

13 Teaching about pornography

A historical perspective on educational resources

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Introduction

In Norway, the number of youths who have watched pornography on the internet has increased in recent years. In 2020, almost 50% of youths between ages of 13 and 18 have watched online pornography, and most of these had been exposed to pornographic images before they were 13 years old (Medietilsynet, 2020). Such numbers and the lack of digital regulations have raised concern and have led educators to focus on how the school's sexuality education can address pornography as a topic. Pornography is often characterized as being explicit, affronting, and transgressing norms. This makes it a tricky topic for educators – especially regarding the development and use of educational resources. However, pornography is not a new topic in Norwegian sex education, and I want to place today's discussion on education and pornography in a historical perspective. How have educators dealt with pornography as a topic in sex education? What dilemmas might they meet in developing and using educational materials for teaching about pornography?

I will discuss two cases. The first is from the 1980s when pornography was introduced as a topic in Norwegian school sex education. The sources I use are the first “official” teacher's manual on sex education that included a thorough chapter on pornography (Egeland & Skarstein, 1984), newspaper material regarding a case where a teacher had displayed pornographic material in order to discuss pornography critically, and archival material from a governmental committee on learning materials on pornography (Undervisning om pornografi, 1986). I will then discuss a contemporary case: in 2021, Jeanette K. Frøvik and Ragnhild D. Torstensen, activists in the organization *Light Up* in Norway, authored a book called *Pornopratt*, a guidebook for teachers and parents on how to talk about pornography with children and youths. Together with educational researcher Beate Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, they have also written a chapter on pornography and critical thinking in a book for educators on how to approach and teach controversial topics (Eriksen et al., 2021). The book and the chapter are used to discuss today's opportunities and dilemmas in teaching about pornography.

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Pornography was introduced as a topic in Norwegian school sex education in the early 1980s, and I will look at the background for this introduction, how the subject was approached in a sex education guide for teachers, and a governmental initiative to create educational material on pornography in the mid-1980s. This serves as a point of departure for presenting and discussing dilemmas which educators might encounter in developing and using educational resources to teach about pornography. I then bring in the contemporary case that especially highlights today's digital society and its impact on youths and pornography. By comparing the cases and discussing the problems of finding and developing "appropriate" resources for such teaching, questions of why and how the school can approach pornography are raised. Although rapid change and generational differences are often highlighted in debates on pornography, youths, and education, I emphasize two continuities: (1) the problem of representation – especially regarding visual educational media, and (2) the framing of the youth as vulnerable and in need of protection in discourses on pornography and education.

Pornography, education, and youths

In research on pornography and sexuality education, one may make a distinction between the use of pornography to learn about sexuality and teaching about pornography (Albury, 2014, p. 173). The first is clearly not discussed here, as this will primarily address adults and is not likely to be a part of state-sponsored sexuality education. Teaching about pornography may however be integrated into comprehensive sexuality education.

It is difficult to give an agreed, clear, and consistent definition of pornography or sexually explicit material (SEM) (Litsou et al., 2021). A broad definition is that pornography or SEM is "seen as any kind of material intended to create or enhance sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient and at the same time containing explicit exposure and/or descriptions of genitals and sexual acts" (Hald & Malmuth in Litsou et al., 2021, p. 244). The material is produced with the purpose of being exciting. McNair (2002) emphasizes how pornography's seductive power relies on its representation of "the secrets of private sexual desire in all their taboo-breaking, transgressive exoticism". Pornography, in this sense, is "a violation of public morality and taste – an affront to community standards in the sphere of sexual representation, whatever that may be" (p. 42).

