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Women's Reported Motivations for, and Outcomes from, their Pornography Use

by

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Abstract

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

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Doctor of Philosophy

Women's Reported Motivations for, and Outcomes from, their Pornography Use

by Aikaterini-Maria (Katerina) Litsou

Research on women's pornography use has been increasing but there has been little focus on the motivations for using pornography, the outcomes women report from their pornography use, and on the role pornography plays in their sexual satisfaction. A mixed methods systematic review and a thematic synthesis were conducted to investigate the reported motivations and outcomes that women in relationships report about their pornography use. Results showed that women's own pornography use played both positive and negative roles in their sexual and relationship lives. A qualitative study using in-depth, semi-structured interviews was then conducted with 30 adults (mean age 30.23, range 20 to 47), all of whom identified as women, resided in UK and in Greece, had accessed pornography previously, and were of mixed sexual orientations and relationship status. The aims were to explore women's motivations for pornography use and potential outcomes from pornography use. Results were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and were organised in two themes, Precursors and Outcomes, with both themes consisting of two subthemes; Sexual and Non-sexual precursors; Intended and Unintended outcomes. Again, results highlighted that pornography use has both positive and negative ramifications for women's sexual lives. Informed by these themes, a large scale international, online survey was conducted to explore women's motivations for their own pornography use, outcomes from their pornography use, associations between pornography use and women's reported sexual satisfaction, and associations between women's pornography use and subsequent emotions. Participants were 3330 adults (mean age 27.5, range 18 to 70) who identified as women, of mixed sexual orientations and relationship status, all of whom had used pornography at least once in the last six months. Frequent pornography use (once a week or more) was associated with higher sexual satisfaction than reported infrequent use (once a month or less); and partnered pornography use was associated with higher sexual satisfaction than solo pornography use. Regarding women's emotions after pornography use, as women reported higher positive emotions, they reported lower negative emotions; older age was associated with less negative emotions. Overall, the findings contribute to the literature on women's pornography use, their sexual satisfaction, and their emotions after pornography use. Pornography use can help women become sexually empowered and enjoy their sexual lives.

Keywords: pornography use, women, sexual satisfaction, emotions

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Aikaterini-Maria Litsou

Title of thesis: Women's Reported Motivations for, and Outcomes from, their Pornography Use

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:-

Litsou, K., Graham, C., & Ingham, R. (2021). Women in relationships and their pornography use: A systematic review and thematic synthesis. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 47(4), 381-413. DOI: 10.1080/0092623X.2021.1885532

Signature:

Date:

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Women's reported motivations for, and outcomes from, their pornography use

Chapter 1 – General Introduction

Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the general introduction which presents how I became involved in this research topic, previous research in the area, gaps in knowledge in the area, some methodological issues, and a brief overview of my philosophical and theoretical standpoints.

The second chapter describes a mixed methods systematic review and a thematic synthesis about women's pornography use while in committed relationships. The third chapter describes a qualitative interview study and a reflexive thematic analysis with thirty women participants. The fourth chapter presents a large scale international online survey, with women.

The fifth and final chapter is the general discussion which integrates the findings of the research and the combined contribution of the three papers, discusses the implications of the results and possible future research directions, as well as limitations and strengths of the research presented.

Chapter Outline

Within this introductory chapter I first present my background and how I became involved with pornography research, followed by a consideration of definitional issues and the pornography definition used for the whole of this thesis. I then give a short summary of previous research on pornography use, with the focus being on women's pornography use; this is followed by highlighting current gaps in knowledge regarding women's pornography use and common challenges researchers face when conducting pornography research. Finally, I discuss some of the reasons why this research is important.

Methodological issues that were encountered while conducting the systematic review (study 1), the qualitative interviews (study 2), and the online survey (study 3) are presented next. I briefly present challenges that were encountered during the whole research process for this project, and I explain how I situate myself regarding the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that inform

this research. Finally, I discuss how the research conducted for this thesis builds upon the existing literature regarding women's pornography use.

How I Became Involved With Pornography Research

I have always been interested in every aspect of human sexuality since I completed my Master of Sexology degree in 2010. In 2018, I was appointed as a Senior Research Assistant on the Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery project on pornography use and the potential effects on people's lives awarded to Professors Alan McKee and Roger Ingham. This project was a collaboration between the University of Southampton and the University of Technology Sydney. For over two years we carried out detailed exploration of the relevant literature, conducted four systematic reviews, and published a series of articles (Byron et al., 2020; Litsou, Byron, et al., 2021; McKee et al., 2020; McKee et al., 2021a, 2021b). Based on updates and edits of these papers we also published a book (McKee et al., 2022). The overarching rationale for the project was to explore pornography in the context of McKee et al.'s (2010) earlier analysis of what they termed "Healthy Sexual Development".

Through my work in the project, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with academic pornography research and observed that there was relatively little research focusing specifically on women's pornography use (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018; Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020). Moreover, when women's pornography use was studied it was most often in quantitative studies, involving mixed-gender samples (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019), focusing on sexual risks and sexual difficulties related to pornography use (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015), or on women's perceptions about their male partner's pornography use (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Bridges et al., 2003; Cavaglioni & Rashty, 2010; Johnson et al., 2019). I therefore decided to explore further women's own pornography use, their perceptions about their pornography use, why they used pornography and what they believed they were gaining from using it. The approach to the research described in this thesis was neutral and non-judgemental, i.e., trying to be neither in favour nor against pornography.

What Is Pornography and How It Was Defined in This Project

Pornography, and sexually explicit material (SEM), are difficult concepts on which to find an agreed definition (Ashton et al., 2018). Hald and Malamuth (2008) defined pornography or SEM 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” (p. 616). In the early days of the ARC project referred to earlier, and by using a Delphi Panel survey, McKee et al. (2020) generated two separate definitions of pornography. One was “sexually explicit material intended to arouse” while the other proposed that “pornography is not a thing but a concept, a category of texts managed by institutions led by powerful groups in society in order to control the circulation of knowledge and culture, changing according to geographical location and period” (p. 1088). Ashton et al. (2019b) thematically analysed definitions presented in social science journal articles and concluded that a useful definition of pornography needed to contain three components: content, the intention of the producer and contextual judgement, and meaning, taking into consideration the cultural and historical contexts. The definition they suggested was “material deemed sexual, given the context, that has the primary intention of sexually arousing the consumer, and is produced and distributed with the consent of all persons involved” (Ashton et al., 2019b, p. 163). Although it is not always possible to know whether everyone involved in creating pornographic material have fully consented to participate, Ashton et al. (2019b) argued that the component of consent in a definition of pornography is very important for two reasons: firstly, because non-consensual production and distribution of pornography is easily visible and accessible in the current digital age and, secondly, because including non-consensual material (e.g., abusive behaviour) in a pornography definition could possibly serve to endorse violence. Despite their suggestion to include consent in a definition of pornography, Ashton et al. (2019b) did not suggest a term for what the material uploaded without the participants' consent should or could be called.

Acknowledging the ongoing academic discussion about how pornography is defined, and that there are many different styles and genres of pornography which appeal differently to different women (Maas, Cary, et al., 2019), a consistent definition of pornography is used throughout this

thesis and the same definition was provided to participants, as a way to increase the likelihood that the participants understood what they were being asked about. The definition adopted was the one suggested by Hald and Malamuth (2008, p. 616) provided above. Regarding the term "use" of pornography the words use, watch, consume, view, engage, expose to and access are used interchangeably in this thesis, although these may have somewhat different meanings at different times and with different groups.

Previous Research on Pornography Use

Early research on pornography was mainly focused on men's use and, in particular, its possible connection to aggression. For example, in 1980 a longitudinal content analysis of sexual violence was published about the two best-selling erotic magazines aimed at men which were considered to be pornographic at the time - Penthouse and Playboy (Malamuth & Spinner, 1980). Between 1973 and 1977 an increase was observed in the degree of violence depicted in the magazines, which the authors believed communicated a message of female subordination. Malamuth (1981) randomly assigned 29 male undergraduate students to view either a rape or a mutually consenting sexual scene, via a slide-audio show. All the participants were then presented with a rape audio description. Following this, they were asked to generate a sexual fantasy and to give self-reports of their sexual arousal; their penile blood flow was also measured by the use of a mercury-in-rubber strain gauge, a type of penile plethysmograph. Men who were presented with the rape sexual stimuli had more violent sexual fantasies than those presented with the consensual sexual stimuli. Penile blood flow measurements indicated relatively high rates of sexual arousal for men in every experimental condition. In another study that again used male undergraduate students similar results were reported (Malamuth et al., 1986). Among men who stated they were sexually aroused by pornographic material depicting aggressive sexual acts towards women, it was indeed found that such material enhanced their self-reported sexual arousal; however, for men who reported no sexual arousal from aggressive material, depictions of aggression inhibited their sexual arousal. Other early pornography studies (Malamuth & McIlwraith, 1988; Malamuth & Ceniti, 1986) also focused on men's pornography consumption and possible sexual aggression.

