and sexualised violence limits to the most violent manifestations. I argue that this perception distances the individual from the phenomenon as well as removes the responsibility of the individual in creating discourses and societal atmosphere that uphold the structures that enable sexualised and gendered violence. Understanding sexualised and gendered violence as a more deep-rooted societal issue based in values and attitudes instead of individual acts of violence is integral in ending sexualised and gendered violence. Rape culture is a term used to describe the underlying presence of the threat of rape, usually towards women by men, that is perpetuated by upholding attitudes, discourses and behaviours that excuse sexualised violence perpetrated against women. This can be in the form of policing the outfits that girls and women wear in the fear that something might happen to them instead of addressing the problem that other people are subjecting them to that threat of violence (see for example Neville-Shepard, 2019). Because Finland is described as a welfare state, despite high rates of violence against women, gender-segregated labour market and a persistent wage-gap, the belief that gender equality has been achieved remains strong (Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018). This further solidifies that gendered and sexualised violence should be explicitly added into the contents of sexuality education in Finland, since this false belief of achieved equality can prevent action to actually work towards an equal society (Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018).

A common and widespread understanding of sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour that invades one's personal space and disrespects the physical integrity (koskemattomuus) of another person (Jääskeläinen et al, 2015, p.14). However, the aftermath of the #metoo movement has changed the understanding of the meaning of sexual harassment. Instead of defining sexual harassment only through the most extreme examples, such as rape or murder, the definition now encompasses a variety of behaviours ranging from unsolicited messages to unwanted touching to crude jokes to stalking (Kingston, 2018). Understanding sexualized violence on a continuum, which, according to Phipps (2019), can now be seen as a staple of feminist theorizing and activism, has challenged the distinction made between "more" and "less" serious forms of sexual violence. The continuum, coined by Liz Kelly (1988) notes how all forms of sexual violence have similar functions and effects, such as the threat and force used to control women (as cited by Phipps, 2019).

The newfound common understanding of sexualised and gendered violence has forced us to find new ways to understand the shifted power dynamic, as well as us educators to re-evaluate how we approach these topics in a classroom setting, especially in sexuality education. How can we teach about consent, social pressure and decision-making skills to ensure that young people receive all the necessary information they need to recognize and navigate possibly dangerous situations in the midst of discovering and exploring their own sexualities? That is why education should include education about sexualised and gendered violence; to offer tools to recognise the behaviour in oneself and others, as well as to reflect on the underlying values and attitudes behind that behaviour. I have decided to examine this issue through the context of sexuality education, because currently, the notion to understand social structures, power imbalance and sexualised and gendered violence in an educational setting is almost exclusively found in guidelines for sexuality education, and it can be assumed that education about sexualised and gendered violence would fall under sexuality education. According to Rollston et al (2020) the failure to implement comprehensive sexuality education that includes developmentally and culturally relevant, science-based, medically accurate information on a wide range of topics, including human development, gender identity, sexual behaviours, communication skills, empathy, and mutual respect, puts people at risk of sexualised and gendered violence. In addition, as I will discuss in subchapter 2.3, schools are not immune for sexualised and gendered violence. Addressing sexualised and gendered violence in schools is important, because, as Meyer (2019) states, as long as the societal attitudes and behaviours go unchallenged and



bad behaviour is excused, then schools will continue to be sites where young people are harassed out of an education. Compulsory sexuality education, and more specifically sexuality education about gendered and sexualised violence can be a means to address this.

Even though not an exclusive list, among these aforementioned reasons my purpose is to examine sexuality education, specifically education about and to combat sexualized and gendered violence. *Now You See It*- film collective aims to provide one possible set of teaching material for sexuality education in Finland, more specifically education about sexualised and gendered violence. According to the *Now You See It* website, the objective of the campaign is to bring forth gender-based power dynamics and offer tools for recognizing, processing, and verbalising it (<https://www.yksittaistapaus.fi/>). The films are public and have accompanying free Finnish, English and Swedish discussion material developed with professionals to help grasping and unpacking the themes presented in the films. The film collective has been made in cooperation with many societal agents such as Ombudsman for Equality, the Finnish National Agency for Education, and YLE (the Finnish General Broadcasting company) through which the film collective has been made accessible (2019, retrieved 10.9.2020). The films are in Finnish and are intended for Finnish audiences, but can be viewed with Swedish and English subtitles. I have decided to conduct my research in English as it has been the primary language I have used throughout my studies, as well as because I find English a more inclusive and accessible language. The phenomena discussed in this thesis is not exclusive to a Finnish context, but the depiction of the film and the context in which it was created is rooted in the Finnish experience of sexualised and gendered violence.

I have chosen to study the following research question:

1. How is sexualised and gendered violence portrayed in the film *Girl Thing*?
2. What are the possible implications of that portrayal?

While the main objective of this research is to address the portrayal implications of the film, I am also interested in, and will discuss the suitability of this material for educational purposes, and if it is aligned with the goals and objectives of sexuality education.

I chose to use this material as the data for my research, as I find it an interesting and important reaction to the recent shift in societal discussions concerning sexualised and gendered violence. Providing freely accessible material creates an implementable possibility for nationwide Finnish education about sexualised and gendered violence with potential for education for liberation and societal transformation. I am also interested in the way sexualised and gendered violence is represented in this collective, as the subject needs to be handled with care, being relatable but not too triggering, all without being too confronting to not evoke defensive and dismissive reactions. Gendered and sexualised violence is very nuanced and analysing whether the film presents the issue with both the detail and clarity it requires to be beneficial in the recognition and verbalisation of sexualised and gendered violence is justified when deciding whether or not this material should be presented as educational material, which it is intended as. Especially because of the presentation as educational material, as opposed to for example art, we must remain vigilant about the ethics of education and the material we subject our pupils to. Lastly, I want to analyse if *Girl Thing* as well as the accompanying discussion material align with the wants, needs and desires for sexuality education, or in other words, analyse the potential for implementation within the curricular framework and objectives of education.

In this master's thesis I have decided to use the term sexuality education when referring to formal education that provides information and knowledge about human sexuality, as I feel as though it better considers the many dimensions of sexuality as opposed to its commonly used counterpart, 'sex education', which focuses more on anatomical facts and reproduction. I will also be using the terms man, woman, girl and boy. I understand that this is a very binary categorisation of gender and does not reflect the multitude of identities that can be found and expressed outside and within that binary. I am aware of spectrums of gender and sexuality and while I am mindful of the in-betweens, I also want to keep the research clear while operating in a heteronormative frame. Therefore, I use the women-girls/men-boys dichotomy to operate in the frame most used by educators. As the definition of the term *gender* is most commonly understood as the social performance of gender rather than its biological counterpart, *sex*, excluding people existing outside that binary would be irresponsible in the context of sexualised and gendered violence. Gendered and sexualised violence is not simply a women's issue, but the intersections of gender and sexual identity place a person in larger risk of facing such violence. However, as my data addresses gendered and sexualised violence and power specifically exercised over women and girls, for the sake of coherence and easy understanding,

I will be using binary language in this thesis. I will include discussion about the (lack of) representation of minorities in the data in chapter 7“ Discussion” of this thesis. When referencing to studies, I will be using the terminology used in each study. In my analysis, I will use the terms ‘girls ’and ‘boys ’when referencing to the characters of the short film, as I find them most appropriate considering the young age of the characters, and the terminology is also in line with what the website uses of the characters.

I will be examining these questions through film analysis, more specifically combining elements from qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. I am working through the lens of queer theory and feminist pedagogy (and feminist theory), which compose my theoretical framework. In addition, I will examine some contemporary publications by the Finnish Ministry of Education and other educational agents to provide an understanding of the current guidelines and curricula relating to the subject to analyse the implementation possibilities of the film *Girl Thing* and the accompanying discussion material.

Throughout my studies as an Intercultural Teacher Education student in Finland, I have been interested in equity in education. This has led me to research various subjects in relation, such as (in)equality, discrimination of children and young people based on sexuality and gender, intersectionality, and feminist pedagogy. I became aware of how the impact of human sexuality (and furthermore the performance of sexuality and the subsequent behaviours) and sexuality education were often overlooked in conversations and discussions about well-being within education. My interest ultimately led me to write my bachelor’s thesis on sexuality education, and furthermore led me to want to examine the topic even closer, resulting in this master’s thesis. As our knowledge and understanding of what sexuality, sexuality education, and sexualised and gendered violence means and how it is visible in the structures of our culture, we are forced to evaluate the content and methods of education to ensure everyone the opportunity to take care of themselves to the best of their ability. An increasing portion of our interaction is moving online, and subsequently, according to Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto (2016) internet does play an essential part in sexuality education (p.53). Finding new, engaging, and accessible material for sexuality education is important, and that is why I was interested in making this the subject of my thesis.

## **2. Background**

In this chapter I will give some context and background to the sexuality education that has been provided in Finnish schools. I will also explore how education about sexualised and gendered violence has been taken into account within sexuality education, and discuss the importance of curricular content and the benefits of including sexuality education in the curriculum.

### **2.1. Sexuality education in Finland**

Sexuality education became obligatory in Finnish schools in 1970, and in 1972, through the Primary Health Care Act, municipalities became responsible to provide free contraceptive counselling (Väisänen, 2015, p. 374). As a result of the improvement of sexual health services, abortion and delivery rates among adolescents declined to low levels in the mid-1990s, which can be seen an indicator of improving sexual health amongst young people. However, as sexuality education was made an optional subject which negatively affected both the quality and quantity of sexuality education, over the next seven years the abortion rates increased by 50%, most likely due to a decrease of adolescent contraceptive use and an earlier start of sexual relations (Loeber et al, 2010, p.173). This stunning correlation might not be due entirely to the shift to optional sexuality education studies, but still, young people's behaviours is undeniably influenced by the education they receive. This can also be viewed as an indicator of the importance of sexuality education on the overall health of young people, as well as highlight how education can have societal effects. With the reformation of the Finnish national core curriculum in 2004, sexuality education was again made a mandatory subject, integrated into environmental studies (elementary school) or health education (middle and high school). I will discuss curricular sexuality education content in more detail in section 2.2.

Pupils have an ever-growing array of resources when it comes to sexuality education. In early 2000s for example, the television and magazines were listed as the first sources of this info for young people, and only after those were teachers and the school nurse mentioned (Liinamo, 2000, p. 229). Currently, the internet is most likely regarded to be the most important source, and Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto (2016) argue that the internet does play an essential part in sexuality education (p.53). Regardless of the time, it appears that teachers or official educational material provided in compulsory education may not be the first information source about sexuality education for the students. According to Pakarinen et al (2017) educational facilities

still have an important role in increasing the knowledge about sexuality, and in a study conducted for 15-19-year-old Finnish vocational students, school was mentioned to be the most important resource for information about sex and sexuality (p.147).

Not surprisingly, pupils have also expressed their concerns about the inadequacy of their received sexuality education, and according to Liinamo (2000), in studies conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Finland show that the quantity of sexuality education was regarded as insufficient (p. 226). Many Finnish pupils had mentioned how sexuality should already be addressed in primary school (Kontula, Lottes, 2000, p. 223). Pakarinen et al (2017) argue that sexuality education should be provided earlier and more consistently as well as the quantity of information should be increased (p.147).

Overall, the attitudes towards sex education in Finland have been positive. Already in the early 2000s, both young people and their parents, as well as the providers of sex education perceive school- provided sexuality education as important and necessary (Liinamo, 2000, p. 221). According to Pakarinen et al (2017) young people tend to have positive attitudes towards sexuality education, which is an important starting point to improve young people's sexual health and offer comprehensive sexuality education (p147). However, this information seems to be somewhat in conflict with previously mentioned information; if the importance of sexuality education is recognized by all parties, what causes the dissatisfaction within the recipients of the education?

The current (?) content of sexuality education in Finland concentrates on birth prevention, relationships (namely dating), and sexually transmitted diseases/infections, and recently Helsingin Sanomat published an article about how the Finnish sexuality education is based on "scaring" the pupils with STD's and unwanted pregnancies (Vanhatalo, 2019). This places excessive emphasis on risks and the biological aspects of sexuality and leaves many other dimensions of sexuality unexplored. According to Lähdesmäki and Peltonen (2000), already in the early 2000s the Finnish national curriculum has provided a framework for over 30 years that would allow well-executed sexuality education. This, however, maybe partly due to the freedom of teachers and implementation of the curriculum, was not translated in practice as the results of sexuality education were inconsistent (p. 215). Kjaran (2018) discusses how but the responsibility of the execution of certain topics within sexuality education that are not explicitly mentioned in curricula often falls on individual teachers and their will to engage with it. As teachers are left responsible for prioritisation of topics within subjects, and as sexuality

education is currently not a standalone subject for any grade, but either a part of environmental studies (grades 3-6) or health education (grades 7-9), it is possible that teachers might skip the topic of sexuality education if they feel uncomfortable with it. There are multiple possible reasons for doing this, such as if they do not feel like they have received enough training for it or perhaps for other reasons, such as if their religion prevents them from teaching it.

Even though attitudes are positive, and the importance of sexuality education is recognised, the content of sexuality education in Finland fails to acknowledge important dimensions of human sexuality. Even though according to Jääskeläinen et al (2015), education should aim to recognize and dismantle the societal and cultural structure (p.18), sexuality education in Finland tends to ignore certain non-conforming identities that fall outside the heterosexual, cis-gendered, white “norm”, and fails to recognise structural and societal attitudes and values that guide and determine behaviour and the performance of gender and sexuality. This notion creates a normative idea that sexuality, instead of being intertwined within identity, is a collection of acts or merely reduces sexuality to mean who you are attracted to. This makes it difficult to reflect on complex matters of sexuality, for example recognising and understanding sexualised and gendered violence, as it is a phenomenon that reflects and is enabled through cultural and societal structures. Young people need sufficient knowledge to protect themselves from sexuality health risks, and new diverse and relatable means of sexuality education that take individuality are necessary to provide that knowledge (Pakarinen et al, 2017, p.147).

## **2.2. Curricula and other educational guidelines (in Finland)**

Sexuality education as a standalone subject is not introduced in the Finnish national core curriculum. Instead, sexuality education is embedded into multiple different subjects. In grades 1-6 sexuality education is integrated to environmental studies (Ympäristöoppi). In grades 1-2 the content for environmental studies includes the practicing the management of feelings and valuing both oneself and others. Also, physical integrity and respect for personal space is mentioned (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 132). During grades 3-6 the curricular content for sexuality education (included in environmental studies) includes discussing sexual development and reproduction in an age-appropriate manner. In addition, the curriculum places emphasis to self-reflection and the practice of noticing and understanding their own thoughts, needs, attitudes and values, discussion of physical and emotional integrity, and reflection on different kinds of interaction and their effect on the surrounding society (Finnish National

Agency for Education, 2014, p. 241). Through grades 7-9, with pupils' ages ranging from 12-13 to 15-16, sexuality education is a part of health education. The content during this time includes examining sexuality, the different sectors of sexual health and the diversity of sexual development (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 400). Sexuality education is also mentioned within the contents for Catholic religion for grades 7-9, where the content includes discussing the church's teaching about sin in relation to the individual as well as the society, and its effect on sexuality (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014, p.409).

