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An Educational Response to the Issue of Online Pornography for Schoolboys: The Case of Participatory Action Research in Lithuania

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THEORY

PRACTICE

RESEARCH

The rapid rise of online pornography has become a real challenge for educators dealing with the daily use of online pornography amongst schoolboys. Many researchers stress that online pornography has become a significant factor in gender socialization, reinforcing traditional constructions of men's power over women in terms of hierarchy, objectification, submission and violence. There is a lack of educational discourse on how schools react or otherwise respond to the use of online pornography. In this paper, the case of participatory action research, implemented in one Lithuanian school, is presented as an educational approach for critical consciousness education of schoolboys with regards to online pornography. The outset of critical consciousness education is the students' own experiences and lifeworlds wherein students and educators can jointly recognize and challenge the oppressed subjectivities and oppressive circumstances.

Key words: social pedagogy; online pornography; school; critical consciousness

Introduction

During the last decade, pornography has become an important online product amounting to hundreds of millions of web pages (D'Orlando, 2011). D'Orlando suggests that the evolution of the pornographic market over the last few decades has seen a progressively reduced role for traditional media, through which pornography was once brought to consumers, and the rapid rise of new media. Estimates attempting to provide quantitative data about the pornography market suggest an enormous spread of online pornography, accessible free of charge with billions of views, which has resulted in a huge reduction in global revenues for commercial online pornography (Internet Pornography Statistic, 2006; Pornography Statistic, 2013). 'During the last few decades, the sex industry has become one of the largest grey-zone business activities worldwide, which effectively and increasingly uses new and older forms of technologies and services based on gendered commercialization(s) of the body and desire' (Jyrkinen, 2012, p. 27).

A study (n=594) in New England by Sabina, Wolak and Finkelhor (2008) found that, overall, 72.8% of participants (93.2% of boys, 62.1% of girls) had seen online pornography before the age of 18.

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Most exposure began when young people were between 14 and 17 years old, and boys were significantly more likely to view online pornography more often and to view more types of images. Considerable numbers of boys and girls had seen images of paraphilic¹ or criminal sexual activity, including child pornography and sexual violence, at least once before the age of 18. Girls were significantly more likely than boys (42.3% of girls, 6.8% of boys) to report never looking for pornography on purpose, indicating they were involuntarily exposed. Sabina and colleagues summarize that, if participants in this study are typical of young people, exposure to pornography on the internet can be described as a normative experience.

Such a phenomenon implies a serious concern about the sex and gender education of youth, especially adolescent boys. According to a study by Ruškus, Žvirdauskas and Kačenauskaitė (2010) in Lithuania, boys are much more frequent viewers of online pornography than girls, with boys connecting to these kinds of websites almost daily. Emmers-Sommer and Burns (2005) emphasize this as a concern, considering that the internet is available to all and that children or adolescents who do not have a clear understanding of sexuality or sexual relationships can easily access pornographic material with a mouse click. Despite these alarming tendencies, the topic of online pornography has stayed out of curricular and extra-curricular education and is left to informal self-education. In a TED talk, Cindy Gallop (2009) argued that '*Porn Has Become De Facto Sex Education*'. Pornography is a suppressed topic in educational environments, because it is seen as both illegal and immoral. The taboos surrounding pornography elsewhere disappear on the internet: the internet makes acceptable and tolerable what is not acceptable and tolerable publicly.

An investigation by Heider and Harp (2002) found that online pornography sites reinforce traditional constructions of men's power over women in terms of hierarchy, objectification, submission and violence. The feminist critique highlights the hegemonic construction of gender identities in online pornography, with their sexist and oppressive portrayal of women. Van Zoonen (2000) highlights feminism's unconditional focus on analyzing gender as a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them. According to Flood (2009), pornography can influence viewers' attitudes towards, and adoption of, particular sexual behaviours. Internet and online pornography can therefore become a significant factor in gender socialization, promoting beliefs that women are sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007), sexual violence, decreased sexual intimacy (Flood, 2009), increasingly negative attitudes toward women (Emmers-Sommer & Burns, 2005), and online infidelity (Henline, Lamke & Howard, 2007).