According to a historical review, in the 1980s and 1990s pornography research was very much targeted towards men (Rasmussen, 2016). This male focus in early pornography research could have been because women reportedly use pornography less often than men do (Grubbs, Kraus, et al., 2019; Regnerus, 2016), as well as the belief that women have a lower sex drive than men (Baumeister, 2000, 2004; Baumeister et al., 2001; Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Leiblum, 2002). A very recent meta-analysis on men and women's sex drive revealed a stronger sex drive in men compared to women, with men more often thinking and fantasising about sex, as well as masturbating (Frankenbach et al., 2022). The results had a medium to large effect size. However, it is important to consider that some of these differences between men and women might be because men tend to overreport, and women tend to underreport their sex drive, due to cultural and social norms (Frankenbach et al., 2022). Based on all the above it is not surprising that most pornography is still targeted towards men (French & Hamilton, 2018).

During the last two decades, due to advances in internet technology, pornography has been increasingly accessible, affordable, and with easier anonymous and free access (De Alarcon et al., 2019; Donevan & Mattebo, 2017). Pornography research has also increased in volume, with studies being conducted focusing on many different aspects, as illustrated by the various systematic reviews that have been conducted in recent years (De Alarcon et al., 2019; Grubbs, Perry, et al., 2019; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; Harkness et al., 2015; Litsou, Byron, et al., 2021; Marshall & Miller, 2019; McKee et al., 2021a, 2021b).

More recently, research focusing on women's pornography use has also been increasing. What follows is a brief discussion of the more recent research regarding women's pornography use, as well as some of the remaining gaps in knowledge on this topic. I did not attempt to review all research relevant to women's pornography use here as this is presented in the following chapters, and particularly in the systematic review.

Research on Women's Pornography Use

Bridges (2007) examined the relationship between pornography use and sexual and relationship satisfaction in a sample of 217 US heterosexual couples, where the age range for women

was between 18 and 76 years. Women's pornography use was directly and positively related to sexual and dyadic satisfaction. Bridges and Morokoff (2011) studied 217 heterosexual US couples' pornography use. Higher frequency of pornography use reported by women was associated with greater dyadic satisfaction reported by male partners. Women mainly consumed pornography as part of their sexual relationships with their partners and for women shared pornography use was associated with higher relationship satisfaction compared to solitary pornography use. Solitary pornography use was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction for women. Another study of 617 heterosexual US couples, where the age range for the women was 17 to 58 years, investigated associations between pornography use and sexual quality. Sexual quality was measured by two questions, one about how satisfied the participants were with the sexual intimacy they experienced, and another about how often sexual intimacy was a source of problems in their relationship. According to the results, women's pornography use was positively associated with their own sexual quality (Poulsen et al., 2013).. In another study with 1755 US heterosexual couples, discrepancies between partners in their solo pornography use were related to lower relationship satisfaction, less stability, less positive communication and more relational aggression (Willoughby et al., 2016). It should be noted that the women recruited in these studies were in relationships. It is likely that for such women pornography use might have different implications than it would have for single women, but the studies above did not explore this issue. These results highlight the fact that women in relationships often might choose to use pornography as part of their sexual relationships, as a way to satisfy their partners (but not necessarily only to satisfy their partners); hence when women use pornography with their partners, they are more likely to report higher sexual and relationship satisfaction than when they use pornography by themselves.

In a study which investigated 326 US heterosexual, married couples' pornography use, their pornography acceptance, and their sexual satisfaction, women's pornography use was negatively associated with their own sexual satisfaction but positively associated with the couple's sexual satisfaction (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017). Carroll et al. (2017) studied pornography use among 1,486 US heterosexual couples and found a "pornography gap", meaning that for many couples there was a discrepancy in their pornography use, with men consistently consuming pornography more often

than their women partners; this discrepancy resulted in significant conflict in their relationship. In a study that explored the associations between pornography use and sexual satisfaction in 240 committed, heterosexual US couples (with a broad age range of between 18 and 60 years for the women), couple pornography use was associated with higher sexual satisfaction for both partners, and women's own pornography use was positively associated with their own sexual desire (Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). A US longitudinal study from 2006 to 2012 examined pornography use and potential relationship breakup among 969 both male and female participants, of any sexual orientation and all in relationships (with a broad age range from 18 to 80). The findings demonstrated that women who used pornography were less likely than men to experience relationship breakup (Perry & Davis, 2017). Data from the same dataset were analysed for a different study that investigated pornography use and marital quality over time (Perry, 2017b). For heterosexual married women, more frequent pornography consumption was associated with higher marital quality, in comparison to women who consumed pornography less often. Again, these studies involved only women in relationships and did not assess reasons women reported for their use of pornography. These results again highlight the fact that when women use pornography as part of their partnered sexual relationships, they report higher sexual and relationship satisfaction.

In an online survey conducted in Canada with 340 heterosexual women aged between 18 and 41, who used pornography and were in committed relationships, mutual pornography use was not associated with relationship satisfaction. Mutual pornography use was negatively associated with women's distress levels related to their pornography use (Resch & Alderson, 2014). Despite women choosing to use pornography with their partners, some women did experience distress because of it possibly, according to the authors, because they were not comfortable with the idea of their male partners getting sexually aroused by pornography, or maybe because they did not like the fact that their male partners were watching attractive porn women actors. Therefore, pornography use in relationships can also play a negative role as women might feel they have to "compete" with pornography for their partners.

An online US survey with 143 male and female student participants (with an age range from 18 to 48) examined the reasons for pornography use (Emmers-Sommer, 2018). The main reason reported by women for pornography use was to masturbate, followed by to get sexually excited. Women also reported they benefitted in terms of sexual satisfaction (Emmers-Sommer, 2018). However, analysis for this study was conducted based on a relatively small sample of 76 participants because of the total 143 participants recruited into this study, only 76 of them reported they were current consumers of pornography, and the statistical analyses focused only on those current pornography consumers.

A qualitative study by Ciclitira (2004) utilised semi-structured interviews with British women, aged between 23 and 52, of mixed sexual orientations and relationship status, who used pornography. Discourse analysis showed that women's experiences with pornography were individual and complex. In a different study, Benjamin and Tlusten (2010) conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 heterosexual Israeli women in relationships aged between 22 and 53 who used pornography, and analysed the data using phenomenological analysis. They identified three main dimensions of couples' relationships: the individual space – women's perceptions of the pattern of the sexual activities a couple should engage in, either together or separately; cooperation – using pornography either with their partner or not; and relationship work ethics – the effort women made to improve their relationships sexually and emotionally. The focus of this study, however, was on women's partners' pornography use rather than on women's own pornography use. Additionally, none of the studies mentioned above focused on the reasons that motivated women to access pornography.

An in-depth interview study with 11 Canadian women aged between 23 and 47 explored how digital technologies helped women to access pornography (McKeown et al., 2018). Data were thematically analysed and showed the following: women used online pornography to fulfil their sexual needs; technology helped them to be independent consumers of pornography because they could access whatever content they wanted whenever they wanted; online pornography also helped them to explore their sexual desires and interests, and even share these preferences with partners if

they were in sexual relationships; and, finally, women felt that their sexual desires were normalised by their use of digital technologies to consume online pornography because they believed that other people shared their sexual interests (McKeown et al., 2018). This study focused on the digital use of pornography only and not on any other forms of pornography.

A very recent online study recruited 80 Czech young women (aged between 18 and 30), and asked about their pornography use, habits, and pornography preferences (Lebedíková, 2023). Six themes were reported: porn sex versus real sex; pornography and the body; involving a partner; taking action, which was about applying sexual practices women watched on pornography when having sex with partners; quick arousal and climax, which was about consuming pornography in order to experience orgasm faster; and, finally, broadening sexual horizons, which was about how pornography had enhanced women's sexual lives (Lebedíková, 2023). This study involved only Czech women and did not explore the reasons that led women to actively use pornography.

Two systematic reviews have covered research that focused specifically on women's pornography use (Ashton et al., 2018; Litsou et al., 2023a). Ashton et al. (2018) summarised research on the way women encountered pornography; how women related to pornography to draw conclusions about their bodies, their sexual activities, and their experience of arousal; how women navigated the use of pornography in their relationships; and finally at the way women made sense of pornography. The systematic review by Litsou, Graham, et al. (2021) focused on pornography use among women in committed relationships and concluded that pornography use both enhanced and disrupted women's sexual and relationship lives, that frequently women in committed relationships chose to use pornography with their partners and, finally, that there were different reasons why women in relationships chose to use pornography. Both reviews highlighted that women's pornography use, no matter their relationship status or their sexual orientation, is a complex issue that warrants further investigation.

There are some limitations in the research presented as most of the studies have been conducted with samples from the US and Canada, and also used samples of women who were in

relationships. There has been much less research conducted with European samples, and with women not in relationships.

