

I am not alone – we are *all* alone: Using masturbation as an ethnographic method in research on *shota* subculture in Japan

Qualitative Research
2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–10
© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/14687941221096600

journals.sagepub.com/home/qrj



Karl Andersson 

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Abstract

I wanted to understand how my research participants experience sexual pleasure when reading *shota*, a Japanese genre of self-published erotic comics that features young boy characters. I therefore started reading the comics in the same way as my research participants had told me that they did it: while masturbating. In this research note, I will recount how I set up an experimental method of masturbating to *shota* comics, and how this participant observation of my own desire not only gave me a more embodied understanding of the topic for my research but also made me think about loneliness and ways to combat it as driving forces of the culture of self-published erotic comics.

Keywords

Sensory ethnography, sexuality, masturbation, comics, queer studies, *shota*, experimental methods, manga

Introduction

I had hit a wall in my research. Semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2006) can only take you so far, especially when the topic is sensitive (Lee, 1993), which mine is. A short introduction is called for before we move on.

Corresponding author:

Karl Andersson, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK.

Email: karl.andersson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Shota, or *shotacon*, is a Japanese genre of comics and illustrations that feature young boy characters in a cute or, most often, sexually explicit way. The genre emerged in the amateur culture of self-published comics – *dōjinshi* – in Japan in the 1980s, which is centred around huge conventions that have come to attract hundreds of thousands of participants (Kinsella 1998: 295–96). *Shota* was first an offspring of the male homoerotic genre *yaoi*, which is read and produced mainly by women. Male readers discovered *shota* through *lolicon*, a genre that features young girl characters in a sexually explicit way. Yet other male readers positioned themselves against the *lolicon* reading *shota* fans (Watanabe, 1998). This ‘complicated mix of male and female producers and consumers’ (Saitō, 2007: 236) of *shota* is reflected in its many subgenres, differing in style, themes, the age of the characters and the explicitness of the sex, as well as in the readers’ views on whether or how sexual desire for fictional boys is connected to sexual attraction to actual children. Untangling this largely unresearched knot of desires for fictional boy characters will give us a better understanding of human sexuality and provide a more solid basis for policymaking.

In my current research, I am asking how fans of *shota* comics in Japan think about desire and identity. My methods have included web surveys, participant observation at *dōjinshi* conventions and the above-mentioned semi-structured interviews, both recurring and one-off ones. In these interviews, my research participants have talked about various aspects of their relation to *shota* comics: what kind of *shota* they like, how they see themselves in relation to the story, how they engage with *shota* concretely (how they read or draw it), what *shota* gives them and so on. While the answers are sprawling, a few themes have emerged. My main finding, which I explored through filmmaking, is that some readers use *shota* as a way to relive an alternative version of their own pasts, which had sometimes been traumatic or uneventful.

So far everything makes sense. Semi-structured interviews had been transcribed, coded and funnelled into neat findings. A bit too neat, maybe. I had a persistent feeling of only having traced the surface of my topic, and of wanting to go deeper. Filmmaking had added a ‘knowledge of being’ to the ‘knowledge as meaning’ (MacDougall, 2006: 6) that words convey, but my understanding of my research participants’ experience remained largely intellectual. What I needed was a method that could remove the ‘separation of mind and body’ (Stoller, 1997: xv), and so give me an *embodied* understanding of my topic.

The solution had been there all along, printed in plain language in the interviews – I had just not seen it so clearly. Because no matter how my research participants’ takes on *shota* differed in terms of favourite theme, preferred age and style of characters, how they related their own selves to the story, and so on, they had one thing in common: almost all of them said that they masturbated to *shota* material. I tried to inquire about the details of these masturbation sessions, but it was hard to know what to ask, and the conversation sometimes stalled. In addition, it would have been impossible for me to grasp how the intellectual reasoning, for example, of entering an alternative past, was connected to the bodily sensation of masturbation without me ‘doing it’ myself. Audre Lorde (1997: 282) has written: ‘The erotic cannot be felt secondhand.’ Indeed. And so I realized that my body was equipped with a research tool of its own that could give me, quite literally, a *first-hand* understanding of *shota*.

