



The Ethics of Including Pornography Literacy in Sex Education of Secondary School

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Abstract. The relationship between the utilization of pornography and the implementation of sex education in schools is a convoluted and contested issue that involves various stakeholders. Studies indicate that, despite the prohibition of pornography sales to individuals under the age of 18 in Australia, there is a prevalent trend among the youth who consistently engage with such material [22][17]. The deleterious and stereotypical material in pornography, which is widely accessible online, has the potential to inflict damage upon adolescents. Adopting a feminist pragmatic ethical perspective, the article advocates for the incorporation of both pornographic literacy and feminist pornography into sex education, asserting its potential benefits. This stance aligns with the World Health Organization's endorsement of comprehensive sex education as a method to foster healthier interpersonal relationships and mitigate harm.

Keywords: Pornography Literacy, sex education, secondary school,

1 Introduction

This manuscript's primary objective is to scrutinize the ethical implications of incorporating pornography literacy into sexual education syllabi for high school learners in developed countries such as Australia. Through the comprehensive evaluation of pertinent literature and data, a critique of pro and con arguments surrounding this practice, and a reflection upon feminist pragmatic theory, it is deduced that the pedagogy of porn literacy is ethically justifiable and pragmatically attainable, given certain preconditions and prerequisites are met.

In this scholarly composition, I initially position the matter of pornography within the context of student sex education as a gender-centric issue, subsequently linking it to theoretical and practical interpretations of "family". Subsequently, I delve into feminist pragmatic theory and feminist pornography before examining the ethical debate concerning the instruction of porn literacy in academic institutions. Lastly, I introduce a juxtaposition of perspectives and lines of argumentation to substantiate my ethical standpoint.

2 The Gender Issue of Youngsters' Pornography Consumption:

Pornography can be characterized as the explicit graphical or textual depiction of sexual conduct [15]. It serves as a potent medium for transmitting notions pertaining to sex, sexuality, relationships, gender roles and identities, as well as masculinity and femininity [22]. Like other media forms, pornography disseminates and aids in constructing broader societal norms, including harmful and restrictive sexist stereotypes. Indeed, a substantial portion of the currently available internet pornography exhibits a heteronormative male viewpoint, replete with male gazes and gender stereotypes [7]. This is substantiated by the observation that numerous tags associated with internet pornography are predicated upon the age, ethnicity, physical appearance, profession, and clothing of the female performers (e.g., Asia, swimsuit, nurse, thin, blond)[10][18]. Even though these statistics and studies are a decade old or so, they maintain their relevance and precision to the present day. Any contemporary exploration of a pornography site will reveal the persistence of these categorizations or the emergence of new labels targeting women as shown in Fig 1.

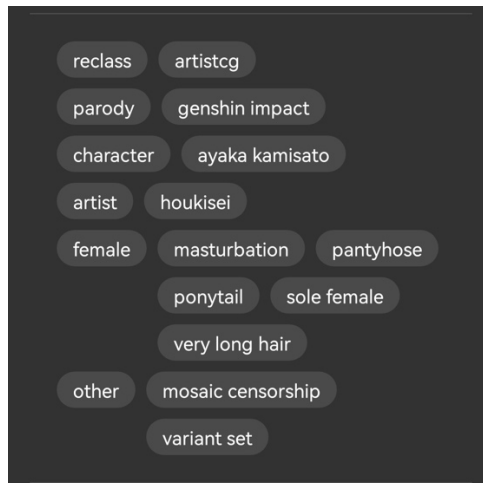


Fig. 1. Tags in a Pornography website [8]

Even more alarming than the propagation of detrimental gender norms and male-centrism is the pervasive dissemination of misinformation pertaining to sexual conduct and assault within pornographic content. Previous empirical investigations have illuminated that approximately 90% of pornographic media depict non-consensual and violent themes upon analyzing commercially available pornography, which include acts such as slapping, hair pulling, and verbal aggression. It is typically women who are portrayed as victims of such assaults [3]. Most disturbing are depictions of rape, child pornography, and 'revenge porn'—the unauthorized distribution of sexually explicit images—which are readily accessible on the internet [5].