Online pornography can be considered a real challenge for educators dealing with the mass and daily use of online pornography among schoolboys. Educators are concerned with how to confront what appear to be highly attractive, yet potentially oppressive and influential pictures constituting online pornography. Taking the ideas of the Brazilian social educator Paulo Freire (1973; 2006) on emancipation from oppressive structures and conscientization, we are proposing here that the discussion of, and reflection on, the sensitive topic of pornography can substantially contribute to raising schoolboys' consciousness on sex and gender issues in online pornography.

Online pornography and victimization as a media and gender issue

Online space and internet use have become an inseparable part of the daily life of adolescents during the last few years. The internet offers users unprecedented access to a very large scale of information, resources and meanings. Berson (2003) points out that, 'just as fire has brought us

¹ Paraphilia is the experience of intense sexual arousal to atypical objects, situations, or individuals. (American Psychiatric Association – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR)

warmth and light, the internet has ignited an excitement for learning in a global medium' (p. 9). It extends opportunities for users and opens up access to informal learning. Informal learning may be seen as including three types of learning: self-directed learning is intentional and conscious; incidental learning is unintentional but conscious; and learning acquired through socialization (usually values, attitudes and dispositions) is often unintentional and unconscious (Schugurensky, 2000). The daily use of the internet implies all three types of informal learning when the internet responds to requests for information but also automatically generates more or less unwanted information and images. According to Berson (2003), although the internet can provide an exciting world of exploration and information, it has also created a new context for sexual exploitation and victimization.

The internet offers unparalleled access to hard-core pornography with just a few keystrokes (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). Online pornography is often regarded as harmful and offensive, degrading and exploitative especially in regard to youth (Hargrave & Livingstone, 2009). Some authors highlight online victimization, which is described as an unwanted exposure to sexual material when, without seeking or expecting sexual material – for example when doing online searches, opening e-mails, instant messages, or links – the viewer is exposed to pictures of naked people or people having sex (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2006; see also Mitchell, Finkelhor & Wolak, 2004; Mitchell, Wolak & Finkelhor, 2007).

Waskul (2004) stresses that internet sex is largely composed of images, systems of meaning and forms of interaction that are conspicuously familiar. According to Waskul, cybersex is characterized by the usual themes of any pornographic medium, such as androcentric bias, female sexual exploitation and a consistent refutation of established moral beliefs. Berson (2003) notes that, just as the destructive force of fire necessitates careful use of this unpredictable element, online interaction can expose adolescents to an insidious threat to their well-being – 'like fire, the potential brilliance of the internet may only be obscured by the hidden dangers lurking beneath a mesmerizing façade' (p. 9).

Berson (2003) stresses that the social and cultural communities of the internet provide a virtual venue with unique perspectives on power, identity, and gender. Van Zoonen (2000) has noted that many feminists argue that pornography objectifies women for men's pleasure, that it contributes to the erotisation of power and violence and hence the construction of forms of masculine sexuality which seek pleasure through power and violence. Flood (2009) emphasizes that pornography can influence viewers' attitudes towards and adoption of particular sexual behaviours. According to Flood, children may also be alienated, as many adult women are, by the subordinating representations of women common in pornography. Flood reports that 'exposure to media which sexualizes girls and women is associated with greater acceptance of stereotyped and sexist notions about gender and sexual roles, including notions of women as sexual objects. [...] Exposure also influences how men treat and respond to real women in subsequent interactions' (p. 391). Flood concludes that pornography is a poor sex educator and that, subsequently, 'young people's use of pornography may have further negative impacts on their sexual and intimate relationships' (p. 393). In this sense, pornography and victimization are connected.

The aim of the analysis in this paper is to discuss the opportunity of an educational response to online pornography access by schoolboys. Research by Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson and Tydén (2006) suggests 'that school and health personnel communicate and learn to discuss how sexuality is portrayed in pornographic material and in media with sexualized content, so as to help young people to develop a more analytical and critical awareness towards pornography' (p. 392). This paper presents a case study of participatory action research undertaken in one Lithuanian secondary school, aiming to validate the need and the method for critical consciousness education for schoolboys to counter the oppressive and victimizing phenomena of online pornography.

Conceptual framework: Critical pedagogy and development of critical consciousness

There is much literature about the threats and harms of online pornography, especially for children and young people. And there is great lack of literature about how to deal with this issue, including in education. The large extent and high use of online pornography is now a fact and calls for appropriate ways to address related issues. Our objective for the study was to discover and to suggest an educational way in which to deal with oppressive and personal issues arising from online pornography. For this purpose we initiated a reflection on this subject amongst groups of schoolboys, expecting not only their sharing of experiences and understandings of online pornography, but also their development of critical awareness and its objectivation by developing ideas for action and changes in a school context.