Erotic confessions

The erotic in research ranges from recognizing it as a benevolent influence in education (Pensoneau-Conway, 2009: 176) to anthropologists having sex with research participants in order to understand a certain practice, such as anonymous sex (Langarita Adiego, 2019: 1256). While there is plenty of literature on masturbation as such, few researchers write about their own masturbation habits. The glaring exception is Kristen C. Blinne (2012), who attempted to ‘break taboos and stigmas surrounding self-pleasuring’, but whose poetic style ironically reinforces the idea that masturbation is a sensitive enough subject to warrant special linguistic treatment. Forestalling the criticism of her culture (North America), Blinne goes into confessional mode: ‘Before I continue, I must confess: *I masturbate.*’ (*ibid.*: 955; emphasis in original)

Despite the importance of understanding all aspects of being human, research on sexuality is often seen as ‘dirty work’ (Irvine, 2014: 633), and researchers, not least of sexually explicit comics, are vulnerable to accusations of having a ‘prurient’ interest in their research topic (Madill, 2018: 270); studying *lolicon* made Patrick W. Galbraith (2017) ‘the *lolicon* guy’, publishing a seminal book on pornographic films turned Linda Williams (1999: ix) into ‘a professor of “porn”’, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2008: 59) felt the need to justify why she, as a woman, wrote about gay men. *Why are you interested in this?* seems to be the lurking question that researchers want to beat critics to. Williams did so by abandoning her initial ‘objective, distanced stance’ for a confession similar to that of Blinne: ‘I thus hereby admit ... to a genuinely “prurient interest” in the genre of pornography’ (Williams, 1999: xi). As commendable as I find such bold admissions of prurience, I can’t shake off the feeling that they reflect and reproduce the historical Christian belief in a ‘truth’ or ‘individual secret’ that can and must be expressed through confession, as detailed by Michel Foucault (1978: 61). I will therefore make a point of writing this research note in a rather casual and hands-on way, without any ceremoniously delivered confession: I simply want to explore a method that my research question seems to call for.

Let us briefly consider why, in a society that prides itself on being sexually liberal, masturbation is still controversial. One reason may be that we’re living under the yoke of a Christianity that for centuries ruled that reproduction was ‘*the only* justification of sexual relations’ (Weeks, 2009: 22; emphasis in original), and masturbation certainly doesn’t produce any babies. But plenty of sexual acts don’t, and yet they are not as stigmatized as masturbation. Foucault argues that the ‘crusade against masturbation’ in the 18th century was connected to the nuclear family as a new unit of knowledge-power, which was responsible for surveilling and quenching anything deemed ‘abnormal’ in the emerging medical discourse of the time (Foucault, 2003: 327). These abnormalities were rounded up and juxtaposed with their sanctioned counterparts in Gayle Rubin’s ‘hierarchical system of sexual value’, in which coupled relations are ‘good’ and solitary practices ‘bad’; masturbation is thus seen as ‘an inferior substitute for partnered encounters’ (Rubin, 2007: 151). While other ‘bad’ sexual acts have climbed in the hierarchy since Rubin’s essay was first published in 1984 – homosexual sex, non-procreative sex and casual sex, for example – the monstrous figure of ‘the masturbator’ (Sedgwick, 2008: 9) is still invoked in

discussions. A recent article on the ‘foul’ practice of masturbating to someone’s Facebook photos can serve as example. The author uses the terms ‘perpetrators and victims’ and describes the masturbators as ‘very awful people’ (Zia, 2017). In a time when sex discourse flourishes and companies routinely paint their logotypes in rainbow colours to profit on a sexually liberal image, it seems that the worst sin is to simply be alone.