With the rapid development and ubiquity of the internet, the youth has increasingly easy access to pornographic content. Research by Crabbe [7] disclosed that while 90% of males had engaged with pornographic material online, this was true for three-fifths of females as well. In a survey of 2000 respondents of the same age group, over 56% of young men reported regular exposure to pornographic content. By contrast, only 15% of young women claimed to engage with it on a weekly basis[21]. On average, males were introduced to pornography at the age of 13, whereas for females, this occurred at around 16, coinciding with their entry into secondary school in Australia [22].

The widespread and intense exposure to such detrimental pornographic content has engendered significant levels of adolescent perplexity about sex, the human body, and pleasure. It has also reinforced gendered stereotypes, which can precipitate severe issues such as maladaptive sexual behaviours, culturally learned violence against women, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate underage imagery [16][22][6]. Young individuals, specifically young women, face the risk of physical and mental health harm due to the misconceptions learned from unrestricted access to pornographic media.

To safeguard young individuals from these repercussions, educators and researchers have conceptualized and developed the notion of porn literacy [23]. Porn literacy, a subset of media literacy, aspires to enhance viewer awareness of the potential influence of pornography on their emotions and perspectives. Essentially, it is a component of sex education curriculum that cultivates a critical viewpoint towards pornography among students. Authentic programs designed to augment people's comprehension of pornography should encourage independent thought and decision-making amongst its participants [23].

3 Sex Education and Family

Unquestionably, families play a significant role in the sexual education of students[9]. A family is typically conceptualized as a kinship unit, comprising individuals bound together through blood ties, matrimonial bonds, adoption, or other personal connections [1]. For the purposes of this article, 'family' refers to the students and their dependents. Under Australian family law, parents bear the responsibility for their children's upbringing. This encompasses safeguarding the child from harm, provision of sustenance, clothing, and shelter, financial support, ensuring security, supervision, and control, as well as access to healthcare and education [22]. As highlighted in the preceding section, given the current era of information overload, the popularization and education of porn literacy emerge as a pressing need for today's generation of teenagers. Consequently, sexual education and porn literacy form part of the broader ambit of children's education and protection, aligning naturally with familial responsibilities.

According to the Department of Education of the Australian Government [26], sexual education programs yield the most success when there is a collaborative effort between parents and schools. The responsibility of providing sex education to children should be shouldered jointly by educational institutions and families. Families can provide a familial viewpoint and emotional support to children who are navigating exposure to sex education and pornography in academic settings. Indeed, the Australian

government [13] has equipped parents with tools and resources to facilitate teaching their children about sexual health, and has even provided specific support for parents identifying as LGBTQ. As society has progressed, sex education has transitioned from an emphasis on courtly manners and purity in the early 20th century, to a concentration on respect and abstinence towards the century's close, and now towards rigorous, empirical pedagogical resources in the public sphere [11].

4 Feminist Pragmatic Ethical Lens and Pornographies:

The preceding discussion highlights the pitfalls of adolescents accessing pornography independently and the imperative for intervention from both schools and parents. It may seem more straightforward to impose an outright ban on youth accessing internet pornography than to undertake the demanding task of facilitating education and guidance from schools and parents. Indeed, in Australia, the display or sale of pornographic material to minors is prohibited [17]. However, despite government attempts to restrict access to pornography for those under 18, such measures have proven largely ineffective [7]. Furthermore, from the perspective of feminist pragmatic theory, adopting an extreme stance to completely prohibit something is deemed unethical.

Unlike other rule-based ethical theories, feminist pragmatic ethics challenges traditional, logical, and objectivist masculine thought and gives way to alternative moral virtues by focusing on individual and community development within broader social contexts [14]. It underscores the necessity to rectify erroneous polarities and binaries as these frequently lead to one side derogating the other [25].

Thus, in this context, imposing a blanket ban on all pornography for underage students is unethical. Instead, feminist pragmatic ethics questions the relationship between pornography and harm, and the influence of violent pornographic content on teenagers' behavior, rather than adopting an extreme stance towards pornography [14]. It would be an oversimplification to assert that all gender stereotypes and sexual assaults originate from pornography[20]. Contrarily, feminist-pragmatic ethics offers a springboard for investigating potential links between pornography and harm, and lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of the behavioral impacts of violent pornography [14]. The cornerstone of ethics could be the pragmatic notion that humans are social beings whose actions reflect their attitudes towards others. In this case, violent pornographic content induces harm as it promotes skewed perceptions about appropriate treatment of others, which may lead to harmful and unwanted behavior in certain circumstances [14].