As the curriculum provides to be only a limited source for teachers in regard to the content of sexuality education, some guidelines have been published from various agents, such as The Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare (*Seksuaalikasvatuksen tueksi*, 2015) and the Finnish National Agency for Education (*Kosketus*, a unit plan for sexuality education, 2021, <https://www.oph.fi/fi/oppimateriaali/kosketus>). However, as of currently, sexuality education leans heavily on what the teacher prioritises in health education, as there are no national or local requirements for the quantity of sexuality education. The resources provided might seem inaccessible, or are only searched for specific instances, instead of using them as an overarching resource in all teaching. Confiding sexuality education only to the context of health class or classes specifically for sexuality education (despite them being important as well) can remove the possibility to have meaningful conversations about sexuality and its many dimensions in other, non-sexuality education-contexts in the daily life of pupils. Even though these guidelines highlight important issues and give suggestions on how to approach these topics, equality legislation is currently based on recommendations and voluntary practices as opposed to prohibitions and sanctions (Ikävalko, 2013, 2016; Kantola 2010, as cited by Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018). Therefore, promoting gender equality is not prioritised, or is implemented through short-term projects instead of long-term development work, and the promotion of gender equality still faces opposition through challenging the need for such promotion and the marginalisation of experiences of gender inequality (Ikävalko, 2016; Brunila, 2009; Brunila & Ylöstalo, 2015 as cited by Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018). As Walters & Rehman (2013) state, curricular content can be especially rewarding if it holds space for marginalised identities who disclaim the gender-binary, and the difficulties and hostility they face living in a gender-binary social world. Inclusive curricula have major potential to enrich the intellectual lives of pupils by deconstructing the collective conceptualisation of gender as rigid and exclusive of those who fall outside of the binary (p. 345).

Education specifically about sexualised and gendered violence is not explicitly mentioned in the Finnish core curriculum, nor is it usually brought up in local curricula either. In the national objectives for compulsory education emphasis is placed on the respect for other people and human rights as well as what are referenced to as “the democratic values of the Finnish society”: parity and equality (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014, p.28). These values are an important baseline towards education with the objective of ending sexualised and gendered violence, but they in themselves do not recognise the problem as an already existing one that needs urgent attention and action. Studies have been conducted and written about sexualised and gendered violence in school settings (i.e. Sunnari, Kangasvuo & Heikkinen, 2003), that provide insight to the ways in which pupils might experience gendered and sexualised violence in school settings, offering tools and suggestions for teachers to better recognise and handle instances in which violence is inflicted. However, as there is no curricular guidelines or requirements of education for sexualised and gendered violence in Finland, this ability to recognise and reflect on encounters of violence will not be passed onto the pupils themselves. As the responsibility falls onto the teacher, it is probable that pupils across the country will not receive an equal amount of sexuality education relating to sexualised and gendered violence in either quality or quantity, possibly resulting in a disparity of knowledge between pupils in different schools. It would be naïve to think that curricular reform would be unnecessary, as having these guidelines explicitly stated would also make educational institutions responsible and accountable within their educational practices. Curricular inclusion of sexuality education topics such as sexualised and gendered violence has great transformational potential due to the unique reach of compulsory education (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö, 2007, p.37). According to Makleff et al (2020), comprehensive sexuality education may help both in the prevention of sexualised and gendered violence by addressing the harmful gender norms that underlie inequitable relationships as well as other risk factors for violence as well as well as in preparing young people to address and mitigate such violence if it happens (p.321). In addition Finland, the curriculum is national with municipalities having an input in the design and implementation of the curriculum and teachers having a lot of autonomy, education is centralised, and the curriculum is the same for all schools. This demonstrates the potential and necessity of curricular content about gendered and sexualised violence in a comprehensive sexuality education framework.



### **2.3. Gendered and sexualised violence in educational settings (Finnish context)**

Due to the young age of pupils in compulsory education and the desire to protect childhood innocence, schools are often not regarded as a setting in which sexual harassment or gendered violence takes place. This notion, however, exists in contradiction to studies indicating that the most common forms of bullying are related to body size, perceived sexual orientation and gender expression, thus meeting the requirements to be classified as sexualized and/or gendered violence (California safe schools coalition 2004; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Harris Interactive 2005; National Mental Health Association 2005, as cited by Meyer, 2019).

As Meyer (2019) explains, gendered harassment is classified as behaviour that is motivated by the inability to exist within the norm setting and public performance of traditional heterosexual, cisnormative gender roles. More specifically, gendered harassment describes any behaviour that polices and reinforces the traditional gender norms of heteronormative masculinity and femininity through harmful behaviours. This policing behaviour can take many forms: physical, such as tripping or hitting, verbal, such as name-calling or spreading rumours, or psychological, such as ostracizing. Forms of gendered harassment include (hetero)sexual harassment, homophobic harassment, and harassment for gender nonconformity, which includes transphobic harassment (Larkin 1994; Renold 2002; Smith and Smith 1998 as cited by Meyer, 2019). The majority of sexualised and gendered violence in an educational setting is perpetrated by peers, and the majority is perpetrated by someone of the opposite sex (Ngo et al, 2018). This being said, our current understanding of sexualized violence often fails to understand the nuanced victim-perpetrator- relationship, as we often fail to realise, that as complex human beings, many of us are not purely one or the other (Phipps, 2019). For sufficient sexuality education pupils must be taught to be responsible for their own actions to understand the complexities that surround human interaction and relationships and the different nuances that exist within them.

Bildjuschkin and Malmberg (2000) acknowledged (Finnish) schools to be a site for sexualised and gendered violence already in the early 2000s (p.135). Jääskeläinen et al (2015) note that sexualised and gendered violence can be incited in peer groups as young as primary schoolers in forms such as invasion of personal space and disrespecting the physical integrity of another person, unwanted touching or jokes of a sexual nature (p.14). A report on the sexualised and gendered violence taking place in middle schools was published by YLE

MOT, an investigative journalism unit of the Finnish public broadcasting company, in 2018 (Munukka, Kurki, 2018). The report highlights how common the instances of violence are, as well as the difference between schools in relation to sexualised and gendered violence; in some schools sexualised and gendered violence was reported to occur five times more than the national average (Munukka, Kurki, 2018). Incidents of gendered and sexualised violence often lead to the loss of trust towards other pupils, the safety of the school environment as well as oneself, which then can manifest as anxiety, fear, shame and feelings of helplessness, guilt, and abandonment. Antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and depression are more common in people who have experienced sexualised and gendered violence (Porras, 2015, pp.125). Furthermore, sexualised and gendered violence specifically in an educational environment negatively impacts school attendance, thus jeopardizing the education and therefore the future of the victim (Larkin, 1994 as cited in Sunnari, 2003, pp. 127).

The discourse surrounding sexual harassment in schools has been and remains very gendered. This means it affects girls and boys differently and assumes roles to each gender, seeing boys as perpetrators and girls as victims, and is often excused as being a part of regular development of young people (Lehtonen, 2003, p.166). Huuki (2010) notes how sexualised violence among young people, especially when perpetrated by boys is often perceived through the “boys will be boys”- discourse, in which the harassment inflicted by boys is excused as a natural and inherent part of their development and behaviour (p.86). Sexualised and gendered violence perpetrated by boys towards girls is often framed as a sign of innocent heterosexual attraction (Lehtonen, 2003, p.256). This creates an atmosphere where boys will have their behaviour excused and girls are told to tolerate or even feel flattered about the violence they face. On a whole, sexualised and gendered violence seems to be largely incited due to the lack of conformity to the normative ideal of presenting heterosexuality (Sunnari, 2003, p.133). Due to the gendered nature of the phenomenon, girls and boys often face different types of sexualised violence, with girls being more likely to face physical harassment (Jääskeläinen et al, 2015, p.15). Girls are often compared to each other as a tool to reinforce heteronormativity, as the comparison is often based on placing excessive value on traits such as beauty and who receives most male attention (Sunnari, 2003, p.133). When boys are victimised, it is often due to not presenting to be masculine enough (Lehtonen, 2003, p.153). According to Meyer (2019) harassment faced male students is often perpetrated by other males and tends to be homophobic in nature. Girls perpetrating sexualised and gendered violence is often verbal, and targets other girls (Meyer, 2019). Sexualised and gendered violence in schools can also be a way to assert

power and dominance, thus becoming a way to influence the social hierarchy of the class environment. According to Huuki (2010), asserting dominance by inflicting sexualised violence on girls through behaviour that is considered inappropriate or taboo, boys of a higher status reconstructed their idea of masculinity (p.88), and through their higher status get to determine which characteristics are “secondary”, and these were often feminine traits and non-heterosexuality, placing those characteristics to the threat of violence (p.86).

As the discussion around gendered and sexualised violence remains binary, it should be noted that young people who are a part of sexual and gender minorities, such as gay, bi or transgendered pupils are more likely than any other pupils to face harassment in schools (Jääskeläinen et al, 2015, p.15). Gruber and Fineran (2008, as cited by Meyer, 2019) found that GLBQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Queer) students experience more bullying and harassment than non-GLBQ students. This study also examined the impacts of bullying and sexual harassment on the health of students. The authors concluded that girls and GLBQ students generally have poorer health (self-esteem, mental and physical health, and trauma symptoms) during middle and high school. Even though legislation in Finland has prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender for years, it is rare for schools to actively prevent possible discrimination or misconduct (Lehtonen, 2015, p.108). There needs to be an explicit goal to eradicate sexualised and gendered violence from educational facilities to achieve an environment that is safe and inclusive where multiple perspectives and ideas are encouraged and valued, and this requires both consistent work from teachers as well as curricular inclusion (Meyer, 2019).

### **3. Theoretical framework**

I will provide an explanation as to why I have decided to compile my theoretical framework in the way it is. I chose to use specific theories as my theoretical framework, because, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, queer theory and feminist pedagogy align well with the objectives of this thesis and provide valuable insight into understanding these objectives as well as examining their importance to society and education. The website for “Now You See It” describes the objective of the campaign as follows: “The objective of the influencing and impact work is to use the films in order to provide insights and observations of gendered power dynamics and offer tools for processing and verbalising it as well as for defining a new normal.” (Now You See It website, 2019, retrieved on 5.3.2021). Part of truly achieving gender equality is ending sexualised and gendered violence. Lahelma (2014) refers to the “gender equality discourse” in which the understanding of gender awareness includes the consciousness of social and cultural differences, inequalities, and otherness. She also notes how all these aspects are built into educational practices but can be changed. She also notes, how it is important to understand the intersectionality of gender; how other ways of identifying, such as age, health, culture, and ethnicity affect the performance of gender (p.185). This definition of gender awareness encompasses the way gender (and sexuality, as it is, in part, a performance of gender) is intertwined in the structures of our society, and therefore visible in the agents that uphold those structures, such as the educational system. Queer theory and feminist pedagogy can cater to the most important part of the aforementioned definition: the belief that things can be changed. The way I view the theoretical framework is as follows: queer theory offers important insights into otherness, dismantling structures and redefining more inclusive ones. Feminist theory and feminist pedagogy, with many overlaps with queer theory, can offer tools to translate those theoretical ideas into practice, and therefore bring about transformation and hopefully liberation.

#### **3.1. Queer theory**

The overarching goal of queer theory is to challenge existing social norms, binaries and categorisation and explore how and why they were created (Fatopolou, 2012). The beginnings of queer theory date back to the 1990s, arising from post-structuralist philosophy and feminism. Philosopher, feminist and gender theorist Judith Butler developed Foucault’s (1980) ideas and further deconstructed the link between sexuality and gender, challenging the boundaries, norms and conceptions regarded as universal “truths” about sexuality and gender (Fatopolou, 2012).

As the main aim of the film collective I am analysing in this thesis is to deconstruct the understanding of sexualised and gendered violence as well as reflect on and dismantle the structures that uphold the environment that enables such disproportioned sexualised and gendered violence against women, I find it beneficial to include queer theory in my theoretical framework. Understanding the underlying social norms is important in investigating the power relations between social norms and ways of identification, oppression and privilege, which are all important aspects of sexualised and gendered violence. Queer theory argues that these rigid categories provided for us are not sufficient in explaining individual experiences, experiences that contain a wide range of attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, and works to create a new, more broad and inclusive definition of “normal” (see for example Giffney, 2004). Queer theory offers insight to assess the way the definitions of “real” and “normal” identities, and furthermore the expression and performance of these identities, including behaviour, are constituted in relation to language, culture, religion, law, the state, local and geo-politics, media, science, technology, and education (Green, 2016, pp.42).

The term ‘queer’ is often used as a descriptor to mean non-heterosexual, or as an umbrella term for sexuality and gender minorities. The term has also held a very negative connotation as it was widely used as a derogatory synonym for homosexual, but has lost some, if not most of its negative meaning over time (Motschenbacher, 2013). However, in the context of queer theory, the term ‘queer’ has a broader definition as a term that objects homogenization contests normativity (Seidman, 1997, as cited by Fatopolou, 2012). According to Edelman (1995, as cited by Fatopolou, 2012), the term ‘queer’ in queer theory should be framed as a site of ‘becoming’ and the constant questioning of norms, as those factors give the theory its critical edge. This broadening of our understanding of the word ‘queer’ opens up the possibilities of discussion within queer theory, as it is possible “to consider a ‘queer’ approach to research, a distinct methodological approach that aims to perform an act of ‘queering’, to de-naturalise taken for granted categories of analysis, even beyond issues of sexuality and gender.” (Fatopolou, 2012). This opens opportunities to critically examine the ways in which studies are conducted as well as the data and analysis themselves. This idea is at the background of my thesis, and even though I do follow fairly traditional steps in the analysis of my data, I have attempted to keep this idea of having a ‘queer’ approach to my research.

The way in which sexuality education is taught often leans heavily on norms accepted in society. In his study, Lehtonen (2003) notes how even the clinical description of reproduction, a seemingly neutral subject, is often taught in a way that reinforces the traditional gender binary as well as heteronormativity in the way fertilization is described; the sperm cell (male) is active in searching for the egg, while the egg (female) is the passive target (p.57). This reinforces the notion in which human sexuality is dichotomised: men are active sexual agents; women are passive sexual objects. The way sexuality education is taught, the content that is provided and the discourses used, can either uphold old structures or dismantle them. This also includes *what* is prioritised and taught in sexuality education and *why* they are taught. Furthermore, sexuality education as well as education in general tend to either unintentionally or intentionally disregard the experiences of pupils who fall outside the 'norm', and, as stated by Mayo (2019, p.3), frequently leave out information about women and LGBTQ-related sexuality issues. This is seconded by O'Quinn & Fields (2019), who state that while cis-gendered girls might learn about their physiological reproductive organs, often only in relation to reproduction, they still will not receive the same amount reliable knowledge about reproduction and pleasure that is accessible to cis-gendered boys. For example, when discussing the physiology of the female reproductive organs, ovaries and fallopian tubes are usually discussed, but clitorises or vulvas are often left unspoken of. This knowledge of sexuality is very limited, as it relies heavily on the binary understanding of gender and fails to recognise sexuality as an aspect of human well-being beyond reproduction (O'Quinn & Fields, 2019). This, of course, is alienating towards queer people, and does not really cater to any pupil's needs. The commitment to biology and reproduction-oriented sexuality education reinforces the idea that bodies only exist on a conventional gender binary, and therefore leads to the erasure of transgender and intersex bodies.(O'Quinn & Fields, 2019). This is why queer theory and queer pedagogy in their objective to dismantle the current narrow standards of existing could offer the tools to address these disparities between individuals and ensure a safe and sufficient sexuality education for all. However, these notions of "acceptable" and "normal" ways of existing continue to haunt queer theory and whatever desires for educational reform (Mayo, 2019, p. 3). This persistent notion of the "norm" continues to exist even within attempts at inclusive sexuality education guidelines, through, for example, muted, normative and monogamous definitions of desire and romantic attraction, even when same-sex attraction is discussed (O'Quinn & Fields, 2019). When sexuality education is taught this way, even in its attempt to be inclusive, certain oppressive structures remain upheld and supported. This also restricts the education about gendered and

sexualised violence to remain normative and might enforce certain gender-roles as well as forget to include pupils who fall outside the “norm”.