Gaps in Knowledge

Early research on women's pornography use often focused on sexual risks and/or sexual difficulties (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015), or on women's perceptions and reactions about their male partners' pornography use (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Bridges et al., 2003; Cavaglioni & Rashty, 2010; Johnson et al., 2019). Quantitative research has often recruited mixed-gender samples and the analyses have not always been presented disaggregated by gender. When results have been presented separately for men and for women, often men had higher pornography use frequency, stronger levels of pornography use motivations and/or stronger levels of pornography use outcomes when measured. Additionally, much quantitative research has used samples of women in relationships only, without including single women. It is likely that there are different motivations and outcomes related to pornography use for single women than for women in relationships. None of the qualitative research to date has focused specifically on women's reported motivations for their own pornography use. Additionally, most of the research conducted has used US and Canadian samples, and there is little research conducted with European and UK samples. Conducting research with a UK sample offers a novel perspective in the field.

Overall, there has been little research on how adult women (18 years old and above) use and experience pornography (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; McKeown et al., 2018) and, in particular, few studies have examined the reasons that motivate women to use pornography and the outcomes women might obtain, and/or expect to obtain, from their own pornography use.

Challenges of Doing Pornography Research

Collectively, quantitative and qualitative research on women's pornography use has similar challenges and limitations, such as relying on participants' self-reported data; and participants' possible social desirability bias (Rasmussen et al., 2018) and recall bias (Colombo et al., 2020). Participants who volunteer to take part in pornography use related research are very likely to have a

sex positive perspective in general and positive attitudes towards pornography. Sex positivity can be understood as promoting respect for all genders and sexualities, and being open-minded and non-judgmental of personal sexual autonomy as long as there is consent (Comella, 2017; Fahs, 2014; Hirst, 2013; Ivanski & Kohut, 2017). Overall, when it comes to conducting pornography research, researchers should keep in mind that it is not a field without challenges, as noted by other researchers in the area (Kohut et al., 2020; Marshall & Miller, 2019; Short et al., 2012).

Why is This Research Important?

There have been rapid and ongoing changes in the availability of SEM and the ways people can access such material. Further developments are to be expected in this area such as virtual reality and use of sex robots (Dubé et al., 2023). As discussed above, there are gaps in the literature concerning women's pornography use, their experiences with it, their perceptions about it, the reasons that motivate them to access pornography, and the outcomes they might expect to obtain from their pornography use.

The research reported in this thesis is important because it investigated some of these under-researched areas in order to better understand women's pornography use, and to give voice to women to elaborate on their own pornography use and how they experience pornography. Such findings can be used by sexual health clinicians, not only to provide them with general information and education about pornography, but also to address and resolve sexual difficulties women might have in relation to, for example, sexual arousal and sexual desire issues (Crooks & Baur, 2011; Lehmiller, 2014).

A fuller understanding of women's pornography use could also help enhance relationships and sex education (RSE) in schools, which for students appears to be the most popular source of information about sex (Newby et al., 2012). Instead of overly focusing on how to regulate access to, and use of, pornography, it might be more helpful to educate children (and adults as well, for that matter) about the content they are using in order for them to be able to assess pornography and help them to develop a critical perspective about it (Albury, 2014; Dawson et al., 2019). In this way, people would be able to make better informed decisions about the material they are using, their

bodies and their sexual health (Ingham & Hirst, 2010). Historically, sexual health education has focused on promoting abstinence rather than sexual pleasure, with emphasis being mainly on the risks and dangers of sex, based on the belief that sexual knowledge might encourage young people's sexual experimentation (Hirst, 2013).

Lastly, understanding women's pornography use better and normalising such use might help women become less restricted by societal norms which state that women should not use pornography or should not talk openly about their pornography use (Ashton et al., 2018; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). In this way, women can become sexually empowered to choose whichever content/media they want in order to experience sexual pleasure, either by themselves or with their partners, whenever they want to, without feeling guilty or embarrassed about it.

Methodological Issues

Study 1 - Women in Relationships and Their Pornography Use: A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis

As the area of women's motivations for pornography use is relatively new, and there had not been a previous systematic review on this research, such a review was considered the appropriate first step for this research programme, in order to collate results from previous studies, provide an up-to-date evidence overview and identify gaps in the literature (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Higgins & Green, 2008; Pollock & Berge, 2018; Siddaway et al., 2019; Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018). The review adopted a mixed-methods approach in order to cast the net wide. A meta-analysis or a meta-synthesis was not considered appropriate as, in order for those to be conducted, the studies should measure the same (or very similar) variables and should be either a quantitative design for meta-analysis or a qualitative design for meta-synthesis (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Higgins & Green, 2008; Siddaway et al., 2019). Consequently, a thematic synthesis of the included papers was considered the appropriate approach to synthesise both qualitative and quantitative data (Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018; Thomas & Harden, 2008). This analysis was published in the *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* (Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021) and is included as the first article (Chapter 2) in this thesis.

Study 2 - Women Reporting on Their Use of Pornography: A Qualitative Study Exploring Women's Perceived Precursors and Perceived Outcomes

After identifying that there was a gap in the literature regarding what motivates women to use pornography and what role women believe that pornography plays in their lives, a qualitative research design was considered the best option as the starting point to investigate that gap. A qualitative design allows for exploring areas where not much is known, enables the exploration of participants' feelings, thoughts and emotions which are difficult to obtain through more traditional quantitative research designs when there is little on which to base questionnaire items (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In addition, as the goal was to collect rich data about the participants' lived experiences, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were considered the best method to achieve that (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Liamputtong, 2009). Focus groups were considered because they are used for research on sensitive sexuality related topics. However, they were not adopted as a way to ensure privacy to prospective participants (Liamputtong, 2009).

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse the data because the main goal was to understand participants' experiences with pornography and because TA is not connected to a specific theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). Instead, the theoretical framework should match the researcher's interests and research questions, and the researcher should acknowledge that they actively chose that particular framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017), which is discussed further in the next section. As reflexive TA allows for theoretical and methodological flexibility, it was considered to be the most suitable and useful methodology for the qualitative project because the primary goal was to have an iterative and flexible approach during both the interview and the subsequent analysis process.

Other methodologies were reviewed but were not considered appropriate to the project's research questions. For example, narrative analysis is used to understand how research participants construct their stories and their narratives from their own personal experience and the researcher then attempts to interpret the participants' narratives (Liamputtong, 2009; Murray, 2000). Narrative analysis is connected to the phenomenological approach (Murray, 2000). Narrative analysis was not

considered appropriate as the goal of the qualitative study was to explore women's experiences and perceptions about their pornography use, rather than investigate their personal histories.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) aims to understand people's everyday personal experiences in great detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith, 2004), and uses phenomenology as the guiding theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). A major difference with TA is that IPA focuses on identifying themes across cases and highlighting unique differences across cases, before proceeding to develop themes across all cases collectively (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). IPA has also been criticised for disregarding the social contexts in which people have their experiences (Larkin et al., 2011). IPA was not considered appropriate for the qualitative study as the goal was to explore similarities and differences in women's experiences with pornography and their perceptions about it, connected to the social contexts in which women were living.

Grounded theory has many different forms and its main goal is to generate a theory that is grounded in the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009). Grounded theory has certain guidelines about how coding is done; it mostly focuses on social processes (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Liamputtong, 2009). Grounded theory was not considered appropriate for the qualitative study as there was no intention to develop a theory around women's pornography use.

Framework analysis is usually used in policy oriented research and its main goal is to condense larger qualitative data into more manageable thematic frameworks in order to facilitate comparisons of themes between groups of individuals (Aashish & Thomson, 2009; Gale et al., 2013). It was not considered an appropriate method for the qualitative study as there was no initial connection to policy around women's pornography use. Finally, discourse analysis focuses on the effects of language in social interactions, and it provides detailed tools for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a) but a focus on participants' use of language while describing their own pornography use was not one of the aims of the study. The qualitative study is included as the second article in this thesis (Chapter 3) and is currently in preparation for submission (Litsou et al., 2023a).

Study 3 - Women's Motivations and Outcomes of Pornography Use: A Large-Scale International Survey

The qualitative study identified women's perceived motivations and outcomes for pornography use. The next step was to investigate whether these motivations and outcomes apply to a larger population of women and the best way to examine this was considered to be an online quantitative survey. Quantitative methods are used when the goal is to collect data on certain variables from large samples, and to enable the exploration of relationships between variables within populations (Field, 2018). This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study as the data collection happened at a single time point. Online surveys as data collection tools have many advantages such as participants' anonymity; convenience as the participants can choose to complete the online survey at their own time and pace; they allow for a large number of participants to complete the online survey in a short period of time; and are also relatively inexpensive to distribute and manage (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The quantitative study is included as the third article in this thesis (Chapter 4) and is currently also in preparation for submission (Litsou et al., 2023b).

