‘It is disgusting, but … ’: adolescent girls’ relationship to internet pornography as gender performance

# Details

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## Sample

"This paper is part of a larger piece of research that involved 68 adolescents, both boys
and girls, between the ages of 16 and 18, selected by a theoretical sampling (Corbin
and Strauss 1990). This study is based mainly on the analysis of the empirical material
picked up from the material of online focus groups, qualitative interviews and co-construction
groups which involved the girls." (Scarcelli, 2015, p. 240).

# Abstract

Digital media are an important part of the lives of young people, who use these resources to access sexual materials such as pornography. This kind of consumption can reveal important aspects of their social lives. Starting from the viewpoint of consumers, this paper is a reflection on girls’ consumption of pornography and on the meanings they give to their practices and choices in the continuum between online and offline experiences. The research involved boys and girls from the ages of 16 to 18 using different techniques: six ‘co-construction groups’, 48 face-to-face interviews, and two online focus groups. The article describes girls’ experiences with internet pornography, underlining the symbolic use of pornographic material as exploration and definition of gender performance. According to girls, using internet pornography means to ‘play’ with gender borders: defining and redefining them, experiencing them, passing through them. These borders are connecting to the meaning of being a girl or a boy, but also to the common idea of ‘normality’ within the peer group.

# Outcome

"The girls I interviewed expressed more negative attitudes
and reported less exposure to pornographic content on the internet than boys. All of
the participants reported that they had come into contact with pornographic material,
voluntarily or not, primarily on the internet.
[...] Girls who took part in my work affirmed that they were familiar with pornographic
material, but they did not use it. During their narrations the interviewees trace a border between an instrumental use of pornography, connected to arousal and typical
(in their opinion) of men, and a more symbolic use, connected to curiosity and typical
(in their opinion) of women [...] A large portion of girls described pornography in negative terms, using words such as ‘disgusting’ or ‘dirty’; one even declared pornography ‘boring’. Sometimes interviewees stated that the representation of intercourse in pornography is lacking in sentiment and love. It is just a presentation of the sexual act, so they are not interested in viewing that kind of material [...]
Generally, pornography is not interesting for
girls, but sometimes it reveals itself as useful: it can reduce anxiety related to firsttime
intercourse; it can lead to fuller discoveries of boys’ desires; and it can help
them understand what their peer group defines as ‘normal’. [...] Some girls told me that they use (or have used) pornography to ‘discover boys’ world’.
Again, with a rhetoric that describes two different worlds, girls are curious about what
boys find so interesting and this occupies part of their discourse in the peer group. [...] To consume pornography with boys frequently means to be introduced to pornography
by boys. It happens in two different manners that we can define as ‘teaching mode’
and ‘goliardic mode’.
(Scarcelli, 2015, pp. 241-245)