Despite its name, “queer theory”, and the assumption of its definition to apply to only the diversity of sexualities, the application of queer theory in sexuality education does not only aim for the addition of diversity in sexuality education, but more so challenges the constructs and categories that, often very narrowly, define our very existence. According to O’Quinn and Fields (2019), queer sexuality education that applies the understandings of queer knowledge has the opportunity to affirm young people’s sexualities in the present and foster hope for an intersectional, inclusive and safe future if appropriately implemented. Even though some theorists, such as Green (2016), argue that queer theory does not offer a framework applicable to social sciences because it will not capture subjects of research from a socially constituted, knowable position and acknowledge the difficulty of applying queer theory in to practice as epistemological assumptions are invested in social categories of subjectivity, such as class, race or gender and their observation. However, according to Fatopolou (2012), research may facilitate the common values underpinning queer studies and studies of intersectionality through, for example, deconstruction, self-narratives, case studies and other creative methods, and researchers could in this way employ queer theory not only for academic purposes, but also as political tools in practices of resistance. Queer studies can provide valuable insight and a critical tool to examine sexuality education material.

### **3.2. Feminist theory and feminist pedagogy**

Feminist pedagogy is oftentimes met with dismissal and even resistance, most likely due to not understanding the premise of or the potential implications of feminist pedagogy (Naskali & Kari, 2020). According to McCusker (2017) feminist pedagogy aims to contest traditional pedagogical styles that can make traditionally marginalised groups passive and invisible and encourage and foster resistance and critical thinking. As a pedagogy, feminist pedagogy aims to be enabling, inspiring and motivating, and recognise the diversity and complexity of identities, subjectivities and social positions (hooks 1989; Lather 1991; Morley 1999; Coia and Taylor 2013; Light, Nicholas, and Bondy 2015, as cited by McCusker, 2017, pp.447). The main characteristics of feminist pedagogy are most often seen to include the redefinition of pedagogical power and authority, valuing personal experiences, diversity and subjectivity and encouraging activism through reconceptualising classrooms as spaces for social justice to ultimately evoke

social change (McCusker (2017 pp.448). Naskali & Kari (2020) remind us about the position of the teacher in feminist pedagogy. That position is one of self-reflection and social and cultural analysis, as schools that want to promote activism and social transformation need teachers that can reflect on their own thinking, opinions, and attitudes, and who are able to analyse the existing cultural and social power structures. They go on to argue that only through understanding these structures and placing them under scrutiny and criticism can education become equal for all (Naskali & Kari, 2020). Redefining the classroom as a more interactive and collaborative space, the implications of the contents of the teaching happening in that classroom will more likely be carried out in the lives of the pupils outside the classroom. Sexuality education to recognise and ultimately end gendered and sexualised violence must be followed up with actions outside schools to invoke actual change and providing a setting in which activism is encouraged will offer an opportunity to make such changes to societal values possible, which is why feminist pedagogy might provide an appropriate framework to implement education about sexualised and gendered violence.

Feminist pedagogy shares many similar views that align with queer theory. These include the ideas surrounding difference, othering and marginalisation, that have been central to feminist issues, and categorization that arises from those differences associated with, for example, race, ethnicity and sexualities. The raising of the question of difference as a key feature of feminism can be tracked down to the rise of postmodernism and the works of Donna Haraway (1988), and Judith Butler (1997), also an important influence of queer theory, and the deconstruction of grand narratives. Through these notions, feminist scholars aim to recognize the complexities of multiple, competing, fluid, and intersecting identities as opposed to examining differences in a way that relies on categorisation (Gringeri, et al2010, p. 394). Leaning on this, I argue that combining elements from both queer theory and feminist pedagogy is important. To truly inflict reflection and social change in regard to sexualised and gendered violence is to understand how these different aspects of one's identity affect one's placement in the social structures. However, it can be argued that examining sexualised and gendered violence does, in itself, include a binary understanding of gender and therefore rely on categorisation. I understand this binary understanding will ultimately bleed into my study as well. As we do live in a society in which structures that are built upon categorisation and the subsequent assignment of value on those categories are in place, understanding the implications of those categories and protecting those who are most hurt by them is important. Differences between and within identities cannot be, and nor do they have to be ignored in feminist pedagogy, and the idea that



difference is irrelevant can be used as a tool to dismiss feminist knowledge (Naskali & Kari, 2020). On the contrary, if the overarching goal is to understand the arbitrary nature of those categories and deconstruct them, offering liberation to marginalised groups, understanding difference within identities and their treatment within societal structures is necessary. I argue that feminist pedagogy and queer theory implemented in sexuality education may provide beneficial theoretical grounds to do so.

Understanding the basis of feminist theory will further help to comprehend the objectives behind feminist pedagogy. Gringeri et al (2010) contest the notion of centring women's bodies and issues as the defining aspects of feminism and feminist research. This notion reinforces a narrow perception of femininity and is not definitive or expansive enough. Instead, gender should be understood through gender performativity, a concept coined by Butler (1990, as cited in Gringeri et al, 2010), that removes the focus from the essentialized characteristics of body sex, and places it on how gender is performed (p. 395). Gringeri et al (2010) argue that feminist research should place emphasis on the very construct of gender, ideas of femininities and masculinities, to be a means to better understand how diverse individuals experience and resist privilege and oppression (pp. 394-395). Postmodern feminism and the challenging of binaries can lead to a better and more inclusive understanding how the construction of gender affects the lived experience of men and transgender people in addition to those of women, thus benefitting everyone suffering from heteronormative and binary views of gender and sexuality (Gringeri, Wahab, & Anderson-Nathe, 2010, p. 395). Understanding sexualised and gendered violence as a product of the performance of patriarchal and binary gender stereotypes will lead to deeper understanding what causes the problem instead of vilifying individual men as predators and all women as victims, which then might also decrease the likelihood of a defensive reaction.

Feminist pedagogy aims to be both transformative and emancipatory; vital qualities for a pedagogy with ambitions to eliminate injustice and oppression (McCusker, 2017, pp.457). Therefore, feminist pedagogy can be seen as a beneficial framework when discussing sexuality education, more specifically education about sexualised and gendered violence. There is a need for intersectional feminist approaches in the battle to end sexualized violence, since, as Meyer (2019) states, the majority of anti-bullying programmes as well as the accompanying research often fails to identify and take into account social group membership that affect a person's identity, and their interaction both within individuals as well as between individuals

(Meyer, 2019). It seems that bullying is often seen as conflict between individuals, and cases of bullying and harassment or displays of violence in schools instead of behaviour that reflect societal values, and the resolution of the conflict fails to acknowledge what societal factors enable such behaviour.

Transformative feminist approaches in pedagogy can, however, also be confronting for students. In a paper by Ollis (2016), Australian secondary school students took part in a feminist-based classroom program in which they discussed violence against women through depictions of women in the media, pornography and advertisement. While the program clearly raised awareness of the objectification and dehumanization of women and the link of these representations of femininity to violence against women, many students reportedly felt confused and uncomfortable. If pupils are not provided tools to process what has been made visible to them through the program, this confrontational radical feminist pedagogy is in danger of leaving students feeling without agency (Ollis, 2016). Ollis (2016) argues that to combat this lack of agency, feminist pedagogy should focus on deconstructing gender roles and focusing on pupils' human characters rather than gendered character. In other words, not teaching women to be victims and men to be perpetrators, but to raise awareness and understand gender roles and power relations within those gender norms and their impact on the self (Ollis, 2016). Ylöstalo & Brunila (2018) confirm this notion by stating that questions about gender and gendered practices of education lie at the heart of feminist pedagogy, as it aims to empower students through this deconstruct of the dominant gender ideology.

There are some differences between different feminist pedagogical approaches. For example, Ollis (2016), recognises that the feminist pedagogical approaches draw heavily from radical and liberal feminist movements, which have been criticised by gender scholars as having a limited understanding of gender in comparison with postmodern feminist approach. Post-structuralist feminist pedagogy, on the other hand, approaches teaching and education as practices of power that produce subjectivities, inviting students to criticize the unequal social relations embedded in contemporary society and to change these circumstances (Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018). Gringeri et al (2010) argue that researchers should challenge the notion that feminism is defined by binary thinking, and instead emphasize multifaceted femininities and masculinities and the intersectionality of identities. This does not mean gender should be completely disregarded; instead, the concept and understanding of gender should be deconstructed to see and challenge the links between gender and other social categories that shape identity (p. 402). This falls in line with the values behind the data I have decided to analyse in this thesis.

To understand sexualised and gendered violence, it is not beneficial to ignore gender altogether, but instead try to understand and deconstruct the structures that have been constructed to benefit certain identities over others. Translating this notion into practice, through teaching material or curricular reform for example, can, however, prove to be a challenge, as Ollis (2016) states that the postmodern feminist approach, which is often regarded as conceptually superior, is difficult to operationalize.

Even though the film collective at the centre of this study does not explicitly claim any theories as its framework, the objectives of encouraging social change, contesting what is assumed as “normal” and challenging the norm can be seen to be in alignment with the ideas of queer theory and feminist theory and pedagogy. Examining the data through a theoretical framework of queer theory and feminist pedagogy can provide a point of view for analysis that is beneficial and accurate when discussing the potential of the film collective as an agent of social change.

## 4. The data

In this chapter, I will introduce the data used in this thesis, as well as give some context to how films have been used in sexuality education. I decided to introduce my data before getting into my methodology because I feel as though it is easier to follow the steps of my methodology after having some context to what data I am using. This also aligns with my theoretical framework, as I am trying to keep in mind the norm-breaking notions of queer theory, and try to implement that in my work as well.

### 4.1. Films and sexuality education

There is nothing new about using films as a teaching medium. Films have been used for educational purposes for decades, receiving both criticism and praise (Limond, 2009). In sexuality education specifically, films have been used to teach young people about their changing bodies, reproduction and more in both animated form as well as live action, by movie makers ranging from Walt Disney with *Story of Menstruation* (1946) to sexologist Martin Cole, the creator of the controversial and explicit live-action sex education film *Growing Up* (1971). (Limond, 2009).

The objective of sex education films has often been to provoke apprehension towards sexuality in hopes of preventing young people from engaging in risky sexual behaviour. As Laukotter (2016) states, the objective of using films as a sexuality education medium has traditionally been to evoke negative feelings, such as shame about “immoral” choices, fear of infections and through those feelings motivate a change in behaviour. Films used as sexuality education material have been used as more of a cautionary tales instead of offering tools for navigating one’s own experiences regarding sexuality. Films used as teaching material in sexuality education seem to rarely provide relatability, opportunities for reflection or any depiction of the social aspects that affect the expression of sexuality. If films are used as a cautionary tale, sexuality itself is rendered to one act (heterosexual, penetrative sex) with negative consequences, and fails to recognise sexuality as a part of one’s identity. (Laukotter, 2016). This rendering then alienates any discussion about societal aspects that affect our view of sexuality, the expression of it and sexualised and gendered violence. As stated in the introduction, our understanding of sexuality education is still narrow, and therefore using films that tackle issues such as gendered and sexualised violence as material in sexuality education may seem unorthodox. However, dedicating space for material like this and prioritising education about power

imbalance and the social aspects of the expression of sexuality might in itself change the rigid perception of what sexuality education is and what it should prepare the pupils for.

Sexual imagery is prevalent in our society, and the implications of this imagery often goes unexplored. In a study by Miller and Seitz (2014), a group of North American students in a Sociology of Gender class were required to collect and submit photographs of gender messages around them, which would then be compiled into a video learning object through observing each other's photographs. It was hypothesized that this project would lead to a better understanding of gender messages in their everyday lives. The photographs as well as the assessment questionnaire indicated that the assignment made them better aware of those gender messages if they were not already aware of them. Miller and Seitz (2014) continue: "Specifically, students expressed an awareness of how these meta-messages reinforce beliefs, values, and norms about gender polarization, biological essentialism, and andro-centrism." (p.219). In addition to taking the photographs themselves, the compulsory viewing of the film created from the photographs of the students allowed the students to reflect on how these gender messages were part of "a larger systemic pattern". In conclusion, the assignment was said to have "had a powerful enlightening effect on understanding social life" (Miller & Seitz, 2014, p. 291). This study demonstrates the power of the subliminal and the explicit messages that are carried through the imagery we consume and their reflection of the values of our society. Leaning on this, it is arguable that by using well-executed films as a part of sexuality education, more specifically when discussing sexualised and gendered violence, could make students more aware about said messages in their lives, and consequently offer them tools to recognize and react in situations in which gendered power is violated.

In another study by Walters and Rehman (2013) in Arizona, USA, 120 students were split into three groups. The first group, the control group, watched no documentary. The second group viewed a news documentary film featuring transgender-identified children and adolescents and their families for 14 minutes, and the final group for 28 minutes. It was concluded that watching the news documentary for 28 minutes increased the knowledge accuracy of students, as they scored higher compared to their peers in assessing accuracy about transgenderism. According to Walters and Rehman, the data suggests that instructors could use a short, easy-to-implement, low-risk film in their courses or training exercises to improve basic knowledge about the transgender concept (Walters & Rehman, 2013, p. 343). There is no reason to believe that similar results could not be achieved even if the subject matter changed. This data suggests that using film as a medium in education to recognize gendered violence could

increase the knowledge about, recognition of and agency to work against sexualised and gendered violence.

Furthermore, as gendered and sexualised violence has taken new forms as technology advances, and especially verbal sexual harassment on the internet and on social media platforms has become more and more common (Porras, 2015, p.123), including education for the different manifestations of gendered and sexualised violence in the sexuality education curriculum is important to ensure the safety of children and young people. Klemetti and Raussi-Lehto (2016) state that media education should be a part of sexuality education, as the media shapes the perception of sexuality and the expectations towards themselves and their peers (p.40). Using freely accessible, reliable, and professional material and providing resources for pupils to seek out information would protect young people having to rely on their not-yet-developed critical reading and thinking skills, and therefore decrease the probability of coming across harmful sexual material in an attempt to find out information. Using, for example, short films discussion analysing the topics presented in the film can help develop media literacy skills alongside tackling the themes and topics themselves that can be helpful when presented with other sexualised material.