In this context, Porn Literacy could serve a vital role in aiding students to discern harmful content and understand how to perceive dating and sexual behaviors positively, thus presenting an ethical choice for students and their families[21] [23].

Nevertheless, it's crucial not to stigmatize pornographic material in its entirety. Feminist pornography carves out space for new perspectives to be heard [24]. As a medium of self-expression for women, it underscores the importance of consent in sexual encounters, shifting focus from sexual objects to sexual subjects actively participating in

sexual acts. The evolving dialogues within these narratives embody this paradigm shift [24].

While feminist pornography and porn literacy represent two distinct concepts, they are closely intertwined in their mutual commitment to propagating positive, egalitarian, and inclusive ideas about sex. Hence, I posit that feminist pornography could be integrated into the pedagogical approach of porn literacy. Consumption of feminist pornography, respectful and inclusive in nature and decoupling pornography from violent behavior, is also ethical through the lens of feminist pragmatism, thus rendering it an ethical choice for teenagers engaging with pornography.

Feminist pornography, as a more ethically sound approach to porn consumption, facilitates the inclusion of pornography and porn literacy within the sexual education curriculum. As per the World Health Organization (WHO) [27], imparting a wide-ranging sex education to students has been shown to mitigate physical and sexual aggression, including dating and relationship violence, and homophobic bullying. This positive impact has been observed across nations with diverse economic strata. Further, curriculums demonstrate greater efficacy when they employ varied teaching methods, including videos, activities, posters, infographics, and guided discussions [27]. Thus, enriching the current curriculum with pedagogical elements of porn literacy could prove beneficial for students' comprehension of sexuality.

5 Issues and debates

Indeed, incorporating porn literacy into school curricula is a significant decision with widespread implications. The diverse demographic fabric of Australia, a multicultural country, complicates this further [19]. It's also important to remember the right to religious freedom, and individuals hailing from more traditional backgrounds might harbor different views on porn literacy [13]. Furthermore, even ethically sound porn literacy can cause stress and discomfort to some students, such as those who've experienced sexual abuse and consequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder [12]. In this light, introducing pornography in schools may be deemed unethical from a feminist care ethics perspective, which prioritizes relationships and emotions and takes into account diverse viewpoints shaped by factors like religion, class, education level, and ethnicity [4]

There is no definitive right or wrong approach to implementing porn literacy in schools, and this paper intends to further this discussion from a pragmatic standpoint. Aligned with the feminist pragmatic theory, this stance is open to contrasting theories and ideas. It acknowledges and even encourages divergent perspectives and values while retaining the right to scrutinize them critically [14]. Therefore, the argument put forth by care ethics is given due consideration. Accordingly, potential adjustments can be made to make porn literacy more ethical in a school setting.

As Rothman [23] successfully demonstrated, it's essential to engage parents before implementing the program. Parents are encouraged to review the curriculum before their children's participation. It's also crucial to provide evidence assuring that the program does not motivate unexposed students to explore pornography, a fact that can

reassure parents [23] In Rothman's program, parents expressed gratitude for the porn literacy initiative as they acknowledged its necessity but were reluctant to broach the topic themselves. For children dealing with PTSD, parents should have the option to exclude their child from the porn literacy program, and students should have the right to opt-out at any point. Through such measures, porn literacy education can be made more ethical and sensitive to varying personal backgrounds and circumstances.

6 Conclusion

This scholarly exploration utilizes the perspective of Feminist Pragmatic Ethics to delve into the moral complexities surrounding the instruction of porn literacy within secondary schools in developed nations. Acknowledging the digital landscape's permeability, which provides young individuals unrestricted access to online pornographic material, it appears impractical and ethically questionable to impose an absolute prohibition on pornography. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on equipping students with critical comprehension and responsible perspectives towards pornography and gender stereotypes. This can be achieved through education offered by schools and parents, advocating for the discerning consumption of regulated, impartial feminist pornography, as opposed to unsupervised online engagement, which can inadvertently propagate sexual misconceptions.

The proposition of integrating discussions around pornography and endorsing the viewing of feminist pornography within a school setting might encounter resistance from certain factions. However, Albury [2] postulates the necessity of this discourse within the realm of sex education, underscoring its vital role in fostering cultural transformation and enhancing comprehension of sexuality. Amidst the internet era, it becomes essential for the emerging generation of students to cultivate an expansive understanding and perspective towards gender and sexuality, thereby breaking free from the confines of biases and misinformation.

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