Critical pedagogy was used to ground the study's theoretical framework. Critical pedagogy aims at 'the creation of educational conditions – by educationalists and students in concert – within which students are able to develop their critical consciousness. The pedagogical process of developing critical consciousness involves working with students to recognise, evaluate and negotiate structures of power and knowledge. The objective of this pedagogical focus on developing critical consciousness is that students will come to understand themselves as active agents, within and as part of those structures of power-knowledge, facilitating identification and creation of conditions for the possibility of human change in oppressive sociocultural constructs' (Glenn, 2007, pp. 756-7), which online pornography can be attributed to. There are numerous definitions and versions of contemporary critical theory and critical pedagogy. They include, for example, Henry Giroux's synthesis of the more progressive elements of John Dewey's philosophy and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School; Patti Lather's work in the field of critical education around characterizing the relationship between feminist and critical pedagogy, feminist ethnography, and post-structuralism; and ultimately the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who stressed the need to engage in a praxis that incorporates theory, action, and reflection as a means to work toward social change and justice (Breuing, 2011).

Conscientization, a concept developed by Freire (1970), was considered as the most appropriate means of approaching online pornography pedagogically, in a school setting. For Freire pedagogy is a means of liberating people from relationships of domination and victimization through the transformation of magical and naïve consciousness into critical social consciousness. According to Freire, conscientization refers to 'learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (p. 19). Goldbard (2006) stresses: 'Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, being an "object" of others' will rather than a self-determining "subject"' (pp. 242-3). 'The process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming a "subject" with other oppressed subjects – that is, becoming part of the process of changing the world' (Freire, 1970, p. 19). Conscientization therefore means the process of the awakening of critical awareness through reflexion and action. The raising of consciousness is an ongoing process by which a learner moves through critical thinking and honest dialogue towards increased critical consciousness (Johnson-Hunter & Risku, 2003). Freire (1970) says that 'there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world' (p. 75). The word and dialogue are the means of coping with silence and oppression, so the word and dialogue become part of the liberating educational culture.

Methodology: Participatory action research

Participatory action research was chosen as the study's underpinning methodology, and focus groups were used as a method to encourage discussion and awareness amongst schoolboys. Freire's liberation pedagogy is at the basis of participatory action research. Participatory action research supposes that a reflective dialogue, which enhances the sharing of personal experiences and self-awareness among persons in the group, is actively employed. Participatory action research as a research methodology at micro and macro levels is defined by understanding, mutual involvement, change, and a process that promotes personal growth (Kidd & Krall, 2005). Reason (1994) states that participatory action research can be described as empowerment through consciousness-raising. Whilst also constructivist, participatory action research is dialogical and proactive, typically focusing on empowerment and with both researchers' and participants' values being central to the planning process (Kidd & Krall, 2005).

Focus groups are a relevant method for participatory action research and particularly effective for encouraging dialogue, reflection and planning (Kidd & Krall, 2005; Liamputtong, 2001). According to Liamputtong (2001) 'focus groups provide rich and detailed information about feelings, thoughts, understandings, perceptions and impressions of people in their own words' (p. 6). Freire (1970) expanded on the idea of active, participatory education through problem-posing dialogue, a method that transforms the students into 'critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher' (p. 68). Liamputtong emphasizes Freire's contribution to the development of dialogical focus groups to facilitate the production of knowledge by the research participants themselves and empowering the participant to transform their own lives. Flick (2006) points out that the focus group method is perfectly suited for disclosing sensitive topics. Pornography and the use of pornography is a sensitive topic for research because of its potentially intimate, discreditable or incriminating focus; it concerns taboos and threats, the private sphere and the potential for involving participants in discrimination or stigma (Dickson-Swift, James & Liamputtong, 2008).