The definitions of pornography as intentionally arousing, explicit, and affronting hint at some of the challenges one may meet in teaching about it. The educator cannot display SEM produced with the purpose of being exciting, and s/he cannot present "a violation of public morality and taste" to young students. However, the large number of youths who have encountered online pornography has led educators to discuss questions of whether and how pornography may be handled as a topic in sexuality education (Goldstein, 2020,

p. 59). It is often considered difficult and uncomfortable for teachers to teach about pornography, and it has been described as a controversial and sensitive topic (Eriksen et al., 2021). Thus, “a number of creatively ‘indirect’ strategies have been adopted by adults aiming to deliver porn education to young people, in the context of broader sex and relationships education programs” (Albury, 2014, p. 177).

We learn about sex in different ways, and sexual images can provide learning and knowledge – however, both sexuality and learning are complex phenomena. What we find attractive, what arouse us, and what we think of as healthy and/or normal may be influenced by a multitude of different factors. It is linked to biology, our bodies, and feelings and is shaped by culture and society (see, for example, Pedersen et al., 2021; Weeks, 2000). Not only what we learn but also what we find affronting, triggering, and arousing will of course vary, and different forms of pornography may trigger secret (and sometimes shameful) desires and fantasies in the viewer. Pornography is often offensive and can also – and often simultaneously – have emotional and bodily effects such as shame and arousal. Sex educators often need to draw a strict line between pornography and sex education. Learning materials that are applied for sex education should not be considered arousing or triggering emotions, although both sex education material and pornography are produced in historical settings and can be interpreted in very different ways by a variety of receivers in differing contexts. In her study on a “delicate” subject, namely sex education films, Björklund (2012) refers to scholars who have problematized the complex relationship between science (that can be used to legitimize sex education) and pornography. Often seen as opposites, pornography’s pursuit of visibility links it to “a scientific will-to-knowledge as it seeks to unveil the truth of sexual pleasure” (pp. 24–25), and the genre has therefore also been regarded in light of Foucault’s (1976) *scientia sexualis*. Baudrillard (1987) puts forward a critique of a culture obsessed with letting “everything be said, gathered, indexed and registered: this is how sex appears in pornography, but this is more generally the project of our whole culture (...)” (p. 21).

Ambiguities regarding the effect which educational materials might have on students seem to be a continuing issue in the discussions on sex education – and this is especially acute when it comes to teaching about pornography. Visual images, and especially moving images, may illustrate a phenomenon very clearly, but the effect it might have on the viewer may not be as intended. Moving images could perhaps also influence the viewer in a more thorough way than other media (Björklund, 2014, p. 246). This is linked to one of the earliest debates on sex education, namely the tension between the “desire to shape sexual activity and the fear of stimulating it, between the wish to enforce some form of sexuality and the dread of accidentally fostering others” (Carter, 2001, pp. 216–217). Sex education can often be described as an ambivalent endeavour – and this ambivalence is likely to be very present in teaching about pornography.

Not only the pornographic content but also the media technology and circulation of pornographic images and films have changed over the years. In the 1980s, the VHS (video home system) made porn films accessible to larger groups, and of course the internet has been crucial to the acceleration of the circulation of the pornography that is seen today. In recent years, pornographic films have become available and free of charge on streaming services such as Pornhub. The accessibility of pornographic images in today's digital society has raised concern, as pornography is often considered a sexual risk for youths that are online and seen as

... a powerful corrupting force that causes widespread and far-reaching threats such as risky sexual behaviour, poor mental health with reduced self-esteem and self-objectification, degraded peer relationship functioning, restricted choice of professional aspirations and increased sexual aggression
(Spišák, 2020, p. 1250)

Within such discourses of risks, we often find that children and youths are framed as formative, vulnerable, and in need of protection, and the school sex education hence has a protective function.