Philosophical Issues – Theoretical Underpinnings

I conducted my research using mixed methods because I believed it was the best way to address my research questions. However, using mixed methods entails philosophical challenges (Bishop, 2015; Morgan, 2014; Yardley & Bishop, 2017). I approached the whole study from a critical realism position which holds that reality actually exists but the way people access and experience it depends on their sociocultural notions (Maxwell, 2012). People's beliefs and experiences are real, but they are grounded by their particular perspectives and worldviews (Maxwell, 2012). Critical realism holds an ontological realism – that there is a real world existing independently of people's beliefs – while also accepts an epistemological relativism – that people's understanding of the world is based on their own personal beliefs (Maxwell, 2012). For clarification, ontology refers to the nature of reality, while epistemology refers to the relationship people have with knowledge and reality, what can be known about reality (Maxwell, 2012; Morgan, 2014; Ormston et al., 2014).

A challenge that I encountered while conducting this research was identifying a theory that would be relevant to apply. The field of pornography research has been criticised as being largely atheoretical, meaning that there is no specific theory or framework that is consistently used and applied by researchers in the area (Willoughby et al., 2020). Different researchers have used different theories or frameworks for their research, making it hard to use a unified language for pornography research, hard to create and use more consistent measurement scales, and hard to guide existing and future research into relevant and meaningful topic areas (Willoughby et al., 2020). I considered using various theories or frameworks that had been previously used by other researchers. Below I review those that I considered.

According to the ecological system model of human development the individual is at the centre, and is surrounded by systems such as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. The microsystem refers to the immediate environment of the individual while the macrosystem is the most distant environment (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2021; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Del Mar Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2016). Although this model could have been considered relevant to studying women's experiences, perceptions, and motivations about their pornography use, it was not adopted as it was thought to be outside the scope of this research.

The sexual script acquisition, activation, application model (3AM) of media sexual socialization was also considered (Wright, 2011). According to this model, pornography consumers get information about their sexual scripts from pornography use (Braithwaite et al., 2015; Lebedíková, 2023). However, change in sexual behaviours is less likely to occur when media scripts are incongruent with pre-existing scripts (Wright, 2011). This model was not adopted as it is mostly focused on what people think about pornography and how they incorporate what they see, hear, or read from pornography into their own personal lives. It is not directly relevant to experiences and motivations for pornography use.

Finally, while not a coherent theory, an ego-defence mechanism called "compensation" has been proposed where a person tries to mask their perceived weaknesses by developing specific positive traits in other areas (Corey, 2009). Research has shown that people can use sexual

behaviours and pornography to compensate for unsatisfied social needs. For example, an Israeli study with a mixed-gender sample of young adolescents showed that online sexual activity and online pornography use may act as compensation for loneliness among young people with anxious attachment styles (Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019). The opposite was found for adolescents who had high attachment security levels; they did not use online pornography as a form of compensation. As this study involved young people only, generalisations to other age groups cannot be made. Other studies have been conducted on whether sexual activities such as masturbation play a compensation role and showed that masturbation can to some extent play a compensatory role for men when sexual intercourse with partner/s is not available (Regnerus et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2012). In contrast, it appears that for women masturbation has a complementary role because research shows that women who were having sexual activity with partners reported masturbating more often than women who were sexually inactive (Regnerus et al., 2017). In a stratified probability sample survey of the British population aged 16 to 44 years, 71.2% of the women participants reported masturbating at some point in their lives, 36.8% reported masturbating four weeks before participating in the study, and one in six women reported masturbating in the previous week (Gerressu et al., 2008). As in the study above, masturbation was associated with reporting more frequent sexual activity as well as more sexual partners for women but not for men (Gerressu et al., 2008).

In general, different reasons for masturbation are reported by women, including sexual pleasure, as a "release", to better understand their bodies, and as a substitute for partner sex (Bowman, 2013; Csako et al., 2022; Fahs & Frank, 2014; Fischer et al., 2022; Kiliç Onar et al., 2020). Pornography use has been connected to masturbation (Baćak & Štulhofer, 2011), and masturbating is very common among women of different ages (Fischer et al., 2022; Hogarth & Ingham, 2009; Kiliç Onar et al., 2020). Further research is required in order to clarify whether pornography use has a compensatory or a complementary role (or both) in women's sexual lives.

How the Findings Presented in This Thesis Add to the Literature on Women's Pornography Use

This thesis comprises three separate – but linked – research projects, as outlined above. The first is a mixed methods systematic review and thematic synthesis about women in relationships and their personal pornography use and, more specifically, focused on the associations between pornography use and women's reported motivations to use it, what functions women believe that pornography plays for them, what role pornography plays in women's sexual and relationship lives, whether pornography use had any influence on women's sexual satisfaction while in relationships, and women's ability to communicate to their partners their sexual likes and dislikes.

This mixed methods review had a different focus from that conducted by Ashton et al. (2018), which focused on women's experiences with pornography in general. These authors reviewed only qualitative research conducted from 1999 to 2015 about women's pornography use, no matter their relationship status. Additionally, they conducted a thematic analysis as their data were qualitative only. My systematic review identified qualitative and quantitative research, and for that reason a thematic synthesis was conducted.

From the systematic review it became clear that pornography can play both a negative and a positive role in women's lives and that there are many different reasons that women might choose to use pornography. Thus, I followed the review by conducting a qualitative interview study to explore in-depth what motivates women to use pornography and what they believe they get from using it. I decided to broaden the criteria from the ones used for the systematic review, and include adult women, of any relationship status or sexual orientation. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to explore the results.

This qualitative study differed from other qualitative studies about women's pornography use as the main focus was on women's own pornography use specifically and not their reactions or experiences related to their partners' pornography use (Ashton et al., 2019a). Participants came from UK and Greece, rather than Australia (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020) or Canada (Gurevich et al., 2017); it included women with any sexual orientation rather than only women having sex with men (Ashton et

al., 2019a, 2020), or being either heterosexual or bisexual (Gurevich et al., 2017); and there were no upper age limits as in previous research (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020). Analysis was conducted based on reflexive thematic analysis guidelines and data were collected via individual interviews.

In the third study, I explored the extent to which pornography use motivations and outcomes identified in the qualitative study would apply to women more widely. For this reason, a large online international survey was constructed for adult women of diverse sexual orientations, relationship status and country of residence, who reported consuming pornography at least once in the last six months, as a way to minimise recall bias. This study also aimed to explore the relationship between pornography use and women's sexual satisfaction, as well as positive and negative emotions women might experience after using pornography.

This quantitative study was different from other published research about women's pornography use as, according to my knowledge, there is no other similar online survey conducted with this sample size of women that focused on motivations and outcomes of pornography use.

Aims of Research Conducted for This Thesis

Based on the gaps identified in previous research, the main research goals in this thesis were to investigate what motivates women to use pornography, what role pornography use plays in their lives, what emotions women experience after pornography use, and what role pornography use might play in their sexual satisfaction.

Author Contributions

For all the three papers presented in this thesis I am credited as the first author and my two supervisors, Cynthia Graham and Roger Ingham, are second and third authors, respectively.

For the systematic review Cynthia Graham provided help with formulating the systematic review main research question. I took responsibility for writing the protocol, deciding the initial search syntax, and conducting the initial database searches. Roger Ingham also conducted the same searches as a way of crosschecking, as expected for systematic reviews. I also took the lead in deciding about paper exclusions and inclusions. Again, as expected for systematic reviews, I received

help from Dilan Kılıç Onar, a fellow PhD student, who acted as the second rater. Data analysis was primarily conducted by me, and each step of the analysis was discussed in supervision meetings. I also took the main responsibility for writing and proofreading the paper, with support and feedback from both of my supervisors.

For the qualitative paper, I had the main responsibility of organising and managing the study, applying for ethics approval, finding the participants, conducting the interviews, and transcribing them. I conducted the data analysis, and each step was discussed among all three of us in regular meetings. I was responsible for writing and proofreading the paper, with my two supervisors providing support.

For the quantitative paper, again I had the main responsibility, with supervisory support, of organising and managing the study, constructing the survey items, applying for ethics approval, and collecting the data. Data analysis was conducted mainly by me, with Roger Ingham providing support during the whole process of the analysis. Additionally, the whole of the analysis was discussed in regular supervision meetings. Finally, I took the main responsibility of writing and proofreading the paper, incorporating the regular feedback I received from my supervisors.

Chapter 2 – Women in Relationships and Their Pornography

Use: A Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis

Abstract

A systematic review and thematic synthesis were conducted on the motivations, purposes, and influence of pornography use among women who are in committed relationships. Pornography use was identified as having both positive and negative outcomes for women's sexual and relationship lives. Women watched pornography for diverse reasons: to feel sexually empowered, to enhance sexual arousal, and for masturbation purposes. Shared use of pornography with partners provided variety in sexual activities, could aid communication about sexual issues and helped improve intimacy. Pornography use can help some women feel sexually empowered, relaxed and better able to enjoy their sexual lives.