Research on sensitive topics demands the development of a comprehensive safety protocol to anticipate and mediate threats and possible harms of the research (Dickson-Swift et al, 2008). Therefore the research objectives were discussed with and approved by the headmaster and the social pedagogue in one regular secondary school in Kaunas, Lithuania. Purposeful sampling was used in order to have information-rich cases using typical case sampling (Patton, 1990). A typical case sample, according to Patton, is illustrative not definitive. The sampling criteria are not the number of participants and generalisation of data but the gathering of rich information which highlight what is typical. A social pedagogue addressed the whole group of senior teenage schoolboys (about 50), explaining the purpose of the research to discover the issue of the online pornography and inviting them to voluntarily participate in focus groups. In negotiation with the researcher and the social pedagogue some boys agreed to participate in the research for the purpose of sharing experiences and knowledge about online pornography and to develop objectives that could be put in place in the school. Out of a population of around 50, 13 schoolboys aged 16 to 17 came forward to form three groups with four to five participants in each. They agreed to maintain confidentiality with regard to matters arising in the group, concerning their school, parents and other people. The researcher and the social pedagogue made a similar commitment to ensuring that anonymity would be preserved in reporting the research and that participation in the focus group and the research would not have any harmful consequences for the participants. The participants affirmed that online pornography was not a taboo and embarrassing or risky theme for discussions amongst themselves. They also defined themselves as typical schoolboys in regard to use of online pornography.

The focus groups took place in a school classroom after classes. All three groups were moderated by a school pedagogue and a researcher. The focus group discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed to keep the original discourse and slang. Through deductive reasoning three

stages of critical consciousness development regarding online pornography were identified from the data.

To initiate discussion, the focus group sessions opened with several few scenes from the movie *World's Greatest Dad* (directed by Bobcat Goldtwait in 2009). The film scenes showed a conversation between a father and son about the son's obsession with online pornography. The schoolboys approved the issues presented in the movie as relevant to their personal experiences, and this proved a good point to start the discussion about online pornography use.

Findings: The development of critical consciousness regarding online pornography process by schoolboys

Stage 1. Subjective legitimization of pornography: being in magical consciousness

The first experiences related in the focus groups revealed the boys' 'magical consciousness' regarding online pornography. In this mode of consciousness, Freire (1994) suggests that people are not able to discern social realities, they 'confuse their perceptions of the objects and challenges of the environment, and fall prey to magical explanations because they cannot apprehend true causality' (p. 17). The focus group participants asserted that they were watching pornographic material out of curiosity and a desire for sexual satisfaction; it was a means for them to both self-education and physical relaxation.

Curiosity and physical needs to relax. Everything comes into one. [G, 16, focus group 1];

If there's only a wish to see and, well, to relax as a man. [B, 16, focus group 2]

You are more self-confident. [N, 17, focus group 2]

There's a girl and sexual intercourse, you need to know before you try in reality. [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

The schoolboys unanimously came to the conclusion that pornography is a suitable and normal means for sexual self-satisfaction through masturbation (see also Emmers-Sommer & Burns, 2005). In this we can identify a normalization strategy: 'Informants with a normalization strategy did not question or problematize pornography; it was a normal and integrated part of their life' (Hägström-Nordin et al, 2006, p. 390). The schoolboys considered their interest in online pornography and used it due to a natural inclination because it relates to the body's natural predisposition. So usage of online pornography is normalized and accepted by schoolboys as a means for natural self-satisfaction.

Well, one needs to release hormones, what else is there to do, it is normal, I know all guys watch it, it's only that not everyone speaks about it. [V, 16, focus group 3]

A man thinks about filth every seven seconds, so I've heard. That's nature, so it's normal. [D, 17, focus group 1]

It's a natural biological thing – liquids have to be released out of the body (everyone is laughing). But it is serious, because if you don't do it for a long time, later there's only one thing on your mind, you see a woman and it's hard to control [...] everyone is ashamed, but it's a natural thing. [L, 16, focus group 1]

The teenagers indicated the importance of access to content when it comes to watching pornography on the internet. The schoolboys said they knew what to expect from searching different websites. According to them, there are advance warnings about pornographic content on websites, but content is accessible by confirming via mouse click that the viewer is at least 18 years old.