Not only pornography but also sexualized media content are often seen as threats to healthy sexual developments, although there are also studies (such as Spišák's) where the youths are framed as critical and capable of interpretation, and that might counter the discourse of vulnerability and risks (Albury, 2013; Egan & Hawkes, 2010). Spišák refers to scholars who emphasize critical skills and how youths interpret different forms of representation, including sexual representations. The impact of the media cannot be seen independently of the larger context, especially of the family (Buckingham and Bragg (2004) in Spišák, 2020, p. 1250). The impact of the media cannot be seen independently of the larger context, especially of the family (in Spišák, 2020, p. 1250). In Goldstein's (2020) study of undergraduate students, she criticizes models that are constructed in a manner where youths "come to the same porn in the same way". Often, we simultaneously find "a top-down model of education where the teacher passes their knowledge down to students, emphasizing 'correct' readings or interpretations of porn and its practices" (p. 61). In a study on girls and pornography, Spišák (2017) stresses how pornography has different functions: "as a site for satisfying curiosity, as an educational resource in terms of the information it provides on anatomy, sex, and sexual techniques, and as a pleasure technology that facilitates masturbation and sexual pleasure" (p. 370). This is in accordance with Goldstein's research (2020) which points to the different types of engagements with porn that very different types of youths may have. It is also supported by earlier research on Nordic teenagers, where pornography for many is seen as "an integrated part of everyday-life", and as a source of "knowledge, entertainment, pleasure, and sexual innovation" (Graugaard & Roien, 2007, pp. 314–315). Being a part of everyday life, many youths requested some

form of regulation and more communication between generations on the topic, and Graugaard and Roien emphasize how

... pornographic material seems to present educators with a unique chance to study and debate crucial themes related to sexuality, body, gender, intimacy, love, social interaction, and societal development – and to establish an educational situation that places the youngster as an “expert”, while at the same time accommodating his or her questions, doubts and insecurities (pp. 314–315).

However, they also stress the challenges educators consequently often meet – both ethical and didactical. In the next two sections of the chapter, I bring forth two cases to illustrate how educators have approached these issues.

1980s: Introducing teaching about pornography – And a failed attempt

In Norway, broader sex and relationship education programs were introduced into schools in the 1970s, when a new national curriculum was implemented. Historians of education have described the curriculum as inspired by the anti-authoritarian generation of 1968 (Telhaug & Mediås, 2003, p. 220). Gender equality was highlighted, and the school sex education was thoroughly revised and became more like what we today call comprehensive sexuality education (see, for example, UNESCO, 2018).¹

In an international and historical context, the Nordic countries have been regarded as liberal and progressive when it comes to sexuality. This includes both sex education and SEM. In 1955, Sweden introduced compulsory sex education in schools, and the Swedish approach to sexuality education has been regarded as progressive in an international setting (Lennerhed, 1994). In 1967, Denmark received attention as the first country in the world to legalize pornography, followed by Sweden in 1971. Nonetheless, the image of Scandinavia as a region of sexual liberation may need to be nuanced, as Norway has had a more restrictive approach to both sex education and pornography than the neighbouring countries. However, there has been much exchange of ideas and materials over the borders, and the development in Sweden and Denmark had an impact on Norway (Nordberg, 2014).

In Norwegian school sex education, pornography did not receive much attention in the 1970s. The official teachers’ guide to sex and relationship education mentioned that pornography was not in accordance with the school’s Christian and humanist values. The guide stated that sexual relations should not be dominated by “impersonal consumer-relations”, which accordingly was often the case in pornography (Grunnskolerådet, 1975, pp. 62, 80). However, the rising feminist movement would bring pornography onto the agenda, and these discussions would influence the content and form of sex education. In

Norway, feminists representing the organization *Kvinnefronten*² received attention when they staged a protest by raiding porn shops and setting fire to the magazines on the streets outside (Hellesund, 2013, p. 94). By the end of the 1970s, the Norwegian joint action against pornography consisted of not only feminists but also Christian activists, conservatives, and other organizations joining forces in the grassroots movement *Fellesaksjonen mot pornografi og prostitusjon*³ (Korsvik, 2020). Prostitution and pornography were regarded as expressions of misogyny, and as a threat to gender equality and to values that the schools were to promote.