Bretz (2014), recognizes that pedagogy on the representation of sexual violence is a difficult balancing act between approaching the topic without reinforcing the patriarchal systems that uphold the environment in which sexualized and gendered violence is possible, and avoiding the trivialization of the problem, as well as the possible lived experience of some students. Having discussed scenes portraying gendered violence and rape in his literature classes, Bretz (2014), argues that the way we see rape or other gendered violence portrayed in any text is heavily influenced by our own culture's expectations and assumptions regarding the relationship of genders (pp.17), which in transformational and liberatory education is not desirable. This highlights the importance of remaining critical of what material is used when discussing sexualised and gendered violence, as well as what precautions are taken in the discussion following the portrayal of such in an educational setting. Material that depicts gendered and sexualised violence, especially to highlight the power exercised over women requires a lot of attention to not in the aims to provide liberation for women accidentally end up reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and remove agency from women (Ollis, 2016). Zembylas (2013) argues that critical pedagogical approaches, such as radical feminism, that involve trauma and deep emotional responses, such as violence against women, need to be managed well as they may be too firmly grounded in binary understandings such as women as victims and men as perpetrators

(as cited by Ollis, 2016). Gendered and sexualised violence, in schools and otherwise, is mostly seen as men/boys asserting their power over women/girls. However, it is important to understand that the behaviour that leads to gendered and sexualised violence stems from attitudes and social contracts that uphold an environment in which traditionally masculine behaviours are highly valued and practiced and performed over devalued forms of traditional notions of femininity (Meyer, 2019). Bretz (2014) also notes that when exploring education on sexualised and gendered violence and the inevitable and necessary recognition of privilege and trauma, to create a liberatory classroom it is most important to address the students who fail to recognize that the gendered system they subscribe to perpetuates violence (pp.18). Ollis (2016) notes that many strategies (Caulfield 2000; Evans, Krogh, and Carmody 2009) to end violence against women focus on raising awareness about said structures, which will lead to more respectful behaviour. In this light, using the *Now You See It* short films such as *Girl Thing* as sexuality education material aim to do precisely that: raise awareness, help recognise and verbalise sexualised and gendered violence and through following discussion deconstruct existing structures. Tlostanova et al (2019) argue that it is important to focus on the building of knowledge through a never-ending process of learning, unlearning and relearning, humbly listening to others and entering their worlds with a loving rather than agonistic perception, instead of by presenting the problem outside the context (Lugones, 2003, p. 96, as cited by Tlostanova et al., 2019, p. 169).

#### **4.1. Now You See It - and cannot ignore it anymore**

*Now You See It (Yksittäistapaus)* is a Finnish film collective created in 2019 with multiple partners, including artists, filmmakers, and researchers, and the project consists of 11 short films that address sexualised and gendered violence, and more specifically women as the subject of the exercise of gendered and sexualised power. The specific theme or topic and point of view of each film varies within the context of sexualised and gendered power imbalances. These topics include consent, gaze, and power relations, further dissecting them into discussing phenomena such as harassment, race, and rape.

The film collective was created as a reaction to the #metoo movement and the public discussion surrounding gendered and sexualised violence that was catalysed into action by said movement. It is a joint artistic and educational effort by a Finnish production company Tuffi Films that includes various contributors, such as the Ombudsman for equality and the

Finnish National Agency for Education. The contributors also include various youth organisations that provide gender sensitive and culturally sensitive social work, such as the Loisto settlement, Tyttöjen talo (Girls 'house) and Poikien talo (Boys 'house) (youth community spaces that provide guidance as well as resources on sexuality, sexual violence and diversity). Discussion material is provided by Timeout Foundation, an organisation specialised in creating material for societal discussions for educational use as well as workspaces. The films are aimed at individuals, schools, educational facilities and workplaces, and are meant to be discussed afterwards using the provided discussion material. (Now You See It website, 2019, retrieved on 5.6.2021). The films are divided into different categories based on themes. These themes are consent, gaze, power relations, and work life. There is also a separate “for schools”-category that includes films with themes from the other categories. This division is possibly done to include a wide variety of themes to be a part of education about sexualised and gendered violence to understand all the different forms it can take, and ensure that all important themes are included in education.

*Now You See It* is also a part of ERASE GBV- project, that examines gendered violence and responsible and ethically sustainable agency in schools and the educational field. The aim of this project is to increase the awareness of the staff in the educational field in relation to the customs of encountering gender-based violence, and the development of the customs used to intervene in said violence (University of Jyväskylä, STT Info website, retrieved on 23.1.2020). The ERASE GVB- project (Education and Raising Awareness in Schools to Prevent and Encounter Gender-Based Violence) is a multidisciplinary research project with partners from three European countries; Finland, Spain and Croatia. The objective of the project is to answer the needs for the training of teachers by producing a model for developing a web-based training programme to recognise and prevent gendered and sexualised violence as well as provide training to educational professionals to recognize and encounter children and youth exposed to gender-based violence, abuse and harassment by providing support and guidance to further services, and reporting abuse and violence to authorities. (University of Tampere, 6.6.2012, University of Tampere, projects-website, retrieved on 6.6.2012)

## **4.2. Girl Thing**

The film I have chosen to analyse is called “Girl Thing”. I decided to choose this film for my analysis as it is mentioned specifically in the “for schools”-category of the films. It is also listed



under the topic of “gaze”. In addition, this film portrays young characters and therefore presents an aspect of relatability when imagining a sexuality education context for children and adolescents. The short film runs for 12 minutes and 42 seconds.

The film is described as follows on the *Now You See It*-website:

The teenage friends Ellen (Yasmin Najjar), Sissi (Elsa Marjanen), Nana (Alisa Röyttä), and Eveliina (Anna Kare) are celebrating Nana’s birthday at her house. The girls start dancing in front of the window in their bras and draw the attention of some older boys who are cycling on the road. The girls try to make the boys leave but are also fascinated by the situation. Then the boys ask if they can join the “party”.

The film is described as follows by Inari Niemi, the director and writer of *Girl Thing*:

To me, the central theme in *Girl Thing* is that teenage girls have the right to be equally sexual and lost as boys, without being punished or shamed for it. We adults may think we are only protecting girls when we want them to dress and behave in a way that does not provoke anyone, but making girls responsible for someone else’s behaviour is the same bullshit as the whole “your skirt was too short/you begged for it” rape rhetoric. Girls should not have to suppress an essential part of themselves only because some people fail to understand that a child is a child and no means no. Or because for many of us, a wild, curious, and scantily clad girl is too much for some reason. Or because we hope that girls are safe if we teach them to be scared and ashamed. I do not see predators or victims in *Girl Thing*. I see girls driven by both insecurity and curiosity, and power that is not explicitly on either side of the window. I see an escalating situation where it would be easy for the adults to shame the girls. But it does not happen. Because it’s their party, their bodies, their right to experiment, screw up, and still feel like there is nothing wrong with them. (Niemi, 2019, <https://www.yksittaistapaus.fi/en/film/girl-thing/#girlthing>, retrieved on 24.2.2021).

I will now explain the main storyline of the film (in Finnish which I freely translated to English). I am telling the story to the best of my ability in my own words, but the theories I rely on and the paradigm that guides my research are influential in what I see, and I realise that someone differently informed could have a different interpretation of what is shown on screen. I have tried to remain as objective as possible.

The film:

The film begins with two girls, Ellen and Sissi, walking in the streets of a suburb in Finland in late summer. They discuss things like school and the upcoming “exam-week” (koeviikko), from which we can assume they are about 15 years old. They are going to a friend’s, Nana’s, birthday party. A car honks at them to move to the side, and the girls reluctantly move. The car stops beside them, as the driver is the father of one of Ellen’s old friends. He tells the girls he couldn’t recognise them from their backs. He asks if they’re going to a party, looking at their clothing. They seemingly uncomfortably answer his questioning. He then makes a comment about how the girls have “decided to leave their pants at home”. The girls are both wearing shorts, tops, and jackets. The girls look annoyed at this statement and roll their eyes a bit. The man in the car tells them to “just be careful”. The girls force a smile, and he drives off. The girls shrug the interaction off, and resume their journey, making jokes and being excited for the party.

They arrive to Nana’s house, where Nana is upset about a recent break up. The other girls, (Ellen, Sissi and Eveliina) try to make her feel better, stating that she was way too smart for him anyway. Ellen tells Nana to be happy she didn’t do “anything more” with him, to which Nana answers that “well we did enough.” When Ellen questions this notion, asking what she means with “enough”, Nana tells her that Ellen knows what she means, and it can be assumed she means having sex with him. Sissi tells Ellen that it doesn’t really matter, and that she has to keep going forward. Nana finally agrees, saying “you’re right, who fucking cares”. The party, now diffused of tension, resumes with the girls casually chatting about their current lives, as well as appearing to scroll through social media and dating apps, as the girls show each other pictures of people, stating “isn’t he good looking?”.

They turn up the music and start dancing around in the living room. Nana removes her shirt, leaving her in a bra, and the girls all laugh and offer her encouragement by whooping and eventually removing their own shirts.

They keep dancing, when two boys walking their bikes alongside the street spot them through the window. They excitedly try to get the girls attention by waving and shouting greetings at them. Nana looks outside and tells her friends that they’ve got an audience. The girls, seemingly entertained by the situation, shrug them off at first. The boys, however, keep insisting they should open the window. The girls look questioningly at each other, and Nana mouths “I don’t know” at the others. Eventually they give each other little nods and open the window.

The two boys, Einari and Joel, start a conversation with the girls, asking them if they are having a party, to which the girls reply telling them it's Nana's birthday. The boys ask whether it would be ok if they came for a little visit. The girls tell them that it is a "girl party", and they cannot come. The boys tell them they don't mind, and that they love girl things. When Ellen questions this, asking them "what girl things?" means, she is met with a reply from Einari, telling her "I don't know, all kinds of girl things. For example your things look pretty nice" referencing to her breasts. He goes on to ask Ellen for her name, and once Ellen replies, he tells her that Ellen is his favourite name in the whole world, and that all Ellen-named women are beautiful, her included.

Eveliina goes to turn up the music, the girls continue dancing and the boys appear to leave, only to a moment later as they come into the yard and climb to the apple tree under the window. The girls turn to the window, and the boys open cans of beer (we can then assume they are at least 18 years old). They, again, ask if they could come inside. Sissi coldly tells them they are already trespassing on private property. The boys, in an attempt to persuade the girls to let them in, say that they have beer. Nana, sarcastically and unimpressed, tells them "wow". Einari then singles out Ellen, saying that she at least would like them to come inside. Despite her telling him "I definitely do not," Einari keeps trying to persuade her, telling her that his "heart is breaking when she looks at him like that", eventually causing her to smile. He comments on her smile, saying that she has a beautiful smile and should smile more, and that he could help her with that.

Sissi, having had enough, snaps at the boys, stating that even though they seem clearly very smart, they should leave. Einari then switches his focus on her, asking for her name, which she refuses to tell them, stating that it's none of their business multiple times. Einari tells her this only makes him more interested in her.

Eveliina, seemingly attempting to diffuse the situation, tells the boys that it's actually not about them, but the girls are all lesbians, and that's why they are not interested in letting them join the party. The boys, excited, start encouraging them to kiss each other in order to prove that they are lesbians. Nana tells them their sexuality is not there to satisfy their fantasies, but before she finishes the sentence Ellen has already kissed Eveliina. Nana and Sissi look confused, and the boys start cheering. They tell the girls that this is what equality looks like. The boys tell Nana and Sissi to kiss as well. Nana and Sissi look at each other, shrug and smile,

and then kiss. Ellen and Eveliina also kiss again as the boys watch and cheer them on, commenting on how they wish they had a camera with them.

The girls appear to realise that this is how far they are willing to take the situation pull the curtain in front of the window, telling the boys that they'll now continue just between the girls. The boys keep trying to persuade the girls to let them in, telling them they will only stay for half an hour, and that Ellen at least would like them to come in. Ellen looks at her friends, opens the curtain and tells them ok, and the girls appear nervous. The boys are surprised, but as they are making their way down the tree to come inside, Nana's father, Tapani, appears into the yard, asking "who are sitting in my apple tree?". The boys are taken aback, trying (and failing) to explain why they are in the tree. Tapani asks whether they were invited to come there, and the boys answer "well, not verbally, but take a look at them," gesturing towards the bra-clad girls in the window. Finally, as the boys are making their way out of the yard, Tapani asks how old they are, to which they answer thirteen and fourteen. He looks at the girls in the window, and they look embarrassed as they make their way inside and sit on the couch.

Tapani comes in and asks Nana to turn off the music. He starts questioning the girls about what happened and if they knew the boys. The girls keep their heads towards the floor, apparently feeling shame. Eveliina then explains that they were just dancing, and the boys just came into the yard. Tapani asks the girls if they are ok, and if anything concerning happened during the exchange. The girls all shake their heads. He then asks if there was a reason for only wearing bras, to which Sissi answers that they were wearing only their bras because they wanted to. Tapani accepts this answer, telling them "well, it's your party". The girls all look at each other with relief, and Eveliina relaxedly leans back on the couch, asking if Tapani had anything else to talk about. Nana backs her up, telling her father to leave. Sissi tells him that they'll let him know if they need the opinion of a fifty-year-old man concerning their dressing choices. Tapani smiles and tells the girls that with their energy of questioning the patriarchy the world could be saved. He leaves, telling the girls that he'll be in the basement if they need someone to chase down unwanted visitors from the tree. The girls are left in silence, which is broken by Nana, who puts on a song called "leggings are pants", a song by a feminist songwriter. The girls all look at each other, smiling and relieved.

### 4.3. The discussion material

Each of the films, including *Girl Thing*, are accompanied by a discussion material package produced by Timeout Foundation. It is a company dedicated to provide material for constructive discussions about societal issues, as it believes that “constructive societal discussion is a fundamental requirement for democracy and a functioning society, but it has proved difficult to come by in recent years. Therefore, four major societal funders have established a new foundation aimed at moving the discussion culture in Finland in a more constructive direction, reducing the entrenchment of society and increasing people’s participation in society together with other parties interested in dialogue.” (Timeout Foundation website, <https://www.timeoutdialogue.fi/timeout-foundation/>, retrieved 28.2.2021). The foundation was founded by four societal funders: the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, Sitra (a fund working under the government), the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland. The Timeout foundation works on four main emphasis points during 2019-2021, one of which is collaboration with the educational sector. One of the ways in which this collaboration is visible is through the Now You See It- film collective (Timeout Foundation website, <https://www.timeoutdialogue.fi/timeout-foundation/>, retrieved on 6.6.2021).

The discussion material offers a clearly structured group discussion and instructions for the facilitator. It begins with explaining the rules for a constructive discussion and the principle of a safe discussion, where the objective is to learn more and listen to each other’s experiences and opinions. The script offers two options, a 45-minute or 75-minute-long versions. Then the script moves to the “Introduction”-phase, in which the facilitator introduces the film.

After watching the film, the people involved in the discussion are encouraged to find a pair and discuss the events of the film. Questions pertaining specifically to the movie *Girl Thing* to support this phase are presented as follows: “What happened in the girls’ party? Why did the characters of the film behave as they did? What kinds of thoughts did their behaviour evoke in you? Did some of the persons act or behave wrongly, how?”(Timeout foundation, 2019, p.5). This phase lasts for about 5 minutes.