You click that you are 18 and that's all, piece of cake! It's very easy to access that online pornography, even a dope would do it. [L, 16, focus group 1]

Not so unintentional, wherever you go, you are asked if are 18 and you know for sure where you are going. [N, 17, focus group 2]

The economic aspect of pornography usage was also raised in the focus groups. In commercial pornography there is a desire to sell the customer a commodity, in this case pornographic material. The study participants had seen a number of websites offering similar services and mocked those who paid for them as it is possible to obtain such content for free: the ability to access this type of material free of charge was considered something to be proud of. At the beginning of our research, the schoolboys did not think about the threatening effect of pornography as sexual excitement suppressed alertness and feelings of self-defence:

Pornography has been at all times. When the internet appeared, it is one of the sources of money, because they don't care who is going to use that material. Now there are [large] numbers of those sites and anyone can access them. Only those who want to pay are fools, because it is possible to get and use it for free. [...] Everything is possible on the internet [...] We don't think it's a problem [...] It's good that it's easily accessible. [L, 16, focus group 1]

Curiosity, a need for physical relaxation, biological nature and unlimited accessibility – all these motives were named by the schoolboys as their reasons for using online pornography. These motives legitimize their use of online pornography but also demonstrate their uncritical, or magical in the Freirian sense, consciousness. This suggests that schoolboys do not perceive oppressive and victimization structures behind online pornography; they accept it as a fascinating and beneficial daily life activity. These explanations link with the Freirian concept of naive consciousness, which is characterized 'by gross simplifications and generalizations of problems; frail arguments and lack of interest in critical investigation; polemics rather than dialogue; and magical, emotional explanations for problems' (Freire, 1973, p. 18).

Stage 2. Launching critical consciousness in regard to online pornography

According to Freire (1973), 'critical consciousness involves the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; testing ones findings and revision; avoidance of distortion when perceiving problems; refusal of transferring responsibility; and sound argumentation through the practice of dialogue' (p. 18). In the focus group the schoolboys were invited to reflect upon and share their experiences and thoughts about the dangers and harms that can occur when using online pornography.

The schoolboys participating in the focus groups identified actually experienced and sometimes imagined experiences of internet victimization from using online pornography. A case was mentioned when an unexpected e-mail was received. The material contained was not evaluated as negative – '*the pictures there were good*' – but the reaction was negative because their e-mail inbox became overloaded with e-mails. Other participants indicated their computer's slowed pace and the increased risk of virus attacks in the aftermath of searching suspicious websites. Often computer safety was treated as more important than personal safety:

There, I've remembered, they sent me an e-mail from video gaga, so I got nervous because they're sending all kinds of shit that I'm not asking for. [...] They piss me off when they send spam, and then you can't find normal e-mails. [N, 17, focus group 2]

What do I know about porn, but I think when you are searching the internet and they're throwing all kinds of nudities in the ads and then readdressing to other places it is unnerving. [E, 16, focus group 3]

It's unnerving as it slows down the computer and you can get viruses again. [R, 17, focus group 2]

At the beginning of the research the schoolboys mentioned that it is absolutely normal to watch pornography and satisfy oneself, but in the process of the discussion the experience of shame was named more often. The schoolboys were undergoing the duality exercised by the social taboo against pornography alongside their positive feelings towards self-satisfaction and so were facing ambivalent feelings.

You're doing the thing and, for example, your sis comes, the parents can also come, it's shameful when parents know. [L, 16, focus group 1]

The feeling of shame in all cases. You wouldn't tell what you're doing with yourself. [P, 17, focus group 1].

Focus group members maintained that their interest in online pornography was diminishing. They stressed the increased threat of pornography for the younger generation. The schoolboys were worried about child safety when on the computer, their parents' neglectful behaviour and lack of relevant knowledge in this area.

It's bad when children can access it [...] It's really very hard to protect children from these, because access is easy, everyone can access a porn film and it's terrible. [M, 17, focus group 1]

The young spend the most time. [B, 16, focus group 2]

Well, I do remember my parents found me watching and couldn't give enough arguments why not to watch, so you feel like...like you sneer them down. [K, 17, focus group 3]

Parents will not be able to protect so much from such content when the children are still small and they know more than their parents. [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

The schoolboys admitted that pornography was mostly discussed among friends and at school as they spend most of their time there. Still, even being among friends does not mean that one can talk about it loudly and seriously because of the shame and fear of being called a pervert. This is confirmed by Jensen (2004) who maintained that pornography viewers experience strong feelings of shame, guilt, anxiety and confusion.

It is usually among friends, you wouldn't talk about it with strangers, they might think that you are a perv. [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

You keep joking, but it is true that there is pornography, you don't want to make a fool out of yourself in front of friends because you It's like in that film, it was shameful and he didn't want his friends to know. [G, 16, focus group 1]

Group members spoke about persons who publicly commented on sexual intercourse as though they were experts. Such public discussion caused feelings of confusion and in a way forced others to participate in the discussion in order not to be excluded from the group.