Whilst¹ much research has focused on men's experiences with pornography, relatively little attention has been given to women's experiences (Ashton et al., 2018; McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015). When women's pornography use is studied, researchers usually focus on sexual risks and sexual difficulties (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015), or on women's reactions/perceptions to their male partner's pornography use (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Bridges et al., 2003; Cavaglioni & Rashty, 2010; Johnson et al., 2019). Researchers seldom study women's sexual pleasure linked with pornography use (Ashton et al., 2019a).

Pornography Research to Date

Below, we provide a background review of the quantitative research to date followed by consideration of qualitative studies on women's experiences of pornography use.

Quantitative Research. In a survey of Swedish students between 17 and 21 years old, Häggström-Nordin et al. (2005) found that women, 45% of whom had a steady partner, were less likely than men to take the initiative in watching pornography and also less likely to report feeling aroused by watching pornography. Hald and Malamuth (2008) used the Pornography Consumption Effect Scale in a representative Danish sample aged between 18 and 30 years and found that more men (97.8%) than women (79.5%) reported having ever watched pornography. Men also reported spending more time on average per week viewing pornography than women did. Women who accessed pornography regularly reported more positive effects of pornography consumption on their sex life, life in general and attitudes towards sex, compared with those who did not access it regularly. Curiosity, sexual arousal and the need to obtain sexual information were cited as the most common reasons for watching pornography by girls aged between 11 and 17 years old in a cross-sectional study conducted in the Czech Republic (Ševčíková & Daneback, 2014). No differences were found across different ages regarding participants' stated reasons for watching pornography.

¹ The study presented in this chapter has been published: Women in relationships and their pornography use: A systematic review and thematic synthesis, K. Litsou, C. Graham and R. Ingham, *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 2021 Vol. 47 Issue 4 Pages 381-413, DOI: 10.1080/0092623X.2021.1885532, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2021.1885532>

In a computer-assisted telephone survey involving a representative Australian sample of 16- to 69-year-old men and women, fewer women than men reported watching pornography (Rissel et al., 2017). For women under 20 or over 60 years old, self-reported factors that increased the likelihood of ever having viewed pornography were: identifying as lesbian or bisexual, having post high school education, having one or more sexual partners in the past year, masturbating in the past year, having had vaginal intercourse before the age of 16, having had heterosexual anal intercourse, drinking above the national guidelines for alcohol consumption and reporting elevated psychological distress. Among women over 30, ever having watched pornography was significantly associated with masturbating in the past year and ever having anal intercourse. Having a religion or faith was significantly associated with a lower likelihood of ever having looked at pornography. Rissel et al. (2017) also assessed the factors predicting pornography use during the previous 12 months for women over 30. Women were less likely to have used pornography if they were living in a rural area, if they had a religion or faith, or if they were living with a partner. Women over 30 were more likely to have viewed pornography if they identified as lesbian or bisexual, if they had post high school education, if they did not live with a regular partner, if they had one or more sexual partners in the past year, if they had masturbated during the past year, if they had vaginal intercourse before the age of 16 and, finally, if they had ever had anal intercourse. No differences were found in the factors predicting solo and partnered viewing.

The quantitative research to date in this area had some significant limitations. In most of the studies no definition of pornography was provided to the participants, so it was not possible for the researchers to know what the participants had in their minds when completing questions. Participants were usually provided with only limited options of possible responses, which may not be compatible with their (possibly complex) opinions and reactions. Also, there are social desirability factors that may encourage specific answers (Fisher & Katz, 2000; Krumpal, 2013); for example, women tend to report lower, and men higher, pornography use than their actual use (Carroll et al., 2017). Some of these limitations may be overcome in qualitative research.

Qualitative Research. Qualitative research indicates that sexually explicit material is experienced and understood in different ways by women and men (Attwood, 2005). In one in-depth interview US study, for example, young women (mean age 21 years) stated that they were more likely to view pornography when in a relationship, while young men (mean age 23 years) were more likely to view pornography while not in a relationship (Smith, 2013). Distinctions between watching solo and with partners, as well as watching secretly while in a relationship, were not explored.

There has been some limited qualitative research that has focused on women's reactions to pornography use and how it might be associated with their sexual pleasure. Ashton et al. (2019a) conducted interviews with young heterosexual Australian women (18 to 30 years old). Women reported that pornography had both an enhancing and a diminishing influence on sexual pleasure. Pornography was described as enhancing their sexual pleasure when viewing with sexual partners, when learning about sexual preferences, and by providing reassurance about body appearance. At the same time, pornography was reported by the same women as diminishing sexual pleasure by misrepresenting bodies, sexual acts and expressions of pleasure, by causing concerns about the actors' wellbeing and finally, by disrupting intimacy.

Similar results were reported by Davis et al. (2019) who identified themes in the responses of Australian women (15 to 29 years old) about the way pornography had influenced their lives. Two themes were reported: exploration and harm. Exploration covered safety, independence, normalization of sexuality and diversity in body type. Harm covered conditioning, comparison and dependency of viewing pornography. Even though women's opinions about pornography are varied, and although pornography remains primarily men's area of interest according to societal views, research revealed that some women do enjoy watching pornography (Ciclitira, 2004).

Most of the women participants in a focus group study involving US young men and women (14 to 17 years old), reported that they found pornographic sites to be repulsive and they expressed concern that they were offensive to women (Cameron et al., 2005). The majority said they did not watch pornography intentionally and, if they did, it did not affect their personal views about their sexuality.

Some qualitative research has focused on reported motivations and reasons for pornography use. Parvez (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with 30 self-identified heterosexual US women (18 to 40 years); they reported that they enjoyed watching heterosexual pornography both by themselves and/or with their partners and reasons for use were to get sexually aroused, to masturbate, because of curiosity about sexual practices, because they wanted to improve their sexual practices in their relationships and as a means of rebellion against being considered "such a good girl" (Parvez, 2006, p. 616). Even though the context of pornography watching was mentioned, no different functions were reported for solo use versus partnered pornography use.

In an interview and focus group study, young Swedish women (14 to 20 years old), said that they used pornography as a way to socially interact with peers (as a way to test each other's reactions to the actors' and actresses' behaviours and appearances), as a way to become sexually aroused and as a source of education (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). Similarly, Hare et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with young Canadian women (19 to 29 years old), who reported watching pornography for diverse reasons, including entertainment, curiosity, as a self-arousal activity and to masturbate, as an arousing activity with partners, as a means to learn how to perform certain sexual acts, to learn more information about a type of sexual act they were not very familiar with, as an inspiration for sexual acts in offline sexual activities, as a way to check if a sexual interest/desire is "normal", as a means to get sexual health information and as a way to fulfil fantasies.

In a systematic review of qualitative research regarding women's experiences of pornography, Ashton et al. (2018) concluded that women mainly used pornography to become aroused and to obtain information about sex. Women came across pornography in a social setting, in their relationships or by accident. Women carried internalized social messages about pornography (for example, that society deemed pornography unacceptable for women and that women are supposed to be less sexual than men), ethical values and personal experiences; all these played a role in the way they made sense of pornography. McCutcheon and Bishop (2015) conducted interviews with Canadian women (18 to 32 years) who identified as bisexual, heterosexual or lesbian. Across

different sexual orientations, women reported that they watched gay pornography as a way of exploration, because they preferred same-sex pornography and because there was no objectification of women in this type of material (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015).

Some women choose to watch pornography as a leisure activity (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010) and they report that closeness to their partners is not affected (Popović, 2011). In the Popović (2011) study, however, there was no information on whether women watched pornography alone or with their partners.

Reports from (Ramlagun, 2012) and from Rothman et al. (2015) indicate that some young women use pornography as an educational tool in order to obtain information about how to have sex. Smith (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with US women (18 to 32 years) who reported that they used pornography as a source of sexual information and education. In other studies, young women understood that what is depicted in pornography is not real but nevertheless they used pornography as an educational tool (Döring, 2009; Mattebo et al., 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Wang & Davidson, 2006).

The Need for an Up-To-Date Systematic Review

There have been many studies on perceptions and reactions to pornography among young women and men (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Sevcikova et al., 2015). There has been less research on how adult women watch and experience pornography (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; McKeown et al., 2018). There have also been few systematic reviews regarding the use of pornography in general, fewer on women and fewer still on women in committed relationships.