In the light of these changes, it is not surprising that the sex education material developed in the early 1980s included pornography as a topic. In a new teachers' guide to sex and relationship education, pornography was defined as sexual descriptions in which sexuality was detached from "a larger human context" (Finstad & Høigård, 1984, p. 298).⁴ Content analyses of pornography that could be bought in Scandinavia had disclosed that the material included descriptions such as

... promiscuity, group-sex, sexual intercourse between humans and animals, children exploited for sexuality, focus on urination and excrements, the body tied up in uncomfortable and tight suits of leather and rubber, tied up with ropes or chains, whipping, abuse with sharp objects, humiliation of women, naziporn, abnormality-porn....

(Finstad & Høigård, 1984, p. 298)⁵

In the teachers' guide, children and youths are represented as insecure, as "teenagers with faltering values and a limited perception of reality", and at a developmental stage where pornography could be dangerous (Egeland & Skarstein, 1984, pp. 87–88).

Although pornography was included in this guide for teachers, the need for more thorough educational material would soon be addressed, especially after a delicate case reached the newspaper headlines.

In the mid-1980s, at an upper secondary school in Kvæfjord in Northern Norway, porn magazines had been brought into the classroom with the intention of critically discussing pornography (*Undervisning om pornografi*, 1986). The incident received public attention, and although this initiative to teach on the topic was welcomed by some anti-porn activists, the use of porn magazines as educational media was largely disapproved.⁶ The government not only referred to this as a "very unsuccessful" way to teach but also acknowledged the need for educational resources to make it possible to teach about pornography without exposing the students to pornographic content. The Ministry of Education appointed an interdisciplinary committee with the intention of developing educational resources on pornography. It was important to develop a critical attitude towards pornography and make the students capable of revealing how the porn industry abused women and children (*Undervisning om pornografi*, 1986). The task was challenging, not least as pornography

consisted of visual images. How could one teach about a problematic and negative phenomenon without representations of the phenomenon?

Norwegian schools were (and are) largely state-governed. The state's involvement and "sanctioning" of sex education in schools has made it possible to reach many adolescents with the necessary teaching. However, if the teaching was problematic in any way, it could easily lead to political debate (Nordberg, 2014). In this period, textbooks needed authorization by the governmental Committee for Textbook approval (Bratholm, 2001). Teachers' guides and other educational resources did not need such approval, but the material developed by governmental bodies would have an "official status". This was a dilemma for the working group, who expressed doubts about their own endeavours.

The special character of this subject makes it, in our opinion, difficult, or impossible, for a governmental body to produce learning material for the students. There is a great danger that it will either become too careful and ornamental to capture the interest of the students, or so outspoken that it will be forbidden in large parts of the country.

(Undervisning om pornografi, 1986)

The group reached the conclusion that it was not possible to make educational material on the subject directed at *students*, but recommended that *teachers* needed guidance, and they made a sketch for a teacher's guide. This was outlined as a collection of ideas on how teachers could work with attitudes against pornography in different school subjects. The group made a direct link to the schools' work on gender equality, as pornography was "only the top layer of the iceberg of misogyny and reification that are incorporated in the culture" (Undervisning om pornografi, 1986). Although the teachers had to be informed on what was considered "grocery-porn", the pictures that they planned to print in the educational resource should only be read by the teachers, and not the students.

Although it was considered easier to develop material directed at the teachers, this initiative was also interrupted. The expert body of the ministry did not applaud the work and recommended that such teaching could rather be integrated into other subjects and teaching. There were parallels with education on narcotics, which in a similar vein was something almost everyone agreed upon as being bad for the students. To prevent the use of narcotics, it was not considered efficient to show the drugs and inform students about the negative consequences. Instead, an indirect approach, where the students practised making independent choices and were trained in decision-making, was emphasized. To guide youths away from the spell of pornography, the teachers had to work on their attitudes – information itself was not enough. (In the case of pornography, it was also very difficult to *present* the information – and hence this was maybe also a more *convenient* approach for the bewildered educators.)