The next phase, the group discussions, lasts for about 25 minutes, and aims to deepen the conversation, and to really help the group in questions to contemplate on the themes presented in the film. The questions suggested in the discussion material are as follows: “What kind of power was exercised in the film? Who in the film exercised power? Does a choice of

outfit or expressing your sexuality give others the right to persuade or pressure you? How to know if someone is pressuring you or if you are pressuring someone else? When and how is it okay to comment on someone's looks? Did someone in the film act wrongly? Who? How does parents' attitude affect a young person's ways of expressing their sexuality and trying their boundaries?". The 75 minutes version of the material has an added 5 minutes for the participants to affect which themes they would like to discuss further as well as an extra 25 minutes for continued joint discussion (Timeout Foundation, 2019). I decided to use the discussion material in my thesis alongside the film, because think it has the potential to give better insight to what the implications of the film can be within education.

## 5. Methodology, data collection and analysis

The research is informed by Critical Theory paradigm, as the aim of this research is to analyse the depiction of gendered and sexualised violence and the possible implications of a film project for social change specifically concerning gendered and sexualised violence. Critical paradigm assumes that social science can never be truly value-free and should be conducted with the express goal of social change in mind, and emphasises power, inequality and, as one would assume, social change (Callaghan, 2016). I understand that my theoretical framework as well as previous knowledge, my own values and beliefs personal opinions will, to some extent despite attempts to remain objective, guide my analysis. However, as the objective of the project from which the data has been retrieved from has been stated to be to challenge the current perception of sexualised and gendered violence and evoke social change, it is in the best interest of this research to have Critical Theory paradigm as the philosophical framework.

The aim of my research is to analyse in what ways is sexualised and gendered violence portrayed in the short film *Girl Thing* and reflect on how this portrayal challenges the common or “traditional” perception of such violence. I will also analyse the suitability of the film and the accompanying discussion material for educational contexts, and if and how well they align with the needs of the Finnish education system, and if they are in alignment with the Finnish national core curriculum. For this analysis to be comprehensive, I have decided to combine elements from qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. The data used in my thesis has been sourced in alignment with document analysis. In document analysis the data is derived from existing documents as opposed to elicited data like interview transcripts, and can be in the form of text, video, audio, maps and photographs. As according to Prior (2008) and Bowen (2008), document analysis can be conducted by using qualitative content analysis can also involve both qualitative and quantitative content and discourse analysis (as cited in Saumure and Given, 2008, p.927), it aligns well with the implications of my research. I have chosen a data-driven approach, as I have no predetermined categories, nor do I intend to test a previous theory in my research. This means that categories and units of analysis arise, in an inductive way from the material (the film as well as the discussion material), itself during the process of analysis instead of leaning on a specific theory (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). I will more closely appraise the way I conducted my analysis in chapter 5.4. I will now introduce Film analysis, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and explain how they are used in this thesis.

## 5.1. Film analysis

As our society becomes increasingly mediatized, understanding films as a media of communication is becoming more and more important. Films often, if not always, reflect the society it was produced in, portraying the ways in which we interact and exist within those societies. This leads to movies being a part of discursive and social practices, reflecting the conditions and structures of society and of individual life (Mikos, 2014). Pradeep (2017) seconds this notion by stating that visual communication, to which category films fall under, play a part in moulding and upkeeping ideologies of the society. In addition, the educational potential of films is also acknowledged, as it is argued that films have the ability to create, maintain and justify social practices (Pradeep, 2017). As films reflect on the society we exist in day to day, we often seek to find those reflections and relate them to our existence. As Mikos (2014) claims, that in addition to people shaping their own identities through the films they watch, films and the possible following discussions also shape their social relations (p.413). This leads me to believe that analysing the content of short films aiming to shine light and discuss gendered violence in the context of sexuality education can be fruitful and provide insight in the way in which sexuality education is taught.

Movies tend to be more complex targets of analysis as opposed to traditional texts, audio-visual stimuli combined with the film text, which means they can be the object of multiple types of analysis. According to Mikos (2014), a filmic structure can be liable to one of three ways of investigation: “first as regards the coherence of a film in terms of content and narrative; second as regards the creative means directed for viewers’ attention and perception; and third as regards the communicative process and its contexts, because the meaning of a film does not arise until viewers take notice of it.” He goes on to explain how the ‘meaningfulness’ of a film is produced once the analysis is made and does not exist as a factual entity prior to the analysis. The viewer, and the way the viewer is constructed by the film itself is one of the main tasks of film analysis (Mikos, 2014, p.413). Understanding these different aspects of films and the possible implications they might have on the viewer is important in using movies as educational material, as it might be less straightforward to offer clear, one-dimensional narratives. Through providing the discussion material, the films place clear objectives of what is hoped to be evoked in the viewer while watching the films, which is reflection, challenging current discourses and creating better understanding of sexualised and gendered violence. As argued by Pradeep (2017), both the production and reception of the text are fused and framed by ideological concerns. If the ideological concerns between the viewers and producers are in too much in conflict,



the reception of the subject matter can be something different from the intentioned one. It is important that the films have been produced with the viewer in mind, and in this thesis I take this aspect into account when analysing the suitability of the films as educational material.

Films can be analysed guided by several cognitive purposes: content and representation, narration and dramaturgy, characters and actors, aesthetics and configuration, and contexts. The choice of which point of view is taken depends on the context in which the analysis is conducted (Pradeep, 2017). The cognitive purpose that guides my analysis are content, representation and contexts, as I aim to analyse *how* gendered and sexualised violence is portrayed. To achieve the objectives of this thesis, analysing whose story is being represented is beneficial. I aim to analyse the film in an educational context, and this purpose will also affect the analysis. Determining a main cognitive purpose is heavily linked to the approach from which the analysis is being made, for example, according to Barber (2016), when examining texts with a certain textual narrative, as I am doing with my thesis in the context of sexuality education about sexualised and gendered violence, it might be beneficial to choose one using gender theory, queer theory or feminist readings can be beneficial (pp.91). In this case, the textual narrative is one of power imbalance and the exercise of gendered and sexualised power.

Even though I will not be analysing aesthetic or configurational aspects of the movie, it is worthy to note that according to Mikos (2014), representation in a film is also affected by these factors, because the way in which the story is told as well as the context in which it is told can place the viewer in a very specific position in relation to the film and the instances and characters it represents. Hence, the aesthetics and artistic composition of the film together with the cognitive purpose of the research will contribute to the analysis of representation of the film, ultimately affecting the analysis of the discourse structure within the society (Mikos, 2014, p.422).

In this section I have explored the different aspects of film analysis, and in what ways it can be framed and conducted. In the next sections, I will be explaining in more detail how I have conducted my study, and what are the objects of interest. As stated before, film analysis can be conducted through many forms of analysis. In my research, I will be including aspects of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis which I will be introducing in the following sections.

## 5.2. Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis aims to use similar methods of categorizing qualitative textual data into conceptual categories to identify patterns and relationships between variables but in addition attempts to answer questions of “why” (Julien, 2008, p. 121). A qualitative content analysis is typically inductive and interpretive. This means that the data is first examined closely and in great detail, after which less obvious, contextual content is attempted to be uncovered (Julien, 2008). In my analysis, the aim is to both analyse the way sexualised and gendered violence is depicted, and also contemplate *why* the film depicts the incident the way it does, and the liberation attempted to achieve through the film and discussion material.

Content analysis can be conducted on any textual data, but can also be applied to visual data, such as photographs of moving images. According to Banks (2007, as cited by Pennington, 2016) when analysing the content of a film, it is possible to code for elements unique to moving images, including dialogue, editing, or music. The way this can be seen in my research is that I have decided to include elements besides discourse, such as analysing the speechless communication between the characters, as I feel like a lot of the looks that the girls share with each other and the feelings they express are important to the analysis.

To conduct the qualitative content analysis of film in my research, I am guided by Pennington (2016) and chose the desired data to use; video clip(s) of interest. As such, I made myself familiar with the *Now You See It*- film and immersed myself in the media as well as the discussion revolving around it. It was then easier to determine a suitable short film that pertains to my research focus and research question. I selected the film *Girl Thing*. I selected this specific film due to the aspect of relatability for young students as well as the categorisation of this film specifically for schools, as I feel as though they best serve the objective of my research, which is to analyse the portrayal of sexualised and gendered violence in the film and reflect on the suitability of the film and the accompanying discussion material for educational settings. As I was repeatedly watching the film, I noticed certain themes, such as parental worry and coercion and consent, brought up by the behaviour and dialogue of the characters. Then of all the different themes I could identify, some more interesting themes were chosen as a focus to make a selection and narrow down my focus on the data that pertains to those specifically chosen themes. For example, the theme of parental worry is displayed by two different parental figures, both of whom express their worry very differently. This led me to analyse the implications that those interactions have on the characters, and furthermore analyse what the film

wanted to evoke in the viewer; reflection about how the reaction and worry of the parental figures in the film affect the expression of sexuality in young girls and what do they tell about the societal contexts of such behaviour: *why* do the filmmakers of the film think this is an important question to raise? I also used the discussion material as my aid in the coding process, as many of the topics can be seen in the questions the discussion material has chosen to raise.

In typical film analysis fashion, I pay special attention to the focus of the camera, and the order in which things happen in the clips which are important for coding and interpretation (Mikos, 2014). It must be taken into account that the cultural context in which the film collective has been produced, the context in which I am analysing it as well as the cultural objectives and implications of the film collective will play a part in the coding process, research and analysis. As the film collective was created and produced as a reaction to and in support of the rise of the #metoo-movement and the subsequent social discussions concerning sexual harassment (and furthermore sexualised and gendered violence), this context has guided and affected the process of coding as well as my analysis. This is visible for example in the theoretical framework I decided to have as the context for my research, and is in alignment with the context that the *Now You See It-* film collective has claimed for itself.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) also have provided an outline of QCA. This outline includes steps similar to that of Pennington (2016). In my research, I have mostly used the outline of Pennington (2016) as my guide, but have also been informed by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018). In subsection 5.4. Analysis, I will detail how I conducted my research based on this working model, and how I combined the different aspects of film analysis in my research.

### **5.3. (Critical) Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis focuses more on what is being said about a topic as well as how the phenomenon in question is being discussed in a textual form. According to Rose (2012, as cited by Pardeep, 2017), discourse refers to group of statements that structures the way a thing is thought about, and the way in which that thinking influences the way we act in relation to that thing. Hence, discourses actively shape how the world is understood and how phenomena exist in it (pp.7). According to Pennington (2016), discourse analysis is particularly concerned with the construction of meaning through language used in social interactions (Pennington, 2016). Pardeep (2017) offers some examples of discourses that represent some of the ways of thinking about the world through examining the discourses we are exposed to in school: discourses of

science, social and cultural studies, math and sports, and also of health and sexuality. Discourse analysis data can be derived from any representation of language, such as pictures or films (Taylor, 2013, p.3). Pennington (2016) states that discourse analysis can use written, spoken, or signed language as its data and object of analysis, but the emphasis is on larger units of analysis such as conversations and the interrelationships between language and society. According to Pradeep (2017), the film form is a very powerful form of visual media, as it manipulates the visual, spatial, and temporal, and therefore possesses the ability to create an entire world for the audience through visual discourse.

Discourses can be researched from many aspects. These include the analysis of language data as evidence of social phenomena, theorizing language as communication, practice or selective constructions derived from accrued social meanings (Taylor, 2013, p.4). Discourse analysis is quite a broad concept, and Taylor (2013), continues by stating that discourse analysis does not refer to a single approach or method, and its varied forms cannot be distinguished without an understanding of their premises (p.1). Discourse analysis aims to understand how language reflects the cultural context of the analysed data and aims to find language evidence of aspects of society and social life (Taylor, 2013, p.7). As the discourses surrounding sexualised and gendered violence are extremely important to how these issues are understood as a collective, completely disregarding the aspect of discourse in my research would feel foolish. As the objective of the film collective is one of societal change, it can be assumed the film collective aims to affect the discourse surrounding sexualised and gendered violence, which is why including discourse analysis in my research is necessary. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a more specific type of qualitative discourse analysis that focuses more closely on the investigation of the hidden dimensions of ideology and power relations existing in social practices and their reflection in narrative texts (Pradeep, 2017). Fairclough (2010) acknowledges the importance of language and the interconnectedness of it into our surrounding society and its systems and structures as well as to the individual. This being said, the primary focus is neither on the collective nor the individual, but due to the relational nature of CDA, the focus is on relations between and within and even inside relationships (Fairclough, 2010).

Deductible through its name, CDA aims to critically analyse the relationship between language and society. Furthermore, CDA studies the way ideology, identity and inequality are enacted through texts produced in accordance to the social and political contexts in which they are produced in (Dijk, 2001, as cited by Pradeep, 2017). Through discourses surrounding sexualised and gendered violence that bleed into the way we speak and discuss issues related

to it we create structures that have power imbalances and reward power to people who fit certain narrow categories. To analyse the emancipatory potential of the short film *Girl Thing*, it is important to also examine how the film portrays, and therefore either perpetuates or deconstructs those discourses.

When it comes to the process of analysing discourse data, discourse analysis is not very systematic due to its interpretive nature. Taylor (2013) describes the process as exploratory and iterative. In practice this means examining the entire data set repeatedly, comparing earlier observations, noticing new points of interest, and returning to them time after time (p.69). Discourse analysis is often data driven, which means that points of interest arise from the data and process of analysis itself, rather than being confined to a certain theoretical or philosophical ideology (Jokinen et al, 2017). This aligns with the model of qualitative content analysis that I presented in the previous section.

#### **5.4. Analysis**

I began my data collection by choosing the film I wanted to analyse and watching it through repeatedly. After watching the film through multiple times and becoming familiar with it, I transcribed the short film to the best of my ability, translating it from Finnish to English. I tried to the best of my ability to translate in a way that does not change the meaning of the dialogue. In my analysis, I used the steps of QCA by Pennington (2016) that I introduced earlier. The four themes have arisen through qualitative content analysis through the steps I have discussed before. I included critical discourse analysis when discussing the societal implications of the depictions of different themes in the films; what aspects have affected the way that the themes are portrayed, and what is the aim of having these portrayals in the film. In other words, how do they take part in discourses of the discussed themes and in the context of the film and the accompanying discussion material, how do they reinforce or dismantle said discourse. The codes, both inductively and deductively arisen, used in the analysis stemmed from CDA.

The transcription included the most important dialogue that was integral to the story or in some other way provided information about the relationships of the characters. As I wanted to include CDA in my research, this step included almost the entire dialogue and everything that was said between the characters. The transcription also included other observations I felt were important to include my research, such as looks or other visible and clear nonverbal

communication exchanged between the characters. I then, according to my theoretical framework and the objectives of the *Now You See It-* film collective, and through examining the transcript and the discussion material, I could see various themes depicted in the movie, such as agency, consent and parental worry. I then settled on what I think are the most important themes of the film, and what seemed like the themes the film wanted to bring to the forefront. In line with my methodology, some themes arose from the data itself, such as exercise of power and parental worry. Some deductive themes were present in the pre-analysis due to the exploration of the data through the lens of my theoretical framework, as well as what literature has said about the contents of sexuality education, such as consent.