A Google Scholar search on pornography use and systematic reviews (search words: pornography systematic review) conducted on October 15, 2019, in which the first 10 pages of results were checked, brought up 12 systematic reviews on the use of pornography. Results after the first 10 pages were either irrelevant, not about women or not systematic reviews; thus, they were not checked. Of the 12 systematic reviews, three were specifically about men (Infante, 2018; Mellor & Duff, 2019; Sniewski et al., 2018), eight were about women and men (Alexandraki et al., 2018; De Alarcon et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016; Grubbs, Perry, et al., 2019; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019;

Harkness et al., 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Short et al., 2012) and only one of them was specifically about women (Ashton et al., 2018). Ashton et al. (2018) reviewed qualitative research from 1999 to 2015, focused on understanding women's experiences with pornography, no matter what their relationship status. Another Google Scholar search about sexually explicit material and systematic reviews (search words: sexually explicit material and systematic review) conducted on October 30, 2019, did not identify any additional systematic reviews beyond those listed above.

Although research aiming to understand women's perceptions of pornography has increased recently (Ashton et al., 2018), many unanswered questions remain. For example, why do women decide to watch pornography and what functions does pornography serve for them? Another important question is whether women feel more or less comfortable with their bodies and with their own sexual pleasure as a result of viewing pornography (McKeown et al., 2018). If women feel more comfortable with their bodies, are they better able to tell their partners what they want in order to share greater pleasure with them? Another interesting question to explore is whether women's experiences of pornography differ when they watch by themselves or with their partners (Maddox et al., 2011).

Systematic Review Objectives

The aims of this systematic review were to explore the associations between pornography and motivations women provide for watching pornography, what functions they feel pornography serves for them and how they believe pornography influences them. It was expected that, for women in committed relationships, pornography use would have different ramifications than it would have for single women. Other objectives were to explore if and how pornography plays a role in women's sexual and relationship lives, either positive or negative, while in committed relationships, bearing in mind that there are many different genres and styles of pornography and that it is likely these appeal differently to different women (Maas, Cary, et al., 2019). Lastly, it was also investigated whether, for women in committed relationships, pornography had any apparent influence on their own sexual satisfaction in their relationships and on their ability to communicate with their partners about sexual likes/dislikes.

The over-arching research question for this systematic review was: **What are the reported motivations for, functions of and possible influence² of pornography for women when they are in committed relationships?**

This question was broad enough to capture findings about women's sexual pleasure, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and sexual arousal, as well as other potential aspects of pornography use. The aim was to capture all contexts of pornography use, whether women watched pornography by themselves and/or with their partners while being in a committed relationship. In addition, "relationships" were not defined, as the aim was to capture any kind of relationships, heterosexual and same sex, as long as they involved consenting adults.

Method

A mixed-methods systematic review was deemed appropriate as both qualitative and quantitative research could potentially provide answers relevant to the research question. A thematic synthesis was conducted as it allows for the combination of findings from research that uses different methods (Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Thematic synthesis is a method that involves the systematic coding of qualitative data and the generation of descriptive and analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Definitions

For this systematic review the term pornography was defined in a way that is commonly used by pornography researchers: "pornography or sexually explicit material (SEM) is 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 & Malamuth, 2008, p. 616). Throughout this systematic review the terms pornography and sexually explicit material are used interchangeably. Regarding the 'use' of pornography the words: *use, watch, consume, view, engage, expose to* and *access* are also used interchangeably.

² Throughout this paper the words impact and influence will be used interchangeably to indicate an association but not to assume causality.

Types of Studies Included

1. Any peer-reviewed published articles, utilizing any type of qualitative and/or quantitative methodology that offered original data about the use of pornography.
2. Unpublished PhD theses.

Studies had to include participants who were in committed relationships. In addition, all published articles had to be in English language journals and published prior to July 2020. There was no specific start date in order to maximize potential inclusions.

Types of Studies Excluded

1. Review articles (although these were used to identify relevant studies).
2. Studies where the use of pornography by participants was not the main focus of the research but pornography was used as a tool for research; for example, psychophysiological studies using pornography to measure physiological arousal.
3. Studies about pornography production.

In addition, articles and PhD theses not in English and books, book chapters and any other type of unpublished material were excluded, as they are usually not peer reviewed.

Types of Participants Recruited in the Included Studies

Studies which involved individuals who identified as women, were consumers of pornography and were currently in committed relationships, were included. Committed relationships were described as such in the included papers or were at least six months long. Initially, the intention was to include only studies where the participants were in relationships of at least six months' duration, but this criterion was relaxed at the end of the systematic review searches as many articles did not report the actual relationship duration of their participants. Thus, it was decided before final decisions about paper inclusions were made that the six-month duration criterion would not be retained, and studies were included if it was clearly stated that relationships were committed. There were no restrictions regarding women's sexual orientation.

Search Strategy

Database searches were carried out on four databases: PsychINFO, Web of Science, Medline and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. These were chosen because they incorporate psychology, social sciences, life sciences and related disciplines. Additionally, the reference lists of included articles were checked as a way to identify any relevant studies not obtained elsewhere.

Some grey literature was explored as well with the specific goal to identify unpublished PhD dissertations. Including unpublished dissertations helped reduce publication bias as negative results are less often published (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Butler et al., 2016). To obtain grey literature ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global were searched.

The search terms used were chosen based on similar previous research carried out in this field. A librarian with expertise in psychology research and in conducting systematic reviews was also consulted. Search strategies with explanations are presented below and in Table 1 (p. 146). All searches were conducted on February 18, 2020.

PsychINFO via EBSCO was searched in advanced mode, narrowed by English. The key terms were searched under the default field, which looks for abstracts, authors, subject headings, titles and keywords. After the search was run, results were narrowed to academic journals and dissertations.

Medline via EBSCO was searched in advanced mode, narrowed by English. The key terms were searched under the default field, which searches abstracts, authors, subject headings, titles, and keywords. After the search was run, results were narrowed by academic journals.

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global was searched in advanced search, narrowed by doctoral dissertations and English language. The key terms were searched under abstracts (AB) as the default field revealed too many results (19,136 articles when searching under default field).

Web of Science was searched in basic mode. Key terms were searched under the default field 'Topic' which looks for titles, abstracts, and author keywords. As this database has slightly different rules for truncation, the search strategy was slightly modified: specifically, wom?n* was changed to wom?n, and wi?e* was changed to wife* OR wive*.

Selection of Studies

All results from all the searches were exported to the reference manager software EndNote. Duplicates were removed via EndNote automated removal as well as via further manual removal and the number of duplicates was recorded. Following this, an Excel spreadsheet was created containing the following specific information from all the articles:

1. A reference number, unique to each article, assigned by the first author
2. Authors' names
3. Year of publication
4. Title of the article
5. Journal where the paper was published
6. Journal volume, issue and page range of the article
7. DOI number of the paper
8. Abstract of the paper

All articles that were identified from the searches were title-and abstract-screened against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The reference lists of existing systematic reviews were searched and authors in the field were contacted but this process did not bring up any papers that were subsequently included. Roger Ingham also conducted the same searches as a way of crosschecking. The first author screened the articles by title and abstract and made decisions about inclusions and exclusions. Papers for which a decision could not be made by the title and abstract screening were read in full. Following this, a list of eligible papers was constructed by the first author. Then, the first author and a second rater, another PhD researcher in the sexual health area, independently read in full all the eligible papers. Following this, the two raters liaised until they reached agreement about which articles were to be included/ excluded. Articles that did not fit the inclusion criteria were excluded from further analysis. Following this, the final list of included papers was produced. The selection process is presented in a PRISMA flowchart (Moher et al., 2009) (Appendix 1, p. 171).

Quality Assessment

The included articles were then read in full and were assessed by the first author using a quality assessment tool. Quality assessment of studies is considered essential in order to determine whether the studies have been conducted and reported in a reliable way and whether the reported results are relevant to the systematic review question (Boland et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2016), to demonstrate the influence of each paper's quality on the results, and to reduce possible researcher bias (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Dixon-Woods et al., 2004; Thomas & Harden, 2008). There is some debate whether or not poor quality research should be excluded from systematic reviews (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). As the purpose of this systematic review was to provide an overview of the existing research rather than influence policy or construct a theory, all the papers were included, no matter what their quality ratings were (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014; Butler et al., 2016).

A standardized tool, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT, version 18) (Hong et al., 2018) was used to assess the included studies for methodological strengths and limitations. This tool was chosen because it was designed for mixed-methods systematic reviews, allows the use of one tool for concomitantly appraising the most common types of empirical studies, and shows good evidence of validity and reliability (Hong et al., 2018). In addition, it has been already widely used in other mixed-methods systematic reviews (Lawn et al., 2020; Stretton et al., 2018; Tyler et al., 2019). The quality assessment of the included papers was based on the report of the results in published papers rather than on the actual research conducted. After completing two screening questions regarding the research questions and the data collected, each of the included papers was rated according to the appropriate category of criteria as "yes", "no" or "can't tell" (Hong et al., 2018). Calculation of an overall score on the MMAT is discouraged as it is not informative (Hong et al., 2018). Instead, it is recommended that the ratings of each of the criteria for every included study are presented in a table.

The second rater also assessed three of the included articles in order to minimize potential for errors and reduce researcher bias (Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018). Inter-rater reliability between the two raters according to Cohen's kappa (McHugh, 2012) was almost perfect (90%).