There was an agreement among those involved in this work that pornography was harmful to youths. The comparison with narcotics is typical in this regard. Although the group did not manage to produce the material, there were some possibilities for teachers who wanted to discuss pornography in the classroom. As mentioned, the teachers' guide included a chapter on the subject, and the organization *Fellesaksjonen mot pornografi og prostitusjon* had developed material used in study-groups and workshops throughout the country. The organization had also been represented in the governmental working group. The role of NGOs and activists in raising the issue of pornography in sex education, and in developing educational material, is still important in teaching about pornography. I will now turn to a contemporary approach about how teachers can include pornography in sexuality education.

A contemporary case

Sex education has been a field where different organizations and activists have played a large role, and this is also the case when we look at pornography as a topic in such education. In the 1980s, conservatives and feminists joined forces in the fight against both pornography and prostitution, and the organization *Fellesaksjonen* was both a driving force for raising the issue in educational policy and in developing courses and educational materials on the subject. Organizations and activists also play a role in today's teaching about pornography. *Pornopratt* (2021) is a manual on how grown-ups (teachers, parents) can talk about porn with children and youths. The authors, Jeanette K. Frøvik and Ragnhild D. Torstensen, are activists in the organization *Light Up* in Norway, an international organization that works against pornography and trafficking. In their work, they also refer to work on pornography developed by the *Save the Children* organization (Berggrav, 2020). To activists, the school can be an important arena where one reaches many children and youths in what is commonly regarded as formative and vulnerable stages of life. Together with educational researcher Beate Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, Frøvik and Torstensen have also authored a chapter on how educators can teach about critical thinking and pornography as a so-called controversial issue (Frøvik et al., 2021).

In *Pornopratt*, Frøvik and Torstensen (2021) not only offer advice on how grown-ups and children can talk about pornography, but they also criticize the schools for not being up to date and not taking seriously how pornography has become a part of many children's and youths' daily lives. The "great values of the Education Act" do not comply with a situation where children can "freely consume dehumanizing porn and depictions of sexual violence in the classroom, in the school yard or at their homes all over the country. The lack of education about pornography does not make the situation any better" (p. 44). The rhetoric has similarities to that of the 1980s activists and educators, when activists also raised feminist values and warned against trafficking

and prostitution, as well as pointing out links between prostitution and the porn industry (Hellesund, 2013; Korsvik, 2020). Today, human rights are also called upon by the activists. Pornography is framed as potentially harmful for youths, and it is seen as important to work on developing a critical attitude toward pornography – hence, the educational framework of critical thinking is emphasized in the contemporary approach.

Digital technology is an important context for contemporary attempts to raise pornography on the educational agenda. Both pornography itself and the use of learning materials have changed because of new technology, and it is a paradox that it seems difficult to use digital resources to teach on a topic that has both been shaped by and, not least, become more pressing due to our digital age. Examples from the huge amount of pornographic visual media accessible to children and youths in today's digital society cannot be used in a school setting. When Frøvik et al. (2021) discuss the use of educational resources in such teaching, they state that pornographic material can of course not be put on display for children, and that this will be considered a criminal offence according to Norwegian criminal law (p. 123). They rather recommend using *fiction* as an educational resource in teaching about pornography. They refer to Nussbaum's concept of *narrative imagination* – to take the position of the other and relate to the other's feelings and needs (Nussbaum, 2006 in Frøvik et al., 2021, p. 123). They then show how educators can use a Norwegian picture book on the topic of pornography, children's book author Gro Dahle's *Sesam Sesam* (2017), in this regard. It is an explicit book, and they argue that it is suitable for lower and upper secondary school, as most teenagers will already then have been exposed to pornographic images and will be able to reflect critically on the book's topic. Frøvik et al. describe how *Sesam Sesam*'s main character's feelings when he watches pornography are characterized by not only a tension between good and normal sexual feelings but also a feeling of discomfort. Frøvik et al. argue in favour of the critical teacher who knows that it is important that the students regard such feelings as part of many people's sexuality. However, after recognizing this, the teacher can turn to critical thinking and discuss questions regarding human trafficking, violence, and human rights (pp. 125–127).