The final four themes that this research will focus on are parental worry, coercion and consent, exercise of power (and power imbalance), and agency. The four themes have arisen through qualitative content analysis through the steps I have discussed before. I included critical discourse analysis when discussing the societal implications of the depictions of different themes in the films; what aspects have affected the way that the themes are portrayed, and what is the aim of having these portrayals in the film. In other words, how do they take part in discourses of the discussed themes and in the context of the film and the accompanying discussion material, how do they reinforce or dismantle said discourse. These themes are visible in the film and are connected to the well-being of young people and their expression and exploration of sexuality. According to Rajhvajn Bulat et al (2016), specifically indirect parental communication about sexuality is a significant positive predictor of sexual behaviour and sexuality-related thoughts and emotions, which makes this portrayal and the analysis of it a worthwhile point of interest. Consent and coercion are heavily tied together, and according to Jozkovski et al (2019), even though most sexual assault prevention programs depict consent as an explicit statement, “no means no”, the media often depicts consent as something that is implicitly given or declined. Power imbalance can refer to many intersections of identity that place individuals in an interaction to different levels of agency, like age, race, one’s position in a workplace or gender (Fahs and McClelland, 2016). Agency, according to Fahs and McClelland (2016) and in the context of sexuality education for sexualised and gendered violence, is the combination of the perception of having power and choice over one’s sexual activities and refusals and the adaptations to sexual norms. This definition holds space for critique of the ways that individuals are expected to be “empowered” by certain behaviours that assume that all people can be equally “agentic”. This demonstrates how power relations and the different intersections of identity are intertwined and effect one another.

After deciding on the themes, I then coded the transcript of the film using different colours to highlight specific moments in the film that correlated to specific themes that I decided to analyse. In alignment with QCA and the model presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), I was strict with my points of interest and tried to find very specific moments that make the themes and their exploration in the film visible and only focused on those. This is why the coded transcript at some points includes a lot of “blank parts”, meaning that I did not see those parts as to directly or strongly tied to any of the specific themes I had chosen for my thesis.

The transcription includes narration of what is visible on the screen as well as direct quotes of the dialogue. I decided to transcribe this way, because as the data is in a visual form, I did not feel like a transcription of just the dialogue would be enough, as the characters also interact through expressions and looks. The film also includes plot progression through other methods besides dialogue, and I felt this was important to include in my transcription. In the context of sexualised and gendered violence, understanding nuance within interactions is important, and this nuance can be seen in what is being said, how it is being said, and what is left unsaid. It is therefore important to have small details and notes in the transcription, as there needs to be a justification to my belief of what is being left unsaid and how can I deduce that.

Here is an example of my transcription, and coding of 2 themes (10:15-11:40):

Tapani comes in and asks Nana to turn off the music. He starts questioning the girls about what happened and if they knew the boys. The girls keep their heads towards the floor, apparently feeling shame. Eveliina then explains that they were just dancing, and the boys just came into the yard. Tapani asks the girls if they are ok, and if anything concerning happened during the exchange. The girls all shake their heads. He then asks if there was a reason for only wearing bras, to which Sissi answers that they were wearing only their bras because they wanted to. Tapani accepts this answer, telling them “well, it’s your party.” The girls all look at each other with relief, and Eveliina relaxedly leans back on the couch, asking if Tapani had anything else to talk about.

Green indicates instances of parental worry and the results of expressing worry (an inductive theme that arose from the material itself), and the colour yellow indicates agency (also an inductive theme).

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018), the researcher has to make a firm decision on what material will be included in the research. Especially in content driven analysis, it may be challenging for the researcher to not be distracted by extraneous variables that arise from the analysis. However, for the trustworthiness of the research, the researchers must try to remain as consistent as possible (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). For example, I decided not to include any artistic analysis and will not be analysing aspects such as camera angles or the performance of the actors but will focus my analysis on the behaviour and dialogue of the characters. I understand that artistic choices can be a part of the social significance of the film, but for the sake of this research, excluding those aspects will keep my analysis concise and allow me to bring forth and emphasize the aspects I find most important.

Once I had coded the transcript with the different points of interest, I started to build my interpretation. The aim was to see how sexualised and gendered violence was portrayed in the film, and in what ways did the characters' actions and dialogue express that portrayal, and further the implications of the portrayal; what discourses and societal values enable certain behaviour. I also wanted to analyse *why* this behaviour is portrayed in the film or, in other words, analyse the educational value and the potential for societal change. I systematically went over the coded material to find instances that best illustrate the selected themes, and began to interpret each theme individually. This means that one theme at a time, I went over all coded parts for that specific theme, and built my interpretation. After that, I further interpreted the material in light of my theoretical framework and literature review to find societal connections and determine in what ways the film attempts to reach its objectives of societal change. I examined what is being said and shown, and how the characters' behaviour either reinforced or dismantled societal discourses surrounding the themes (parental worry, coercion and consent, power imbalance and agency), as well as the implication of how these themes are portrayed. In this context, having characters reinforce harmful discourses is to shine a light on underlying societal issues and to challenge existing relations, and when combined with an educational context and the discussion material, the portrayal of the discourse becomes one that challenges the discourse. I combined these different aspects of analysis, and present them into the Findings chapter of this thesis.

Then, according to educational guidelines, discussion material provided alongside the films and my theoretical framework, I attempted to interpret the suitability, justifiability, and meaningfulness of the film in the context of sexuality education about the exercise of gendered and sexualised power, as well as gendered and sexualised violence (against women).



## 6. Findings and interpretations

The film has many potential implications that can be utilised in the context of sexuality education. Even though the four themes have some overlap, I have decided to present my findings of them separately, as they all bring a slightly varying point of view to the material.

Under is a table of the selected themes that have been decided on based on QCA and examples of the codes that correlate to each theme. The codes stem from CDA as well as QCA. The table also includes reflection on the societal implications as well as the aims of the material relating to each theme; why is the theme portrayed the way that it is? The aim of each theme is reflected upon in the context in which the film is produced as well as the discussion material (e.g. the aim is to challenge and dismantle certain discourses even though the characters reinforce them). The codes arose both inductively from the material (e.g. “pants at home” and “not verbally, but look at them!”) and and deductively (e.g. looks of support the girls exchange when making decisions) as I immersed myself to the material. I will then offer a deeper look into each theme individually and reflect on it in the context of my background and theoretical framework.

4 Selected themes stemming from QCA	Inductive and deductive codes stemming from CDA and QCA	Societal implications	Aims
Parental worry	“So you decided to leave your pants at home?”  "Just be careful."	Potential harm caused by girls clothing, placing responsibility on girls for the violence they face	Critique and challenge the victim-blaming discourses surrounding sexualised and gendered violence.
	Tapani and the boys; intervening and asking for their age, questioning their invitation  Tapani and the girls; concern, “It’s your party.”	De-escalating the situation, offering agency back to the girls (through contending if the boys were invited)  Offering help without judgement or blame	Demonstrate the positive effect of a parental figure on the expression of sexuality in young people (specifically girls).

Coercion and consent	Boys persuasion.  “Not verbally, but look at them”	Denial purposefully misunderstood as flirtation.  Assuming that consent is a matter of assumption and can be given based on e.g. clothing.	Demonstrate the complexities of consent and reflect on whether consent can be perceived as freely given if coercion has been present.
	Girls agreeing/disagreeing	Exploration of one’s sexuality and curiosity versus being pressured  Self-objectification as a form of empowerment/girls’ expression of sexuality being objectified for male gratification	Reflect on the limit of everyone being a consenting, engaging participant versus being pressured to do activities one does not want to partake in. Reflection on own actions and how to notice if you are pressuring someone.
Exercise of power (power imbalance)	First father on the way to the party	Entitlement to comment on others outfit choices based on age, parental status and gender	Understand different structures and aspects of identity that affect the power dynamics within interactions, and how they can be differently implemented.
	Boys (Einari and Joel)  Offering alcohol	Power imbalance caused by age (and the freedom it provides; using alcohol as an incentive)	
	Tapani (Nana’s father)	Parental status enables Tapani to exercise power over the girls	
Agency	Girls’ agency in talk  “Our sexuality isn’t here to fulfil your lesbian fantasy.”  “We were wearing bras because we wanted to.”	How girls talk about relationships and reflect on their own power in them, and how they verbalise their own experience and agency	Reflecting on the positions of girls in relationships and challenging the discourse of girls as submissive or passive participants.
	Girls’ agency in action; removing clothes, dancing	Exploring sexuality in a safe, encouraging environment, self-objectification as a form of empowerment	Challenging the notion that girls can express their sexualities outside of the male gaze and

	Girls' agency in decision making; seeking support from each other, making decisions together	Deciding what to wear/to remove clothing, deciding to engage with the boys, performativity	just for themselves, while still acknowledging that societal structures and norms affect this expression and exploration.
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### 6.1. Parental worry

The theme of parental worry is present in two distinct instances throughout the film. The first happens at (00:45), when the father of the girls' friend comments on their outfits, stating that they have "decided to leave their pants at home", and following this statement up with telling them to "just be careful". The second instance can be seen when Nana's father interferes with the interaction between the girls and the boys in the tree, and the consequent conversation he has with the girls, making sure they are ok. The discussion material also prompts the viewer to reflect on the affect that the parents' actions have on the behaviour and attitude towards their own expression of sexuality, by asking: "How does parents' attitude affect a young person's ways of expressing their sexuality and trying their boundaries?" (Timeout Dialogue, 2019, p.6)

In the first interaction, worry for the girls' safety is expressed as the father of the girls' classmate tells them to "be careful". However, this notion comes only after commenting on the girls' choice of outfit, which implies that if something bad was to happen to them, it could be due to what they are wearing. Even the fact that there is an assumption that something bad might happen to them because of what they are wearing means that there is an understanding that girls are at risk of violence, but rather than holding perpetrators accountable, the man places responsibility on the girls and urges them to be careful. Using this kind of language when expressing concern places responsibility on the girls and is a part of the common discourse surrounding sexualised and gendered violence that holds women accountable for the violence inflicted upon them and makes it difficult to seek justice, and can be seen as a portrayal of how rape culture operates in the values and attitudes of the Finnish western society (Neville-Shepard, 2019; Kingston, 2018). The girls shrug off the interaction, physically shrugging their shoulders and looking at each other, rolling their eyes, and through this lack of a reaction it can be assumed that this sort of behaviour is something that the characters are used to. Therefore,

it can be interpreted that this sort of behaviour has been engraved in the characters' lives, emphasising the familiarity and the structural commonality of this occurrence (e.g. Kingston, 2018; Martin, 2021; Morgan and Simons, 2018).

However, through the second interaction with a parent, the film depicts how concern expressed without guilting or placing blame on the girls helps de-escalate the situation. When questioned about their choice of clothing (only wearing bras) Eveliina answers that "we were wearing bras because we wanted to". The girls appear very uncomfortable in the situation, looking down, which can be interpreted to mean that they are expecting to be vilified for their behaviour, perhaps receive some sort of punishment or at least be scolded for their behaviour. However, instead of judgement or blame, Tapani the father calmly tells them it is their party, giving his acceptance to the girls to explore their sexualities, and offering them a safe space to do so in the future as well, despite not necessarily understanding the situation himself. He does not shame the girls, or question their decision making, but instead offers support, even if he does not completely understand the girls' behaviour. He also later offers to help if the girls need to shoo away someone else from the yard, which further solidifies the parent providing a safe environment, where exploration is encouraged and support is offered.

Young people and adolescents, like the characters in this film, often still wish for parental guidance and help within their own exploration of their sexualities (Rajhvajn Bulat et al, 2016). However, the way in which concern and guidance is presented can either be beneficial or damage the agency, especially young girls feel towards their sexuality. Indirect communication depicted in *Girl Thing* when Tapani first offers support and concern, and later acceptance and encouragement. The girls noticeably relax and their mood shifts as they receive a positive and encouraging reaction from Tapani. Through these scenes of interaction with parents, the film offers two very contrasting instances that can, with the correct discussion material and facilitating, lead to fruitful conversations about responsibility, shame related to expressing one's sexuality, and agency, especially of young women, in addition to the effect that the reaction of parents can have on their children. This scene demonstrates the significance of both indirect and direct parental communication and participation, and show the positive outcomes of it (Rajhvajn Bulat et al (2016).

## 6.2. Coercion and consent

The main conflict of the film is the one where it depicts an instance, where the boys in the tree put a lot of pressure on the girls to let them in and join the party. They seem to feel entitled to be included in the exploration and expression of the girls' sexuality by coming into the yard, later to the tree, and later pressuring them to kiss in front of them, letting the viewer presume that the sexuality of the girls exists to cater to their sexual desires (Wright et al, 2016).

This theme is also brought up in the discussion material through questions like "Does a choice of outfit or expressing your sexuality give others the right to persuade or pressure you?" and "How to know if someone is pressuring you or if you are pressuring someone else?". These questions raise important aspects of coercion and, subsequently, consent. When the girls finally agree to let the boys come inside, after numerous attempts of persuading the girls by offering them alcohol, telling them they will set a timer for their stay and all in all taking advantage of the girls' curiosity and willingness to explore and express their sexuality, can it really be considered as to be freely giving consent, especially since the girls throughout the film told them no and told them to leave the yard multiple times? The girls arguably look nervous and not at all confident in their decision to finally let them come inside, which is then halted by Nana's father, Tapani.

The question of consent and the misinterpretation of women's sexuality existing to cater to men is also depicted in the film when Tapani questions whether the boys were invited to the tree, to which the boys answer by saying "not verbally, but look at them", referencing to the girls' clothing. The way the boys justify their behaviour uphold and reinforce a discourse about sexualised and gendered violence and women's sexuality in which the expression of girls' and women's sexuality is seen through the male gaze (e.g. Wright et al, 2016). This supports the interpretation that the sexuality of girls and women is primarily something to be observed and consumed by men, and further cater to men's sexuality (e.g. Neville-Shepard, 2019; Fahs, and McClelland, 2016). The boys also place responsibility of the interaction on the girls and their choice of clothing by implying that an invitation to the yard was extended to them, just not verbally. This aligns with an earlier scene in the film with the girls' friend's father, feeding into the narrative of women being held accountable for sexual and gendered violence inflicted upon them (Morgan and Simons, 2018; Lombard, 2018). This also implies that consent is something that does not have to be explicitly given verbally but can be dependant on the way behaviour is interpreted by one of the participants of a given interaction (Jozkovski et al, 2019). As

this message is continuously repeated in mainstream media, the definition of consent can remain uncertain or unclear to some. The film contests this mainstream definition of consent, and offers tools to reflect on what giving and receiving consent actually looks like, portraying an instance with both explicit refusal cues, such as the girls telling the boys to leave the yard and saying no repeatedly, as well as implicit refusal cues, such as exchanging worried looks, hesitating and displaying discomfort in their body language (Neville-Shepard, 2019).