But are we alone? Blinne drags the reader into her masturbation sessions, addresses the reader ‘you’: ‘I long to know that this is mutual, yet you offer only silence.’ (Blinne, 2012: 958). Is this inclusion of an invisible reader a desperate attempt to overcome the shame of being alone? I thought so at first, but that was before I started to think self-reflexively about my own masturbation, to which we will now turn.

Masturbation as a method

This is how I set out to use masturbation as a method:

For a period of 3 months, I would masturbate only to *shota* comics. For this purpose, I would use *dōjinshi* and commercial volumes that I have bought or been given during fieldwork in Japan. In short: I would masturbate in the same way that my research participants did it. After each masturbation session I would write down my thoughts and feelings – a kind of critical self-reflection – in a notebook, as well as details about which material I had used, where I had done it, at what time, and for how long. I would not be allowed to have any other sexual relief during this ‘fieldwork’ in my own sexuality: no regular porn, no sex with another person, no fantasies or memories – it had to be *shota* every time. I happened to live alone during this experiment, and I had newly become single after a long relationship – these factors probably contributed to my willingness and eagerness to explore this method.

Among fans of *shota* and other subcultural comic genres in Japan, the fictional world is often referred to as two-dimensional, as in the lines on paper that a character in a comic is made of, whereas actual human beings are called three-dimensional, even when they appear in a photo or a video (Galbraith, 2019: 65). In other words, pornographic films are 3D, and erotic comics are 2D. Since my previous masturbation material had been almost exclusively 3D, immersing myself in the 2D world can be seen as a version of participant observation, the classic ethnographic method that Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered during his fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands of New Guinea in the beginning of the 20th century (Spradley 1980: 3). Malinowski’s radical quest to ‘grasp the native’s point of view’ (Malinowski 2002 [1922]: 19) by participating and observing started an ‘ethnographic revolution’ which came to define anthropology (Spradley 1980: V). It is this ongoing revolution that I want to contribute to by doing participant observation in the field *within myself*, while masturbating in the same way that my research participants do it. The ‘sensory ethnographer’ aims for ‘experience-based empathetic understandings of what others might be experiencing and knowing’ (Pink, 2015: 98), and so my task is to understand *with my body* what it may be like to read *shota* comics.

Why the long period and the strict rules of masturbating to only 2D material? Because ethnographic fieldwork demands such consistency in order to yield results in the form of a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of the field. It was therefore imperative that I kept living

within my own 2D world during this sexual fieldwork, without resorting to my usual 3D material, which I sometimes longed for. In that sense, I felt like I was in the physical field of another culture. I could relate to Malinowski, who during his time among the Trobrianders often felt a ‘longing for civilization’ (Malinowski, 1989: 148), or for *his own culture* as we would say today. 3D is my culture, just like milk and muesli is my breakfast, and not fish and miso soup, which you might be served for breakfast at a traditional *ryokan* in Japan. I can enjoy both, but I think I will never overcome my preference – I wonder if any of us truly can. And so, it was necessary to be diligent enough to abstain from the ‘milk and muesli’ of porn during this experiment, in order to see what happened to my body on a long diet of ‘fish and miso soup’.

Brief findings

The three months of masturbation to *shota* comics resulted in 30 entries in my notebook. Since this essay focuses on the method as such, I will only recount the main findings briefly and in regards to whether they helped me get closer to understanding the experience of my research participants.

Excerpt from my field diary after reading a *dōjinshi* by Shigeru from the ‘circle’, or *dōjinshi* group, Shōnen Zoom:

Started reading on the toilet: Boy who is staying with relatives happens to see his same-age friend masturbate. He can’t let go of this sight ... I continued in bed, arranged the pillows until I was in a comfortable position, a bit ceremonial. ... The boy is now observing Tokio-kun through the window, on the veranda, while jerking off. He slips on the snow and is discovered. Tokio-kun angry, but also excited even as he keeps repeating ‘I’m not homo!’. The boy who has admitted to everything has nothing to lose, so he throws himself over Tokio-kun and starts sniffing his cock and licking his smooth balls, and while waiting for the shot I came! (10 September 2021)