Thematic Synthesis

Synthesizing research can combine data from different contexts, generate new models, identify gaps in research, help develop primary studies and help structure health interventions (Tong et al., 2012). There is no universally accepted method to use for synthesising qualitative and quantitative data (Boland et al., 2017).

Thematic synthesis was deemed appropriate for four reasons: (1) because it allows for the combination of findings from research that uses different methods (Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018; Thomas & Harden, 2008), (2) because it uses specific step by step methods for the analysis of primary data, (3) because it allows the researcher to stay close to the original qualitative data, synthesizing them and in this way producing new themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008), and (4) because it is suitable for systematic reviews that present people's views, perspectives and experiences (Boland et al., 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Usually thematic synthesis is used to synthesize qualitative data but there are also mixed methods systematic reviews that have used thematic synthesis (Baxter et al., 2011; Bray et al., 2014; Fletcher et al., 2016; Joseph-Williams et al., 2014; Schloemer & Schröder-Bäck, 2018; Wang & Yeh, 2012).

In order to conduct the thematic synthesis, all the included papers were gathered but, following thematic synthesis guidelines, only the results or findings sections were coded (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Initially line by line coding of the primary and the secondary data was undertaken, so that each line had at least one code assigned to it (Nicholson et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008). For qualitative studies, primary data are the participants' quotes and secondary data are the authors' interpretations (Smith et al., 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Toye et al., 2014). For quantitative studies, the results or findings sections were considered as primary and secondary data. Coding was undertaken using the results sections of the included papers, looking for anything that appeared relevant to the systematic review's research question. With the quantitative papers, usually a self-completed survey or a questionnaire was used; thus, the results were based on the women's reports. Regarding the qualitative papers, the data were based on what the women themselves had reported. Sections where either men's use of pornography was

discussed and/or where women's use of pornography was discussed but they were not in committed relationships were not coded. With every new paper that was coded, new codes were added to the "bank" of codes. During this process not only were new codes added, but also there was a constant "back and forth" review of the included papers, checking if the new codes appeared in the papers that had already been analysed.

This process created 18 sub-themes. In the second step, all these initial sub-themes were examined for similarities and differences. These were organized into a total of three descriptive themes, each including some of the sub-themes, reflecting the original content of the data and organized into meaningful categories (Nicholson et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Thus far, the analysis was close to the original studies and all the themes came directly from the initial papers. There was no attempt to address the main question of this systematic review or go beyond the original data. The third step was about doing that. This is the attempt to answer the systematic review question by using the descriptive themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The descriptive themes which resulted from the inductive analysis of the included papers were used to push the analysis to "go further" than the content of the included papers in order to create higher-level themes (Nicholson et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2020; Thomas & Harden, 2008) and offer a new interpretation that went beyond the primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008; Tong et al., 2012). In other words, the findings from the included papers were combined to answer the systematic review question: **what are the reported motivations for, functions of and possible influence of pornography for women when they are in committed relationships?**

Through this process, four analytical themes were identified.

The NVivo 12 software was used throughout the analysis process in order to facilitate coding and organizing the results. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software designed to help with organizing and analysing qualitative data (2021). Data analysis was primarily conducted by the first author and each step of the analysis was discussed in meetings with the co-authors.

Results

The initial search identified 1546 articles. After deleting duplicates, screening of titles and abstracts and full text reading of the ambiguous ones, 17 articles and two PhD theses were included in this mixed methods systematic review³. One of the included papers was based on one of the PhD theses, using the same data set. Both the thesis and the journal paper were included as they investigated different hypotheses. Of the studies, four were qualitative and 15 were quantitative. Two of the studies were conducted in Australia, one in Israel, 13 in the USA, two in Canada and one was an online survey, with country of residence for participants not specified but they were most likely from Canada and the USA. All four qualitative studies used interviews. All the quantitative studies used surveys – online, telephone, or in-person. The studies were published between 2007 and May 2020.

Additional details about the characteristics of the included articles are shown in Table 2 (p. 147).

Quality Assessment

The results of the quality assessment conducted with the MMAT (Hong et al., 2018) are presented in Table 3 (p. 156). All 19 included papers had a “yes” response to the two initial screening questions: “Are there clear research questions?” and “Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?”. The design and the remaining ratings of the studies reported in the included papers (qualitative, quantitative descriptive, or quantitative non-randomized⁴) is provided in Table 3.

Almost all of the included papers scored a “yes” for the majority of the quality assessment questions and a “can’t tell” rating to the question “is the risk of nonresponse bias low” for 10 of the quantitative descriptive papers and a “can’t tell” to the question “are the confounders accounted for

³ For the sake of brevity, all included research will be called papers or studies, interchangeably from now on.

⁴ Non-randomized studies (NRS) are defined here as any quantitative study estimating the effectiveness of an intervention (harm or benefit) that does not use randomization to allocate units to comparison groups. This includes studies where allocation occurs in the course of usual treatment decisions or by individuals' choices, i.e. studies usually called observational Higgins, J. P., & Green, S. (2008). *Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions*. Wiley, John & Sons.

in the design and analysis" for one quantitative non-randomized paper. These data indicate that the quality of the included studies was relatively high. The aims of the studies, the methods used, and the type of analysis were clearly reported in all the included articles. The age range of the women participants varied from 18 to 80. In the three studies which provided longitudinal data from women, participants were as old as 80 years old (Perry, 2017b; Perry & Davis, 2017; Perry & Schleifer, 2018).

A definition of pornography or sexually explicit material (SEM) was provided in 11 of the papers, whereas in eight no definition was provided (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Daspe et al., 2018; Dellner, 2008; Perry, 2020; Perry & Schleifer, 2018; Poulsen et al., 2013; Willoughby et al., 2016; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020).

Relationship length was relevant to this systematic review as papers were included only if women were in committed relationships. There was no definition in any of the included papers of how long a relationship should be in order to be regarded "committed". Relationship length was not reported in several of the papers (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Carroll et al., 2017; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019; McKeown et al., 2018; Perry, 2017b; Perry, 2020; Perry & Davis, 2017; Perry & Schleifer, 2018; Poulsen et al., 2013). Only one paper specifically stated that participants had to have been in a committed relationship for six months or longer to take part (Dellner, 2008).

In addition, the constructs that were being measured were only defined in one of the articles (Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019). Usually, a specific scale was used to measure a construct, (for example, sexual satisfaction or relationship satisfaction), but the precise definitions of the constructs these measures assessed were not provided.

Thematic Synthesis

As mentioned in the method section, the 18 sub-themes were organized into a total of three descriptive themes, each including some of the sub-themes:

1. Theme One: *How pornography can bring changes to relationships*: Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Sexual Desire, Intimacy, Dyadic Satisfaction, Marital Quality, Sexual Quality, Pleasure Changes Over Time.

2. Theme Two: *Pornography usage*: Porn Use Frequency, Content of Sexual Media, Shared Use, Reasons for Porn Use, Porn Use & Demographic Variables.
3. Theme Three: *Negative outcomes from using pornography*: Porn Use & Separation, Porn Disrupting Pleasure, Pornography Acceptance – Porn as Infidelity, Lack of Control, Unrealistic Expectations.

Then, as was described above, these descriptive themes that came from the included papers were combined to answer the systematic review question and four analytical themes were created.

1. Porn use enhances – plays a positive role in women's sexual and relationship lives while in committed relationships.
2. Porn use disrupts – plays a negative role in women's sexual and relationship lives while in committed relationships.
3. Shared Use.
4. Reasons for Porn Use.

The articles linked to these themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 4 (p. 158). The analytical themes are presented below along with some illustrative quotes.

Porn use enhances – plays a positive role in women's sexual and relationship lives⁵ while in committed relationships. This theme is about how pornography use plays a positive role in women's sexual and relationship lives, whether they watch it with or without their partners. This theme was derived only from quantitative papers, as it was not evident in any of the qualitative studies, and consists of these sub-themes: *Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Sexual Desire, Marital Quality, Sexual Quality*.

⁵ The phrase sexual and relationship lives was chosen in order to incorporate all the terms used by the researchers in the included studies. Most of these terms appear as sub-themes in the analysis such as: Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Sexual Desire, Intimacy, Dyadic Satisfaction, Marital Quality, Sexual Quality.

Sexual satisfaction was the most frequently mentioned sub-theme in the papers. A validated sexual satisfaction questionnaire⁶ was usually used (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Daspe et al., 2018; Dellner, 2008; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). Studies reported that the woman's own pornography use, either by herself and/or with her partner (it did not matter if the partner knew about women's pornography use or not), was significantly associated with higher reported levels of sexual satisfaction (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020).