The discussion material also raises the question of “How to know if someone is pressuring you or if you are pressuring someone else?”, which is an important question to ask in the context of sexuality education, and is in alignment with the curriculum for grades 3-6, that emphasise.s the self-reflection of one’s values and reflection on interaction (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 241). To have fundamental transformation in the way in which we view these situations, we must be ready to reflect on and change our own behaviour, not just recognize existing patterns. Teaching possible perpetrators to recognize their behaviour and regulate it instead of teaching the (possible) victims of such behaviour to avoid dangerous situations is necessary to change the way in which we view gendered and sexualised violence against women (Wright et al, 2016; Neville-Shepard, 2019). This question also opens up the conversation to notice how anyone can subconsciously and while not realising it be repeating these types of behavioural pattern and offer a broader understanding of who the perpetrators of this type of exercise of power are, and how our view of such a perpetrator is very narrow and often wrong (e.g. Lehtonen, 2003; Rollston et al, 2020). The discussion material and the subsequent discussions are an important part of understanding the power dynamics of the situation depicted in the film, and hence, the sexual agency of the girls. Considering the commonplace understanding of sexualised and gendered violence and the responsibility that is often placed on women, it would be easy to question the behaviour of the girls, asking why they opened the window or allowed them to come in if they did not want them to, as could be assumed through their body language and facial expressions (Jääskeläinen et al, 2015; Neville-Shepard, 2019). The discussion material proves to be an important tool to allow an opportunity to raise these questions, and raise concerns relating to consent and coercion; is it really an invitation in if it has already been declined multiple times but after a period of persuasion and pressure, hence establishing power over the girls, is finally accepted, and given?

### 6.3. Exercise of power (power imbalance)

The exercise of power, and especially the exercise of power over women is an important theme in the *Now You See It*-collective. The discussion material encourages the viewers to contemplate who is exercising power, and what kind of power is exercised in the film (Timeout Foundation, 2019, p.6). This is important, because understanding the implications of power and the different dimensions that affect the power balance of a situation, especially an interaction that is influenced by the expression or exploration of sexuality is a large factor in the recognition of and the ability to navigate instances of gendered and sexualised violence.

Power imbalance first appears early in the film is the father of Ellen's friend comments on Ellen's and Sissi's outfits, portraying his remark as worry. The father holds more power in the situation due to his age and the parental status, as the relationships between parents and children (even though in this case the girls are not his children) is hierarchical, and societal values uphold the standard of respect towards people who are older (Fahs, and McClelland, 2016). At the party, the girls display agency, exercising power over their own sexuality. This can be seen through the conversation that the girls have regarding Nana's recent break-up, but that will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter of this thesis. It should be noted, however, that power in this instance is exercised together and not over anything or anyone; more so the girls find empowerment within themselves and their friendship and sisterhood through the reflection of Nana's break-up, taking part in an empowering discourse about group membership (Meyer, 2019).

The fact that the boys interpret the act of dancing and having fun with one's friends as an invitation, and feel the need to insert themselves into the situation can be interpreted as the reflection of male entitlement and the idea that women's and girls' sexualities are perceived to cater to the needs and desires of men (e.g. Morgan and Simons, 2018; Lombard, 2018; Fahs and McClelland, 2016). There are multiple instances in the film in which the boys exercise and assume power over the girls and their sexuality. Firstly, their age already places them in a position of power over the girls. They attempt to have the girls let them inside by offering them alcohol (beer), taking advantage of that age difference in order to persuade the girls into situation they are visibly uncomfortable with. The fact that boys know about this power imbalance becomes apparent when Tapani asks them for their age: they tell him they are thirteen and fourteen. Through this answer it is possible to draw the conclusion that they know that the girls are younger than them, because it is logical to assume they would tell Tapani they

are around the same age as the girls. Furthermore, this behaviour shows that the boys understand that the behaviour they were expressing is questionable, because otherwise they would have no fear of repercussions, and further, no reason to lie. The fact that the boys do not leave the yard after the girls asking them to do so multiple times, but rather treat it as flirtation, despite Sissi telling them they are trespassing on private property depicts how the boys understand and utilise the power they hold over the girls (e.g. Fahs and McClelland, 2016). Only once an older man, Tapani, asks them to leave do they do so. Tapani also has an opportunity to exercise power over the girls, as there is also a power imbalance between the girls and him due to his parental status, age difference and the fact that he owns the house in which the interaction takes place. However, he does not exploit that power with the girls, but rather gives a good example of utilising that power for the liberation of young women by offering an accepting and understanding reaction (Rajhvain et al, 2016) .

The film also comments about societal discourses through some of the interactions. For example, Einari (one of the boys) tells Ellen that she should “smile more”, which directly upholds a discourse of womanhood based to a societal perception and expectation of girls and women in which they should present happy, nonconfrontational and submissive (e.g. Ince, 2017). Einari also tells Sissi that her cold reaction to him asking her name only makes her more interesting to him reinforces an idea in which women dismissing men’s advances is seen as a part of flirtation instead of being a rejection, perpetuating an idea of “the chase” and ultimately encouraging coercive behaviour (e.g. Morgan and Simons, 2018). These seemingly contradictory discourses, however, are based in men exercising power over women, making the assumption that however women behave is for the purpose of catering to the interest and desires of men, determining what ways are “acceptable” for women to behave (Neville-Shepard, 2019).

#### **6.4. Agency**

Closely related to the exercise of power, it is beneficial to explore the agency of the girls in *Girl Thing*. The film does not aim to, nor does it, depict girls as the passive victim of the exercise of power, but explores these themes from a more nuanced point of view. The film showcases the power and importance of agency in situations that deal with expressing and exploring one’s sexuality and in which power is exercised. The major element that shifts the mood and determines whether the situation is carefree, comfortable, and safe, as opposed to uncomfortable and unsure, and possibly unsafe is, at its core, agency of the main characters.



At the party, the girls claim agency of their own sexualities when they are discussing Nana's recent break up. Nana stating that she had had "enough" with her former boyfriend and seeming upset and regretful about it momentarily displays the internalised abstinence discourse, in which women themselves place value to themselves in relation of how many people they have had sexual encounters with (Kelly, 2016, pp.128). However, as it is met with compassion with Sissi telling her it does not matter, agency is claimed and the narrative flipped, as the young girl characters are shown not placing major significance to the idea of virginity, but instead display curiosity through exploring dating apps and talking about possible new crushes. This is important, because in media, especially American media (but as it is highly consumed in other western countries, including Finland, the implications of it should not go unnoticed), the discourse surrounding women's sexualities still very often reinforces the idea of virginity as a measure of purity and patriarchal family values (Kelly, 2016, pp. 130).

The girls have agency when they dance in the window in their bras; it is clear and visible that what they are doing is motivated by their own desires and wants. The act of removing their shirts is met with laughter and encouragement. It might be beneficial to reflect on what makes the situation sexual by nature. Female nudity is sexualised and capitalised heavily in the media and our society (e.g. Wright et al, 2016), but that does not mean the girls themselves perceive the situation in which they remove their shirts sexual by nature. This scene also creates an opportunity to examine the expression of sexuality in a broader scale; individuals can express their sexuality and appreciate themselves as sexual beings without the situation itself being sexual in nature (e.g. Wright et al, 2016). In addition, as noted by Ramsey and Horan (2018), the desire for attention and the consequent self-objectification can also be associated with sexual empowerment. However, the mood shifts when the girls notice the boys in the yard, and this can be deducted through their body language and expressions. They look at each other, shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulder, with Nana mouthing "I don't know" (3:35). The girls seek support from each other, which demonstrates the importance of group membership and the way they affect our individual decision making and through exchanged looks and approving nods they collectively together decide to engage in the interaction (Meyer, 2019).

As the film is set in a society in which women are often objectified, it is not an impossible idea that the girls would have internalised these messages and are now finding ways to find agency within those structures (e.g. Ollis, 2016). Having grown up in a society that teaches young women that their greatest value lie in their bodies, specifically when relating to

the sexual gratification of men, as the girls are coming to terms with their own sexuality, the girls seem to understand that they hold something desired by the boys, as they keep engaging in the interaction with them (Ramsey and Horan, 2018). As Eveliina turns up the music, the girls ignore the boys and continue dancing. They look outside to see the reaction of the boys, which can be interpreted as being aware of their own power in the situation and understanding the power of their own sexuality. They even look a little disappointed when the boys appear to leave. It can even be argued that some of their behaviour is motivated by self-objectification to attract the attention of the boys. However, they should not be vilified for craving this attention. This means that the girls are actively working within the objectifying structures, yet not being stripped from their agency, but instead using the structures in their advantage (Ramsey and Horan, 2018).

At points, the girls seem to even compete for the attention of the boys, for example when one of the boys (Einari) switches his focus from Ellen to Sissi, Ellen's expressions can be interpreted as jealousy. According to Sunnari (2003), comparison is often used as a tool to reinforce heteronormativity. Then after this interaction and pressure from the boys, Ellen is the first one to kiss Eveliina, perhaps as an attempt to shift the focus back to herself through catering to the desires of the boys. This goes to show how societal structures and expectations manifest in the behaviour of individuals; even though the girls are friends, and repeatedly tell the boys they are not interested, they still desire attention, and demonstrates how valued this attention is regarded as (e.g. Ramsey and Horan, 2018). Even though just moments before the kiss Nana tells the boys their sexuality does not exist to cater to their "lesbian fantasies", they end up doing exactly that; performing sexual acts to cater to the sexual gratification of the boys (e.g. Wright et al, 2016; Neville-Shepard, 2019). This demonstrates the persistence of the "norm"; the girls are asked to prove their sexuality to the boys through a performance of sexuality, and even so the lens is strictly heteronormative (O'Quinn & Fields, 2019). This being said, it should also be noted that the subjection to coercion and the male gaze does not fully erase the agency of the person being subjected. The girls are practicing agency in the societal framework they have been presented; they seem to understand the power they hold in their sexuality and utilise the desire of the boys as a tool in their own sexual exploration (e.g. Ramsey and Horan, 2018). The film does not present them as mere victims but show them navigating through a world that has subjected them to objectification and entitlement. Just by engaging and being active participants, the girls are contending the assumption of men being active participants and women passive objects (Lehtonen, 2003). Throughout the film, through their dialogue, the girls

seem to be aware of current norms and expectations surrounding sexuality, expressing to the boys that they do not have to do anything they don't want to and making sure the boys know that, and contesting stereotypes that are placed on how the different genders should act and express their sexuality (Ollis, 2016). This being said, they do engage in behaviour that seems to make them uncomfortable after some pressuring and coercion, which opens up a dialogue about agency and pressure.

When Tapani walks into the yard, he asks the boys whether they were invited to the yard. Him asking this question can be interpreted as recognising that the girls have agency within the interaction (assuming that if the answer would have been "yes", Tapani would have had no problem with the boys being in the yard). He seems to notice the girls as people who have agency instead of passive beings who just happen to end up in situations. Just asking this question the viewer and the characters alike are reminded of the agency of the girls.

The question of agency is heavily tied to the underlying assumption that the girls were wearing bras for the sole purpose of seeking attention from men, which is inherently sexist and creates a false narrative in which all expression of female sexuality is for attention instead of existing to benefit the one who possesses it, or that women do not even possess the desire or need to express their sexuality and will only do so to satisfy the needs of men, and so upholds rigid ways to perform, gender (e.g. Neville-Shepard, 2019; Fatopolou, 2012). The fact that the film advances from the girls dancing and through no outside pressure or incentive removing their clothes in an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere is a refreshing way of portraying female sexuality in film. In the very end of the film, when questioned by Tapani, Eveliina also states that they were wearing bras due to their own desire to do so, with no ulterior motives. This also shifts the narrative to one in which the girls remain within power of their own agency.

## 7. Discussion

The film reaches the objectives of the collective in bringing to light some of the aspects of gendered and sexualized violence as was intended in the objectives of the film collective. The film portrays an interaction that is both relatable and plausible as opposed to something that disconnects the viewer from the issues it is portraying. This is important because, as stated before, the overall understanding of the nature and forms of sexualised and gendered violence as well as their pervasiveness in the society remain narrow. The film and its accompanying discussion material offers a platform to facilitate a conversation about sexualized and gendered violence where the viewers can reflect on and analyse the actions of characters, which might help verbalising and recognising troubling behavioural patterns in a way that does not rely on the personal experiences of any participants, if they do not wish to share them. Considering that statistically the possibilities of having participants who have experienced sexualised and gendered violence subjected towards them is high (e.g. Rollston, 2019; Martin, 2021; Phipps, 2018), having this possibility to discuss the interaction through the characters instead of oneself is important in making the discussion safe and ethically sound.

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings, discuss credibility and dependability, explore the stability of this material as teaching material, and discuss the ethical questions relating to this study.

### 7.1. Answering research questions

The aim of this thesis was to find out how is sexualised and gendered violence portrayed in the film *Girl Thing*, and what are the possible implications of that portrayal, and find the answer to the following research questions:

1. How is sexualised and gendered violence portrayed in the film *Girl Thing*?
2. What are the possible implications of that portrayal?

The film offers a nuanced and detailed portrayal of the exercise of power over young girls, considering multiple different aspects that affect the exploration and expression of sexuality in young women. The film discusses and even critiques many societal and structural aspects through the dialogue and the portrayal of the instances in the film, and with the discussion material provides a space to critically examine the discourses it highlights.

The film depicts sexualised and gendered violence through portraying one instance between the characters of the film. The film explores the phenomenon of sexualised and gendered violence through depicting multiple aspects that can be visible in instances of sexualised and gendered violence, and through QCA I found, in my opinion, the most important themes that were discussed in the film to be parental worry, consent and coercion, power and agency. *Girl Thing* provides a portrayal of sexualised and gendered violence that is nuanced and challenges the common perception of sexualised and gendered violence defined by the most easy-to-spot, clear and most violent manifestations of it (e.g. Kingston, 2018; Phipps, 2019). The film reflects on the new way of understanding sexualised and gendered violence as a common occurrence (Kingston, 2018) through the depiction of a mundane, everyday situation that shows power exercised over young women. Through the dialogue in the film, the characters shine light to multiple harmful discourses surrounding sexuality, such as placing responsibility on women for the violence they face and assuming female sexuality exists to please the male gaze. The discussion material and the context in which the films have been produced provide an important aspects to the watching experience, the educational value as well as the potential for social change of the film. Through the discussion material and the way it challenges the viewer to reflect on the behaviour of the character, it is clear that the intention of the film is to challenge and dismantle the discourses and harmful structures that are depicted in the film instead of reinforcing them.

There are many possible implications of the film as an educational material. Societal attitudes and the excusing of bad behaviour is in the way in creating an equal and just society and educational system, and having material to address, critique and ultimately reject those attitudes in important (Meyer, 2019). Using the film (or films in the collective) can prove to become an implementable tool to include transformative pedagogy, as the film itself aims to challenge and dismantle norms and create a new environment to what is deemed as acceptable, which are key features in feminist pedagogy and queer theory (O'Quinn and Fields, 2019; McCusker, 2017).

Having material to recognise and verbalise experiences from a variety of points of view is important, as it has been reported that many young people do not have a very good understanding of what sexualised and gendered violence means, but statistically many of them will experience some form of it during their lifetime (e.g. Rollston, 2019; Martin, 2021; Phipps, 2018). Providing relatable material will not only shine light on the issue to those who do not recognise it but offer support for those who already have those experiences, telling them “you

are not alone”, which according to Spišák (2016), can help in developing and valuing pupils’ own sexuality as a rich and rewarding part of life. This can be achieved through providing a safe foundation to lean on when experimenting and exploring their own sexuality in real life as well as online, as well as having tools to process what they have experienced.