It pisses you off because if you don't want to talk about that and there's this one guy talking about it, the others get involved because they don't want to show that they don't know anything. [P, 16, focus group 2]

Usage of online pornography can create an impression for schoolboys that a woman is easily accessible and that her participation in producing pornographic material is of her own free will. Thus schoolboys do not assume responsibility for its usage.

Of course it's interesting that a woman consents to ~~with~~ everything and ... It would be cool to have such. [...] Somehow you wouldn't like it, but if she wants it this way, so what can you do. [R, 17, focus group 2]

Usage of online pornography has been related to progress in pupil's academic achievements and family background (Ruškus et al, 2010). The participants in this research confirmed this. The teenagers thought that sexist swear-words and expressions were characteristic for persons with lower education and for pornography viewers.

It happens that such words as “s...”, “I will ...you from the front or from the back” are used – they don’t learn them from the newspaper. [B, 16, focus group 2]

This is partly because of pornography and lack of education. Maybe it would depend on the parents’ upbringing or any other influence. [R, 17, focus group 2]

The participants in the research evaluated violence against women differently. Some recognised violence as something that they would not like to inflict. Others did not perceive the same sort of content as violent. They thought that a certain experience of violence was a woman’s natural need in order to feel greater satisfaction. Peter and Valkenburg (2007) maintain that such opinions have to be treated as violence rationalization when it is justified by personal needs and often stems from the consideration that a woman is an object of consumption.

It’s humiliating. [...] All kinds of strangling, there’s beating or slapping. [B, 16, focus group 2]

So our manly power is demonstrated and they show that we can do everything and he is the ruler of the thing. You just watch, because it turns you on. [N, 17, focus group 2]

There are all kinds of pornography there. You can watch as much as you want after that also. After there’s danger that all these perversions, sado maso and the like, who knows you can try it yourself sometime with a girl by accident. [L, 16, focus group 1]

You can’t understand them, do they really like it this way or is it just acting, when it is so rough you don’t want to try it in reality. [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

Other participants of the research tended to ascribe the responsibility for her abuse to the woman.

With guys it is more or less, but with women, young girls... there are different perverts making a pass at them. [...] Those stupid ones believe them; it’s obvious they don’t understand. [...] When the older one, an adult is making a pass, those teenagers start drooling and get hooked. [V, 16, focus group 3]

This is crap, a woman must realize what is happening to her. [M, 17, focus group 1]

But there are all kinds of women, you know, and they like it differently. [K, 17, focus group 3]

The focus group participants also indicated the kinds of pornography that could not be tolerated and were treated as perversions. Pornography was named as a threat for future sexual relations.

There are different perverse films, all kinds of cruel porn, where they strangle, horsewhip, there’s also gay porn [interrupts G, 16, focus group 1 – horrendous perversion] and there’s also a theme when a child sees when a man does that with a man and thinks that it’s normal. [M, 17, focus group 1]

It’s a minus that it twists the man’s fantasies, because you have to be relaxed during the act and not to follow some rules like in pornography. [B, 16, focus group 2]

Zillmann (2000) states that pornography determines and advances sexual activity. Research participants saw the same threat. They maintained that online pornography stimulates a wish to try everything earlier and to experiment sexually. Curiosity induces the search for new experiences by transferring ‘theory into practice’.

It’s harmful if you watched pornography from youth and you have a girlfriend, you have sexual relations with her, I doubt it’s useful. [R, 17, focus group 2]

They see and think: well, it would be interesting to try. It’s like in this film, maybe the pleasure would be greater and they start doing this. [...] But still curiosity is the essence. [L, 16, focus group 1]

That’s true, just watching porn stimulates a wish for sexual relations. [...] When you keep watching more and more, you want to try it in reality, you know when it seizes your brain. [B, 16, focus group 2]

Voros (2009) maintains that there still isn't a clear answer about possible pornography addiction, but the threat of addiction grows when pornography is not perceived as harmful and affecting the viewer. The schoolboys participating in the research reservedly evaluated the need to use online pornography as addiction.