The use of pornography is intimately linked to and may have concrete effects on bodies. It might be arousing, it might be repulsive – and often these feelings appear simultaneously, making it a conflicting experience. How pornography triggers sexual feelings and conflicting emotions can be of concern to educators.

The students can experience feelings of shame after seeing porn, and maybe because they like to watch porn. It is therefore important that the teacher create a bridge between the students' emotional life and the teaching such as the students do not close themselves for conversation. This entails to recognize the range of feelings that might evolve in

meeting pornography – both good feelings, such as excitement and lust, and less good feelings linked to discomfort and guilt over seeing porn.
(Frøvik et al., 2021, p. 123)

Frøvik et al. (2021) emphasize that it is adults who are responsible for not letting children get access to pornography and refer to the criminal law of Norway. If the teacher emphasizes adults' responsibility in this regard, "the teachers might help the students in processing feelings linked to shame and guilt", according to the authors (p. 123).

Sex education is a means for shaping sexual subjects, and pornography may interfere in this process, as it often contradicts the values and norms educators want to strengthen. Hence, teaching about pornography will often include strategies for criticizing and revealing the porn industry and its (lack of) values. There are many challenges for teachers. On the one hand, they are supposed to frame sexuality as healthy and not evoke shame for watching pornography in the students. On the other hand, they are supposed to teach the students how pornography is a violation of human rights, and that they need to be critical of the industry.

It is an art of balance for you as a teacher to create room for discussion on pornography without covering the subject with shame and simultaneously making the students' practice critical skills. On the other hand, shame is not necessarily negative and sometimes it can be an ethical guide telling one that what one is watching is not in accordance with human dignity and human rights.

(Frøvik et al., 2021, p. 112)

One is tempted to ask whether it is possible to teach about pornography in a way that is critical and that promotes human rights and develops the students' critical skills, while simultaneously not producing (some types of) shame in youths who consume pornography in their daily lives. Maybe it is not only an "art of balance" for the individual teacher but rather an example of the ambivalences that surround sexuality, education, and pornography in our culture.

Ongoing ambivalences?

In both the 1980s and today, organizations and activists have played a role in promoting and developing education about pornography. Although there have been changes within the field of pornography, the problem of *representation* is still present. Another historical continuity concerns how the framing of the *vulnerable* and *formative* youth is the main point of reference in the discourse of risks that surrounds the field of pornography and sex education.

There are similarities between today and the 1980s. Pornographic pictures and movies cannot be used to exemplify, and the ambiguities regarding the

effect educational materials might have on students seem to be a continuing issue in the discussions on sex education – and this is especially acute when it comes to teaching about pornography. The dilemmas regarding developing and using learning materials, especially visual learning materials, on pornography are linked to the assumed effects that technology and media might have, not only on the students' knowledge and values but also on their bodies and desires. The problems regarding representation seem to be especially acute within the discourse of risks that surrounds the field of pornography, youths, and education.

When pornographic material was brought into the classroom setting in the mid-1980s, this caused quite a stir. Although the intention was to apply this in critical discussions of pornography, it became very clear that pornographic material could not be used as an educational resource. But how could one teach about a very visual subject without visual representations? In the teachers' guide, pornography is described as degrading and affronting, and there are short descriptions of the content. The teachers needed some knowledge on what contemporary porn looks like. Today's digital society has also had a tremendous impact on pornography, especially when it comes to accessibility and spread. To control what the youths may watch is even more difficult today than was the case when VHS technology made pornography accessible to larger groups. Now it can not only be watched discreetly in private homes but also discreetly at school premises. Pornography has once again become a more pressing topic to educators, and as the authors of *Pornoprækt* emphasize, parents and teachers cannot take their own experiences with pornography in adolescence as a framework for their conversations about pornography with today's youths, because contemporary (online) pornography is often more violent and extreme than what was displayed in magazines and pornographic films produced before the age of digitalization (Frøvik & Tørstensen, 2021).