As representation in the media has recently been understood to be important for the individual in feeling seen and valid, as well as collectively in creating discourses and narratives of certain social groups (e.g. Ince, 2017, Fahs and McClelland, 2016), I must raise the question if the film collective has enough diversity. The film collective does include some intersectional themes throughout the various short films, for example centring the experiences of black women and microaggression in the films *Shake!* and *Dream Job*, or raising questions of fatphobia and the scrutiny of the female body in the film *Fat*. Despite the emancipatory and transformative objectives, most of the films represent sexualised and gendered violence through a rather normative lens, with most of the characters appearing to be cis-gendered, able bodied, heterosexual, and white. It can be argued, that as the aim of the films is to raise awareness in the context of Finland specifically and especially concerning power imbalance between men and women, that these decisions be justifiable. However, considering that intersections of identity, including gender, sexuality and race make an individual more at risk of facing violence, including narratives that reflect that would be beneficial for the project to be truly inclusive, because as Phipps (2019) notes, the universalized experience of victimhood in sexualised and gendered violence present in Western public feminism is already based on the experience of white women. This does not make the films useless, but rather it has potential for a more intersectional and inclusive collective that can be achieved through the addition of more representation of the intersections of identity. Using the *Now You See It* short films such as *Girl Thing* as sexuality education material aim to raise awareness, help recognise and verbalise sexualised and gendered violence and through following discussion deconstruct existing structures, which according to e.g. Bretz (2014), Ollis (2016) and Zembylas (2013) are important aspects of creating a classroom that is liberatory, and this notion is emphasized when discussing education for sexualized and gendered violence. Using *Girl Thing* and facilitating and empathetic and constructive discussion has the potential to lead to learning and unlearning, as the film provides a perspective that often goes unnoticed and highlights how common these experiences are. The following discussion, if facilitated well, provides an opportunity to share and reflect, also of-

fering a chance to assume responsibility in perpetuating the kind of social atmosphere that upholds the values that enable pervasive but yet often unnoticed forms of sexualised and gendered violence, such the exercise of power through coercion (Tlostanova et al, 2019).

The depiction of gendered and sexualised violence in an educational setting is a balancing act between raising awareness and giving attention to important issues and being sensitive of the possible triggering effect of the material. Education with the goal of deconstruction of the oppressive structures that enable gendered and sexualised violence requires the acknowledgement of privilege, which can be confronting to some (Bretz, 2014; Zembylas, 2013). Having a fictional film with fictional (but relatable) characters as the material in which instances of gendered and sexualised violence are represented might give the necessary distance to objectively analyse the behaviour, when the pressure of having to directly analyse one's own behaviour is taken out. The discussion questions build up from directly asking questions about the movie, (what happened at the party, and who exercised power?), to analysing characters behaviour (did someone do something wrong, and did someone behave poorly, and if so who?), to self-reflection (Timeout Foundation, 2019). This way, the discussion remains non-confrontational, which can encourage the participants to actually reflect on their own experiences without getting defensive. This is important when discussing widespread and prominent societal issues, such as gendered and sexualised violence, because the experiences of the victims (often women and other minorities) can often be overshadowed by the defensiveness of men, who feel like they are being automatically vilified (Gringeri et al, 2010). This can be seen in instances such as, as brought up in the introduction, the popularity of #notallmen in retaliation to women sharing their experiences of sexualised and gendered violence (Martin, 2021). Even more importantly, however, the way the discussion is constructed to build from less to more personal reflection can offer helpful and even necessary distance to those who have experienced sexualised and gendered violence or trauma related to similar instances (e.g. Tlostanova et al, 2019). There is a possibility that some of the participants also have similar experiences that are depicted in the film, but due to the normalisation of sexualised and gendered violence have not realised that what they were experiencing was, in fact, violence. The discussion must hold space for those experiences and the possible feelings and reactions they evoke.

The discussion material encourages individual reflection, which in addition with acknowledging young people's own accounts of their sexual experiences is important in creating a cultural space in which to explore the sexual agency of adolescents (Spišák, 2016), a great tool when it comes to also reflecting one's own relation to and impact on others. However, as

discussed before, since the acts of sexualised and gendered violence are heavily influenced by attitudes and values that enable individual instances and acts, a deeper, collective reflection on what aspects (entitlement to women's sexuality, normalisation of harassment etc) allow the characters' behaviour might be overshadowed by the aspect of self-reflection (e.g. Morgan and Simons, 2016; Lombard, 2018). Deepening the conversation to the root causes of gendered and sexualised violence would help deepen the understanding of the structural issue that sexualised and gendered violence is, instead of it being merely a collection of somewhat unrelated individual experiences.

I do not want to appear overly critical of the material. I understand that ending sexualised and gendered violence is not something that can be achieved in a moment, but instead is a slow process which requires the widespread transformation of attitudes and values, reformation of the current system that values certain identities and characteristics over others and vigilance in holding people accountable for their behaviour and not ignoring cases of gendered and sexualised violence. The deconstruction must be started somewhere and having tools to recognise gendered and sexualised violence and find the language to describe and verbalise those experiences is extremely valuable. The material can help grasp how common these experiences, how power is exercised over women in many nuanced and "minute" ways that can often go ignored, are and how gendered and sexualised violence affects such a large portion of the population that it must be recognised as a structural problem. I also understand that not all facilitators might have the necessary information and knowledge to sufficiently facilitate a conversation about the structural issues relating to the subject and do find the discussion questions well-thought and easily implementable, which in itself may encourage educators to use this material.

Understanding and valuing sexuality as a part of one's identity, as well as understanding the underlying performance of gender and (often hetero) sexuality and its presence in the interactions of everyday life is important in creating educational reform for sexuality education (e.g. Loeber et al, 2010; Spisak, 2016). A reform is necessary to open a discussion about the ways in which sexuality is present in our everyday lives and to notice the inequalities we see surrounding the expression, performance, and experience of human sexuality. Finding new effective ways of teaching about sexuality and the interconnectedness of individual experience to the collective, and the underlying yet pervasive societal structures that guide our performance of gender and sexuality is important to find liberation and emancipation in education. Compre-



hensive sexuality education should be included in the curriculum, and teachers should be provided with appropriate training as well as accessible resources (such as the *Now You See It* film collective) and training to find them. Multidisciplinary collaboration could be encouraged, which would take the pressure off teachers if they are feeling anxious or ill-prepared about providing sexuality education. As my findings suggest, the film has great potential to be used as an educational tool. It would not have to be confined into a sexuality education classroom, but could be used as an integrated material in other subjects as well, providing a societal commentary that could be utilised. As the material is freely accessible, it could be suggested and distributed to parents as well and they could utilise the material in their own parenting or to become more aware of the phenomenon in question themselves.

## **7.2. Suitability as educational material for sexuality education**

The film and the discussion material bring up many themes and topics that are suitable for sexuality education. As education in general should work towards dismantling the existing oppressive structures this film and discussion material can be tools to meet those objectives. Comprehensive sexuality education should include education about sexualised and gendered violence, and the film and discussion material offer a good tool to bring a reflective perspective; not only does the film provide a nuanced and relatable example of what sexualised and gendered violence can look like, and what it commonly is not seen as, but in addition the discussion material encourages making connections to one's personal life. This further encourages reflecting on the contexts that enable the behaviour of the characters, raising questions like why do the boys feel entitled to be included in the girls' exploration of their sexuality? Or why is parental concern expressed as shaming girls for not wearing pants?

*Girl Thing* and the discussion material do provide a way to teach young people what forms sexualised and gendered violence can take. This can help them to better take care of their own safety, seek justice if they are ever faced with sexualised and gendered violence and hold themselves and their peers accountable. As the general perception of gendered and sexualised violence often fails to include a variety of subtle but oppressive behaviours (e.g. Jääskeläinen, 2015), and as the topic of sexualised and gendered violence is often overlooked by other topics in sexuality education, these films can be a good, easily accessible material to add to sexuality education (e.g. Vanhatalo, 2019).

The film and the discussion material are well suitable for sexuality education, but do not have to be confined to sexuality education class. However, because the curriculum does not hold a lot of space for sexualised and gendered violence in other contexts besides sexuality education or health education, it is most likely this topic would be implemented in sexuality education. Of course, deciding which teaching material to use also requires that the facilitator is familiar with the group of students prior to conducting exercises using *Girl Thing* or the discussion material. Using films that depict instances of violence can be triggering for some viewers and emphasising that watching the film and taking part in the discussion is based on trust and free will can help create an understanding and safe atmosphere. As the curriculum and educational guidelines state, sexuality education should be conducted in accordance with the age of the pupils.

### **7.3. Credibility**

In qualitative research, it is impossible to remain completely objective, nor is that the aim. The analysis of the data is conducted through the lens of the theoretical framework presented in this thesis, meaning the underlying values and beliefs of those theories will inherently be reflected in said analysis.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), multiple aspects affect the validity of the research. Those are the lens of the researcher, the paradigm assumptions and their interaction between each other and within the research (p. 126). In addition, the validity can be appraised through the lens of the study subject as well as through the lens of someone external to the study (Creswell and Miller, 2000). As my research was informed by Critical Theory Paradigm, the different ways to assess the validity of my research would be through researcher reflexivity (lens of the researcher), collaboration (lens of the study participants) and peer debriefing (lens of people external to study).

The personal values and beliefs I hold are important in affecting the results of my analysis. This is not only visible in the analysis itself, but as they have guided me throughout the research process altogether. Deciding the topic, film, which theories to include as the framework of this research, and which themes to analyse in the film itself are all affected by my personal passion and beliefs towards the subject of sexuality education. However, I have tried justify my decisions as well as possible and remain transparent throughout the research, draw-

ing from previously conducted research, guidelines as well as making sure the topics I am discussing in this thesis are consistent with the intentions and objectives of the data itself, and the larger collective it is a part of. In addition, to understand my own researcher reflexivity, I have tried to remain as transparent as possible throughout the study, indicating that my analysis stems from a specific context of personal values and beliefs, theories and methodologies. As my research is informed by the Critical Theory Paradigm, it is important to reflect on the different forces, such as social and cultural, that might affect the interpretation (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

According to Creswell and Miller (2000) credible data can also stem from close collaboration between the researcher and the participants of the study. This collaboration builds credibility to their narrative accounts. As my research subject did not include any participants, collaboration is difficult to include. This being said, I did form a close bond to the data I used, immersing myself in it during my research process. The intent behind collaboration with the participants is to respect and support the participants instead of further marginalising them, and that has also been the objective of my research as well; to respect the data and the creators behind it, and to find emancipatory connections instead of marginalisation.

Peer debriefing is also a method to add credibility to the data. My amazing supervisor (though not exactly a peer) has been fulfilling this role throughout the process of writing this thesis. The objectives of peer debriefing is to challenge the researchers assumptions, push the researcher to the next step and is best utilised when done throughout the entire process of the study (Creswell and Miller, 2000). My supervisor has done exactly that; pushed me to justify my choices better and clarify my study, offering valuable support to add to the credibility of this study.

As my method is a mix of film analysis, QCA and CDA, more specifically a mixture of content analysis and (critical) discourse analysis, even though I have attempted to conduct my research in alignment with literature about those research methods, my interpretation of the film and the subsequent analysis is, one interpretation. I have, throughout the process, aimed to justify and support my interpretations with prior research and literature on the subject to ensure my interpretation and analysis is reliable and can be used in possible future research. As my methods include critical discourse analysis, it has been important to me to remain also critical of my own writing, voice, and the way in which I am taking part in societal discourses through this research. As a qualitative research, the aim is not to provide objective truths or

draw direct conclusions, but more so to examine the phenomena of sexualised and gendered violence, and provide insight through a lens of specific theoretical framework.

#### **7.4. Ethical questions**

The data collection of this thesis was unobtrusive as the data has been derived from freely accessible existing publications, there is no reason to question the ethics of the conduction of the research (Prior, 2008, as cited by Saumure and Given, 2008, p. 927).

As a method of research, qualitative content analysis is nonintrusive because it is applied to data already collected or existing text (Julien, 2008). As my research data consists of public videos, the ethics of my research is not compromised, and no permission is required to use the data for analysis. Some ethical questions that arose throughout this process and that should be considered when implementing the short films in schools have to do with the contents of the films, and the ethics of subjecting pupils to depictions of sexualised and gendered violence. Should students be prepped beforehand, or should parent be notified if material like the film I have analysed is used? Ethical concerns should also extend to the role of the facilitator; should they have preparation for their role?

## 8. Conclusion

Well executed sexuality education has the potential to be transformative and emancipatory. The goals of sexuality education which is to provide the necessary knowledge to make well-informed, safe decisions and express empathetic and respectful behaviour towards others in the context of sexuality and the way it is intertwined with other aspects of identity-transformative and emancipatory education is necessary. Understanding the cultural and societal (oppressive) structures, the hierarchy of identities and the valuing of certain characteristics over others and the way it is embedded in our daily life and behaviour requires the will and motivation to bring forwards and highlight the ways these oppressive structures are visible in our everyday life. By broadening the definition of sexuality education, what it should contain, what should be prioritised and how it is taught we can better utilise schools as sites for social change and emancipatory practices.

Sexuality education, whether implicitly or explicitly, is ingrained in the day-to-day life of schools as pupils interact with each other. As pupils learn to interact with each other, many sexuality education topics, such as consent and self-determination rights or the performance of gender are undeniably going to be present through, for example, learning to respect other people's boundaries and personal space, or choosing to not determine which hobbies are "for girls" and which are "for boys". Through feminist pedagogy and the implication of queer theory, including and utilising their notions of dismantling existing and oppressive systems, educational systems have the opportunity to deconstruct oppressive structures that often reduce the identity of a person to a performance of gender that is often very narrow in what kind of behaviour and expression is deemed suitable, as the goal of said theory and pedagogical framework aims to redefine "norms" and deconstruct structures to achieve equity.

*Girl Thing*, a short film that is part of a film collective aiming to provide educational material for the recognition and verbalisation of sexualised and gendered violence inflicted upon women, portrays a relatable instance where a group of girls is pressured into letting two boys to attend their party after noticing them dancing through a window clad in underwear. In its portrayal of the interaction between girls exploring and expressing their sexuality in their own terms and having that expression then objectified and subjected to the male gaze, the film offers many instances to discuss the relation of the exercise of power to other aspects that affect power dynamics, especially through the exploration of aspects such as age and parental relationships. The film highlights normalised aspects of sexualised and gendered violence that often

go overlooked, and especially when reflected on with the help of the discussion material provided alongside the film, provides suitable and decent material to be used in sexuality education.

Providing sufficient and well-executed sexuality education is a necessity to ensure all young people have the know-how required to take care of their well-being. As societal discussions about gendered and sexualised violence have become more prevalent and unacceptable, we have begun to understand the deep-rooted nature of the phenomenon; gendered and sexualised violence is not only a collection of individual instances existing in a vacuum, but rather a reflection of societal values, attitudes, and the exploitation of power imbalances and structures. Providing educational material to make the recognition of the nuances of sexualised and gendered violence can be beneficial in noticing patterns that create structures, deconstructing them and through open discussion finding new, sustainable ways of behaving and holding oneself and each other accountable, ultimately with the purpose of creating a more equitable and safe society.

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