This masturbation session let me experience one of the core aspects of *shota* that some of my research participants had mentioned: its power to provide an alternative past. The story was realistic enough to make me relate it to my own growing up. I didn’t grow up in Japan and I never lived with a boy my age in the house of my relatives. But I did come to think of a male friend I had, and I do remember being alone in his room once, opening a small cupboard by his bedside, and finding a porn magazine there. Like the boy in Shigeru’s story, I felt excited when realizing that my friend (too) masturbated. My story stopped there, but Shigeru’s continued. And as I stroked myself to orgasm, Shigeru’s story mixed with my own, tweaking my past and providing me ‘a happier version’, as one of my research participants had put it. This is not to say that things like those in the *dōjinshi* necessarily should have happened when I grew up. But to enjoy this alternative version for half an hour in the comfort of my bed felt good.

Several of my research participants had used the word ‘nostalgia’ to describe the allure of *shota*. This too looks back at the past and the period of puberty that is captured by the term ‘growth’, which is a common theme in *shota*. A few sessions after Shigeru, I chose a

dōjinshi by Tanaka Tarō/Jail Black, in which there is a new boy in class, Haru, who befriends a boy in that class, Ken. An excerpt from my fieldnotes:

Took long time before any action. I read everything and once they started undressing and comparing their cocks I came immediately. Vague memories of me and [name retracted] ... What was exciting was definitely the whole atmosphere with two new friends who discover sex together. Something you only do once in life. ... I was there, was one of them, not sure who, or wait a minute: I was Haru! The new boy. Whereas Ken was the active one, and the one who was sexy! (30 September 2021)

In another entry, I note that ‘it felt good to have *shared* a person’s fantasy’ (15 September 2021). This *sharing* of other people’s imaginations is a key aspect of *dōjinshi* culture that finds its most evident expression at the recurring *dōjinshi* conventions, where fans of *shota* or other genres meet and buy each other’s publications. I have been to plenty of these events, but it was not until now, when I started masturbating to the *dōjinshi* I had bought there, that I felt that I had been truly let in. By coming to a particular story, I have shared a fantasy with both the other readers and with the creator of that fantasy. This gave me a feeling of intimacy, and made me understand why every *dōjinshi* ends with an *atogaki*, an afterword, where the author writes a bit about the work and thanks the readers for their support, because this little greeting signalled that we were in this together. The whole structure surrounding the shared imaginations of *shota* and other genres creates a ‘feeling of oneness’ or *ittaikan* (Galbraith, 2011: 224), which I would not have become part of without reading the works the way they were intended to be read: while masturbating.

So far I had deepened my understanding of what my research participants had talked to me about or I had encountered in the literature, but masturbating to *shota* also gave me findings that I don’t know if are unique to me or shared by my research participants, and so I will bring them up in our conversations as my research progresses. In short, these findings included:

Self-care

I experienced a sense of self-care, which I also call the ‘spa effect’, since I often felt so relaxed after these sessions that it reminded of going to a spa, or why not an *onsen*, a Japanese hot spring. While my previous masturbation habits had been rather routine, masturbating to *shota* became more of a ritual: carefully choosing a *dōjinshi* (what am I in the mood for *today?*), creating a comfortable position in the bed, dozing off a bit afterwards – it was all part of the ritual. The feeling was one of care: care of myself. This feeling was enhanced at the times when I chose a previously unopened *dōjinshi*: unwrapping the shiny cellophane created a crackling sound that signalled luxury and investment in myself. Other paraphernalia of the ritual, such as buying a special lamp that made reading while masturbating easier, showed that I respected myself and that masturbating to *shota* was something to feel proud and not ashamed of. But knowing how elaborate the process was also became a hindrance to getting started. Masturbating

became *a thing*, almost something I planned for, and something I knew would take at least half an hour (partly because I took notes afterwards), whereas previously it had always been improvised. And so my masturbation frequency went down from daily to two or three times a week. In a way, quality replaced quantity. It may not be a coincidence that I kept up a healthy lifestyle in general during this period. For example, I stopped eating sugar, which in a way is the porn of food as it creates a dopamine rush of instant satisfaction.