To be dependent on porn to such an extent ... well, maybe ... sometimes it's difficult when you don't watch once a week just out of curiosity. [E, 16, focus group 3]

It's like an alcoholic, they show that he is an alcoholic but he doesn't admit to it. Though there are exceptions, still he can't stop doing that, he needs help from outside. [L, 16, focus group 1]

Stage 3. Constructing an educational response to pornography

In the first two parts of the research the schoolboys attempted to disclose the circumstances of an encounter with online pornography as well as the threats arising from this. The third stage involved gathering schoolboys' ideas on ways of preventing or reducing harms that they had identified as occurring through online pornography. The research participants stressed the necessity of discussing this openly, because the lack of a discussion led to teenagers searching for information through their own channels, which often included online pornography. They believed that preventive means should be in line with teenagers' own expectations and that information in writing should be avoided.

There still are classes of sexual education, but the information there is spilled out like it would be read from a textbook, the teacher says that she has done her job and it's our own trouble now or something like 'if anyone is interested in something, read some books' – that's how you find it on the internet (laughter). [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

A serious lesson would be necessary or maybe a few, so that you feel that it's serious and not just for the hell of it [...] so it would be much more interesting to talk to the girls because now you feel like you don't know who you are. [R, 17, focus group 2]

To demonstrate a video about communication with a girl or even sexual intercourse and to show it to the older ones, maybe 16. Everyone has seen it anyway; it's only that they don't speak about it (laughter). [P, 16, focus group 2]

Tasks and discussions were indicated by the boys as relevant means of focussing attention in the classroom. A friendly environment that would include peers was also mentioned, as was the presence of a social pedagogue or an educator as activity coordinators.

Maybe not so much with the teenagers or parents, but with a specialist it would make you feel more confident, because he knows more, like here today. [L, 16, focus group 1]

They should make groups so maybe it would be easier to talk, because it's impossible with so many people. [D, 17, focus group 1]

The class could gather, discuss it, reach common decisions, the information would sink into the mind, people would think. [P, 16, focus group 2]

The teenagers named so called 'smart alecks' – schoolboys who crave attention and make fun of the discussion on this sensible topic – as obstructing discussions of online pornography experiences. The research participants recommended excluding them from the group.

Some "smart alecks" laughed everything off, so they were removed from the class and everyone could watch it with interest and attention. [L, 16, focus group 1]

People should be educated properly, not just that children learn from the older ones, not so much older, just a couple of years older experts (laughter) and do all kinds of crap themselves. [N, 17, focus group 2]

The research participants emphasized ways of preventing pornography addiction together with additional information, which needed to be delivered during sex education classes.

How to use safety means and that there is such a thing as addiction and that you need to turn to specialists or parents if you can't stop watching porn every day. [L, 16, focus group 1]

It would be enough to talk about it at the beginning, but if there is pornography addiction you might need specialists. [M, 17, focus group 1]

It would be the best to go to psychologists if the addiction is strong. [L, 16, focus group 1]

A special electronic programme used by parents and regulating the permeability of the searched websites was named as a means of safeguarding a young person from online pornography.

There are such means like computer nanny that block pornographic websites, you can't reach those filthy ones. [L, 16, focus group 1]

The schoolboys maintained that most parents are conscious of the threats connected with online pornography. Schoolboys stressed the necessity to help parents realize that they need to talk more openly about the things that bother their children. The participants said that they would be willing to communicate with their parents about sensitive topics, but they were waiting for their parents' initiative.

Where to look for information? Not all even know about the threats, they know it's bad, but they don't know how bad it is. [P, 16, focus group 2]

I don't know, I really don't know, maybe just talk openly and show that you trust your child and you are not superior by hiding something, explain everything, say that it's bad what's going on, that there are bad things. [Ž, 16, focus group 3]

Visual aids could be helpful for parents if they don't know how to approach it, it would have worked with my parents or maybe it will still work. They buy it, watch it with their child, explain, familiarize. [B, 16, focus group 2]

The young people thought it was necessary to reduce the incompatibility of information supplied by parents and teachers with their own experience. This was disconcerting for the research participants, who as a result said they then chose to communicate with their peers instead, although the latter did not understand the nuances of the relationships under discussion.

Parents and teachers as well as educators should talk among themselves, because sometimes you can see that they are talking about different things and it gets boring, so you stay with yourself or you listen to what your pals are saying. [V, 16, focus group 3]

In the circle of friends you normally talk about everything, you know. [K, 17, focus group 3]

In the course of their discussion, the schoolboys came to the conclusion that girls cannot be treated as shown in online pornography.