It is a paradox that educational resources that are regarded as innovative and efficient in education in general can be very problematic in teaching about pornography. The potential of moving images as an effective educational resource has been emphasized for years. In a famous statement from 1913, Thomas A. Edison claimed that books would soon become "obsolete in the schools" and scholars would be "instructed through the eye". He predicted that the school system would be completely changed in ten years as it was "possible to touch every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture" (quoted in Diesen & Svoen, 2011, p. 55). While his technological optimism about an educational resource might seem naïve today, in the 1970s, simultaneously as progressive pedagogical approaches to teaching were developing, film as an educational resource achieved a breakthrough in Norwegian schools (Diesen & Svoen, 2011, p. 67). Today, digital resources and visual media play an important role in much education. At the same time, the choices teachers are left with are not manifold. In the digital age, many resources that in other areas would be regarded as effective and innovative are not considered appropriate in this teaching. Frøvik et al. (2021) recommend using children's picture books, although they do this with a caution.

In the failed attempt of the 1980s, the framing of the child or student was that of a vulnerable victim to disturbing images. It was clearly a discourse of risk, and the parallels to teaching about other dangerous phenomena, such as drugs, illustrate this. It was implied that pornography was potentially dangerous for the youth. However, the need for the individual to develop a critical attitude was also regarded as important, and hence the teacher needed to work on attitudes. Today, the large number of youths who use pornography and pornography's place within the digital (and sexualized) culture, which many youths are part of today, makes it difficult – and problematic – to dismiss pornography as harmful per se, and although curricula and research today often frame the youth or student as competent and with an ability to critical thinking, s/he is simultaneously seen as formative, vulnerable, and in need of protection. The contemporary case I have discussed emphasizes the students' potential as critical consumer – that through critical reflection on the porn industry they can use their consumer-power and work against pornography. Yet, does this imply that the youths are framed as individuals with agency? Today the Norwegian curricula emphasize critical skills, and this is a frame of reference in the contemporary example which highlights the students' potential for critical reflections. The assumption that students will respond with critical reflection to a critically based education on pornography might be optimistic. Historical studies have problematized the assumption that sex education as classroom knowledge will strongly influence the students, and that they will respond in a rational manner to the dissemination of sexual knowledge (Moran, 2000; Zimmerman, 2015). An education on pornography that manages to make distinctions between “good” and “bad” feelings of shame and that develops students' critical skills is probably very difficult to put into practice. Pornography is seductive and triggers emotions and feelings that might be subconscious, at odds with our self-image and our own values. Pornography might also serve very different functions for different people. In this area of uncertainties, educators have to develop and use materials that take this complexity into account. That is not to say that a critical approach should not be applauded, but perhaps we also should discuss the limits of teaching. Despite the changes within the fields of youth, pornography, and sexuality education, teachers are still mostly left with “indirect” approaches to teaching about this sensitive and controversial topic.

Notes

- 1 UNESCO and other organizations as well as educators today often use the term “sexuality education” to emphasize a broad understanding of the subject. Sex education has been used as a term for a long period, and in this chapter I use both terms since some of the sources are contemporary and others were written at a time when sex education was a common name for teaching.
- 2 English translation: Women's Front.
- 3 English translation: Joint Action against Pornography and Prostitution.
- 4 The presentation of the 1980s case is based on the same sources that I used in *Ansvarlig seksualitet* (Nordberg, 2014).

- 5 All quotes from the source-material are translated from Norwegian to English by the author.
- 6 *Fellesaksjonen mot pornografi og prostitusjon* supported the teacher and school for dealing with an important yet difficult theme (Harstad tidende, 1985b, p. 2) and the school accused the media of making a “scandal” out of the teaching (Harstad tidende, 1985a, p. 3). The incident led to letters to the editors in both local and national newspapers concerning moral decay in schools and society (Aftenposten, 1985; Nordlys, 1985, p. 5).

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