Dōjinshi are diverse

It was not until I started reading *dōjinshi* actively while masturbating that I realized how different they were, not only in terms of drawings and story, which of course range from very amateurish to very professional, or in terms of characters and themes, which are a matter of taste, but more in how believable the story was. The examples above, with stories from a past childhood, were believable to me, as in ‘that *could have happened*’, and that made those *dōjinshi* good. But more often, very young boy characters would greedily jump over the first cock that presented itself. That too worked for me, but it was different. If the boyhood stories enhanced a sexual curiosity that was there from the start in the typical pubescent boy that the characters were modelled on, these other stories pasted an overly virile sexuality onto characters that would not be sexual to start with (or at least not *that* sexual, or in that way). Maybe one of the thrills of creating your own *dōjinshi* is that you can mend reality in such unbelievable ways? This relates to ‘the thrill of customizing someone else’s characters as one likes’ (Nagayama, 2020: 79), that is, creating erotic ‘parodies’ of famous comics, which is a defining feature of *dōjinshi* culture, instead of inventing one’s own original characters. In any case, discovering the cultural diversity of my masturbation material made me want to discuss in more detail how my research participants think about different *dōjinshi*.

Desire by proxy

My desire did not only emanate from the content of the *dōjinshi*, but from the fact that other people too were excited by this often extreme content and masturbated to it. Safely separated in time and space, we were sharing a sexual moment and maybe coming on the same pages, to the same frames. I did not want to see these people (at least not while I was masturbating), but just knowing that we were, in a way, *doing it together* added something to my pleasure. This feeling was enhanced when I read a secondhand *dōjinshi*, which I assumed had been used for masturbation by its previous owner, and thus been ‘charged’, like a magic charm that would continue to bring happiness to new owners.

Conclusion

What I learned from this experiment was to attach greater meaning and value to the act of masturbation, and especially of doing it to two-dimensional material in the form of comics. By that I don’t mean that I had belittled it before, but in a way I think that we all

belittle, unconsciously, practices that we don't understand. Masturbating made me understand.

Thinking more critically about my own masturbation also made me wonder if all sex is masturbation, in the sense that people are focused on their own pleasure and use other people as 'masturbation material'. This is most evident in various forms of cybersex, which has been described as 'a novel masturbatory innovation' (Waskul et al., 2000: 388), since the partners are physically separated. But the autoerotic aspect of sex is there even when we are physically together, and certain sexual practices enhance this aspect, as Pat Califia (2004) notes: 'Some forms of masochism and fetishism are actually very sophisticated and complex forms of masturbation.' Similarly, constructions like darkrooms, where people have sex without seeing each other, or glory holes, which conceal everything but the penis or a body orifice, let us build up the other as a *fantasy* in our heads from a minimal piece of actual flesh. To a varying extent, that's what we always do when we have sex with someone. We're all alone, no matter if we are physically alone or not.

And at the same time, we are not alone. When we masturbate, someone else is always there. During this fieldwork, others were there with me, both in the form of the characters that populated the *dōjinshi*, but also in the form of the invisible creator of these characters and the other readers who were enjoying them. In addition, my head was visited by people from my past, people I had seen on the street, my ex-partner. It's impossible for your brain to be blank during masturbation, which is why Blinne (2012) invited 'you' to hers. It may very well be that masturbation is the activity during which we are least alone. That, in turn, may explain what drives *dōjinshi* culture: a yearning for being less alone in a society permeated by loneliness on a large scale (Kato et al., 2017).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen for commenting on an early version of this article, the two anonymous reviewers for providing useful feedback, and my PhD supervisor Sharon Kinsella for always encouraging me to go where my research takes me.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Karl Andersson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0069-8683>