I think that if you want to have a girlfriend, you have to act opposite to what is shown in pornography. [N, 17, focus group 2]

And I think that if you interacted with a girl like in pornography you would hardly have a girlfriend. [R, 17, focus group 2]

Feedback and respondent validation (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002) of the researcher's interpretations were given during group reflection at the end of each focus group, which confirmed participants' increased critical consciousness of online pornography.

Earlier there was a lack of talking about pornography itself, maybe there was not so much of it earlier, but still. [R, 17, focus group 2]

Everything exists, but people don't talk, this debauchery, no normal intercourse. [B, 16, focus group 2]

I liked it because I seem to have learned more than I used to think before, I didn't think much but... It's hard to say now, but maybe I really think more. [K, 17, focus group 3]

Conclusions: Some considerations for social pedagogy

We have seen that online pornography, intrinsically victimizing and harmful, is practically endemic worldwide and accessible for all. Teenage boys are highly involved in use of online pornography and are particularly sensitive to the threats and harms of online pornography. The study presented in this paper describes the case of one typical Lithuanian school. However, research by Livingstone and Haddon (2009) suggests that seeing online pornography poses a fairly similar risk across all European countries and is ranked as the second most common risk online. They further identify 'a positive correlation between use and risk: Northern European countries tend to be "high use, high risk"; Southern European countries tend to be "low use, low risk"; and Eastern European countries tend to be "new use, new risk"' (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, p. 1). This suggests that watching online pornography is current amongst schoolboys in most countries. The development of evidence-based policy for awareness-raising and media literacy are firmly recommended by the authors of the research (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009).

Echoing Glenn (2007), we dissociate critical consciousness from awareness-raising. Critical consciousness describes a bottom-up process 'wherein students' own experience and lifeworlds become central, and wherein students and educators can, together, challenge the seeming "naturalness" and inevitability of oppressed subjectivities and oppressive circumstances, [whereas awareness-raising] assumes that educators can (and ought to) transmit preselected knowledge to students, "depositing" it into passive student-receptacles [in a] top-down process' (Glenn, 2007, pp. 757-8). The research presented in this paper aimed to build critical consciousness in schoolboy online pornography users, by creating student-centered dialogue to recognize the victimizing content of online pornography and to cope with it.

The reflection or analysis of online pornography usage does not form a part of the formal education content and is not included in formal teaching programmes in schools. Still it can be inferred that online pornography is used on a large scale, particularly among teenage boys who are beginning to get intensively interested in sexual relations. It can be assumed that usage of online pornography constitutes a considerable part of informal education. Obviously the formal education system should not ignore the harmful nature of the online pornography.

Dialogue and reflection are the means of education that create the preconditions not only for expression and indication of personal experiences and emotions, but also for listening to the experiences and emotions of others, as well as for a discussion of them among peers or together with a social worker or educator. Participatory action research is of an educational character as the present experiences are disclosed and participants' consciousness is developed by means of dialogue and reflection in the research process. The research results demonstrated that schoolboys are able through discussion to recognize possible threats and indicate potential preventive means when discussing their experiences with online pornography. Indicating experiences in the group, a possibility to express oneself, hearing others, and engaging in dialogue create organizational measures for increasing and expanding personal understandings of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as objectivization of personal experiences in connection to this phenomenon. The male teenagers participating in the research indicated that the dialogue and reflection method employed in the research should be extrapolated to other situations and is appropriate for developing teenagers' critical consciousness vis-à-vis online pornography.

Our findings suggest that online pornography should not be left to young people's self-education because of its harmful and victimizing character.

A social pedagogue or school social worker, having gained the teenagers' trust, has to play an important part in this process by initiating discussion groups on sensitive topics such as online pornography. According to Knudsen (2010), the possibility of exploring gender issues depends on the teacher's gender awareness. There are many urgent issues that have to be named, discussed and reflected in peer and adult groups in order to enhance the critical consciousness of teenagers in relation to ambiguous and sensitive social phenomena. It is obvious that the understanding of teenagers and adults about youth interests, experiences and expectations can be increased as adults often have no idea what children are interested in and what relations they are involved in. It is recommended that discussion clubs and groups in schools should be initiated where teenagers of different age – alone or together with social pedagogues or school social workers and/or parents – could have a dialogue about questions of concern, create precedents of openness and trust and, respectfully, develop critical consciousness towards ambiguous phenomena of the present day by elaborating the culture of reflection and collegial communication.

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