References

- Bernard HR (2006) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 4th edition. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Blinne KC (2012) Auto(erotic)ethnography, *Sexualities* 15.8: 953–977.
- Califa P (2004) The Limits of the S/M Relationship, or Mr Benson Doesn't Live Here Anymore. In: Thompson M (ed) *Leather Folk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*. Los Angeles: Daedalus.
- Foucault M (1978) *The History of Sexuality. 1st American edition. Translated by R. Hurley*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault M (2003) In: Marchetti V and Burchell G *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975*. London: Verso.
- Galbraith PW (2011) Fujoshi: fantasy play and transgressive intimacy among 'rotten girls' in contemporary Japan. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37(1): 211–232.
- Galbraith PW (2017) 'The lolicon guy': some observations on researching unpopular topics in Japan. In: McLelland M (ed) *The End of Cool Japan: Ethical, Legal, and Cultural Challenges to Japanese Popular Culture*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Galbraith PW (2019) *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Geertz C (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Irvine JM (2014) Is sexuality research 'dirty work'? Institutionalized stigma in the production of sexual knowledge. *Sexualities* 17(5–6): 632–656.
- Kato TA, Shinfuku N, Sartorius N, et al (2017) Loneliness and single-person households: issues of Kodokushi and Hikikomori in Japan. In: Okkels N, Blanner Kristiansen C and Munk-Jørgensen P (eds) *Mental Health and Illness in the City*. Singapore: Springer, 205–219.
- Kinsella S (1998) Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24(2): 289–316.
- Langarita Adiego JA (2019) On sex in fieldwork: Notes on the methodology involved in the ethnographic study of anonymous sex. *Sexualities* 22(7–8), 1253–1267.
- Lee RM (1993) *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lorde A (1997) Uses of the erotic: the erotic as power. In: Conboy K, Medina N and Stanbury S (ed) *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 277–282.
- MacDougall D (2006) *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Madill A (2018) Rotten girl on rotten girl: boys' Love 'research'. In: Morris C (ed) *Researching Sex and Sexualities: Methodological Reflections*. London: Zed Books, 263–278.
- Malinowski B (1989) *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. London: Athlone.
- Malinowski B (2002) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
- Nagayama K (2020) *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga*. Trans. by PW Galbraith and J Bauwens-Sugimoto. Amsterdam: Amsterdam: University Press.
- Pensoneau-Conway S (2009) Desire and passion as foundations for teaching and learning: a pedagogy of the erotic. *Basic Communication Course Annual* 21(1): 173–206.

- Pink S (2015) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Rubin GS (2007) Thinking sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In: Parker RG and Aggleton P (ed) *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*. 2nd Edition. London; NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.
- Saitō T (2007) Otaku sexuality. In: Bolton C, Csicsery-Ronay I and Tatsumi T (eds). *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*. Trans. by C Bolton. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 222–249.
- Sedgwick EK (2008) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Updated edition with a new preface. Berkeley: University of California press.
- Spradley JP (1980) *Participant Observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stoller P (1997) *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Waskul D, Douglass M and Edgley C (2000). Cybersex: outercourse and the enselment of the body. *Symbolic Interaction* 23(4): 375–397.
- Watanabe Y (1998) Otaku no Sekushuariti 1: Shota no Kenkyū. In: Okada T (ed) *Kokusai Otaku Daigaku 1998-nen: Saizensen kara no Kenkyū Hōkoku*. Tokyo: Kobunsha, 31–55.
- Weeks J (2009) *Sexuality*. 3rd edition. New York: Routledge.
- Williams L (1999) *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zia N (2017) The final taboo: masturbating over someone's facebook photos. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/gypxjx/the-final-taboo-masturbating-over-someones-facebook-photos> (accessed 28 March 2022).

Author biography

Karl Andersson is a PhD student at the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester (UK). He has a master's degree in Visual and Media Anthropology from the Free University of Berlin (Germany). Karl's graduation film about *shota* culture in Japan, *Unreal Boys*, won the award for Best Student Film at the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival 2021 (USA). His PhD research is funded by the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.