Relationship satisfaction was the second most mentioned sub-theme in all of the quantitative papers; again, this was measured by validated questionnaires (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Daspe et al., 2018; Dellner, 2008; Poulsen et al., 2013; Resch & Alderson, 2014). Studies reported that the woman's personal pornography use, either on her own or with the partner or both, was positively associated with relationship satisfaction:

"Specifically, the woman's own use of sexually explicit material was positively related to sexual and relationship satisfaction (Bridges, 2007, p. 65)."

Sexual desire was also mentioned only in the quantitative papers (Bridges, 2007; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). It was found that the consumption of pornography by women was associated with higher sexual desire:

"Women's pornography use was associated with significantly higher female sexual desire (Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020, p. 83)."

Marital quality was mentioned in one of the papers which reported on quantitative longitudinal data (Perry, 2017b). For those women in relationships who reported watching pornography more than once a month at the time of the first survey, their marital quality had increased by the time of the second survey:

⁶ The psychometric tools used are listed in Table 2 (p. 147) - Characteristics of included papers.

"Viewing pornography would not be negatively associated with marital quality for women, but could in fact be positively associated with marital quality (Perry, 2017b, p. 556)."

Consumption of pornography was reported to play a positive role in women's *sexual quality* as assessed by a two-item scale in a quantitative paper; sexual quality was not defined (Poulsen et al., 2013).

Porn use disrupts – plays a negative role in women's sexual and relationship lives while in committed relationships. This theme is about how pornography use plays a negative role in women's sexual and relationship lives, whether they watch it with or without their partners. This theme was derived from both qualitative and quantitative research, and it includes these sub-themes: *Sexual Satisfaction, Porn Use and Separation, Porn Disrupting Pleasure in Relationships, Intimacy, Pornography Acceptance / Porn as Infidelity, Lack of Control, Unrealistic Expectations.*

Sexual satisfaction was the most common sub-theme assessed, but only in quantitative papers (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Daspe et al., 2018; Dellner, 2008; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). These reported that women's solo pornography use (it was not specifically mentioned whether partners knew about use or not), was negatively associated with their own sexual satisfaction:

"Significant findings partially supported the second hypothesis that husbands' and wives' solo pornography use would negatively associate with sexual satisfaction. Wives' pornography use was also negatively associated with their sexual satisfaction (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017, p. 580)."

Separating or breaking up with a committed partner was mentioned to be positively associated with pornography use by women in some of the quantitative articles (Perry, 2020; Perry & Davis, 2017; Perry & Schleifer, 2018):

"The positive association between pornography use and repeatedly breaking up appeared to be stronger for women (Perry, 2020, p. 1210)."

Among women, however, there was a negative association between discontinuing pornography use and divorce. Of those women who continue to watch porn during

both survey waves, 18% were predicted to be divorced at Time 2, compared to only 6% of those who stopped viewing porn in between the two surveys. Overall, these figures suggest that women who watch pornography get divorced at higher rates than men (who watch pornography) (Perry & Schleifer, 2018, p. 290).

Pleasure was also reported as being disrupted because of the use of pornography by women in qualitative papers, whether they were watching it by themselves or with their partners or both (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020). It was also noted in qualitative papers that women's pleasure was never really emphasized in pornography and that was something that affected the way women communicated to partners about their sexual needs:

Chloe spoke of pornography as depicting men 'always getting it right'; as a result, 'there is never those conversations in porn' about women's pleasure. This had influenced her not to communicate her needs or desires to her sexual partners on the assumption that they would 'take offence' (Ashton et al., 2019a, p. 422).

"Pornography that was detrimental to the relationship, whether consumed by the women or their partners, was described by women as reducing their pleasure (Ashton et al., 2019a, p. 424)."

Another component of women's sexual and relationship lives that appeared to be negatively associated with the consumption of pornography and was mentioned in quantitative papers was *intimacy* in committed relationships (Bridges, 2007). In one of the quantitative papers it was demonstrated that:

"the more sexually explicit material a woman reported using herself, the lower she rated her level of intimacy in her romantic relationship (Bridges, 2007, p. 76)."

Interestingly, it was mentioned in quantitative papers that women who were in committed relationships and were using pornography still thought that this was some form of *infidelity*, no matter whether their partner knew or not (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Carroll et al., 2017):

"Nearly one-third of engaged and married women report that they view pornography as a form of 'marital infidelity' (Carroll et al., 2017, p. 153)."

Furthermore, pornography use by women was positively associated with perceived *lack of control*: in one quantitative paper, difficulty of controlling a strong urge and trouble stopping or decreasing pornography use was reported (Daspe et al., 2018).

Finally, as described in one qualitative paper, women reported that pornography use gave them *unrealistic expectations* regarding their sexual and relationship lives:

“Samantha was disappointed following expectations engendered by pornography. Penetrative sex with her partner was not ‘amazing’, she did not ‘orgasm very quickly’ or find it ‘highly pleasurable’, and she and her partner did not reach orgasm simultaneously (Ashton et al., 2019a, p. 421).”

Real-life sexual experiences were not the same as depicted in pornography. Whether the type of pornography accessed played a role in women's expectations was not discussed in any of the articles.

Shared Use. This theme is about all aspects of shared use of pornography and how shared use works as a stimulus to communicate about sexual issues and to improve intimacy. There is some overlap with the previous two themes but this one is specifically about anything mentioned in regard to shared pornography use. This theme was identified only in qualitative research.

Many papers mentioned that women enjoyed watching pornography with their partners as it gave them ideas for new sexual activities that could lead to more sexual variety and sexual pleasure:

“They and their sexual partners could use pornography to learn about and practice new sexual activities and to enhance shared pleasure (Ashton et al., 2019a, p. 418),”

Some people see pornography as only for men. NO! It's for both men and women. In fact, pornography is primarily a masculine initiative since the man is the one who provides it. In my case, it was like that, however if there is intimacy there is an opportunity to enjoy it together. If you view pornography as something for both to enjoy, then there is something appealing in it that stimulates arousal (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010, p. 614).

At the same time, however, it was also mentioned that sharing pornography use with a partner did not benefit women's sexual life, as it could mean pressure for women to perform specific sexual acts they did not necessarily want to:

Although Chloe said she did not 'necessarily have any problem with people, well, the people I have sex with watching porn', she spoke of partners giving her 'a one-size-fits-all kind of feeling' and of their tendency to perform 'scary' acts, such as choking or anal penetration, that they had seen in pornography. At times she had felt 'pressured' to 'go along with it' and, because 'there is almost never any negotiation in porn', she felt that her pleasure was not considered and her relationships did not benefit (Ashton et al., 2020).

Shared pornography use by women and their partners was also mentioned as a tool to communicate about sexual issues and negotiate about sexual likes and dislikes:

Molly explained, I find it easier to negotiate sex in relationships if there's someone else's sex happening. I'd be like, that'd be too far for me by the way...it takes it away from my partner and puts it into something that's separate from us so no one feels like they're ruining it for the other person or something like that. Similarly, Sophia shared, 'it's just a lot easier to look at someone outside your relationship and say 'see that person's doing something I don't think is attractive,' instead of saying 'you're doing something.' It's a tool (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 348).

Finally, it was mentioned that shared pornography use improved *intimacy* in relationships:

We inferred from women's accounts that a pleasurable experience of shared pornography viewing was more likely to occur in a relationship presented as respectful and communicative; viewing together was constructed as a contribution to intimacy. The women who described viewing with their male sexual partners narrated themselves as agents in the relationship: they experienced sexual intimacy as healthy, could critically assess what they saw in pornography, and could be selective about the role it played in partnered pleasure (Ashton et al., 2019a, p. 419).

Reasons for Porn Use. This theme focuses on the reasons provided by women for watching pornography and appeared in both qualitative and quantitative research.

Several reasons were provided as to why women in committed relationships watched pornography, either by themselves or with their partners or both. Some women mentioned that they chose to watch pornography when their partners did not want to engage in sexual activity:

“Female users stated that they used sexually explicit materials because their male partners did not want to be intimate as often as they did (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011, p. 573).”

Other reasons that women reported for pornography use were to enhance masturbation and fantasizing (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011) and to assist them in exploring their sexual selves while they were in committed relationships:

For example, many women spoke about how their consumption helped them to foster a sense of sexual independence because it was rooted in personal choice. Sara shared, ‘It’s something I want to do.’ Sophia also noted, ‘It’s just me time I guess.’ And Sophia spoke about how her consumption helped her feel empowered. She explained, it does make me feel empowered in the sense that I can access these things, I’m comfortable with them. I’m comfortable with my body. I’m doing it freely so the sexually explicit material that I consume now and have consumed for years has been independent. It’s been driven by my own preferences and choices and so I think that is nice particularly since I’ve been in relationships a lot of my 20s. So, having control over an aspect of your sexuality that is only for you and only yours (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 347).

Women also talked about how they consumed pornography in order to explore their own sexual interests and to gain a better understanding of their sexual selves:

As Nora shared, ‘it allows me to explore my own interests beyond a relationship, independently.’ She continued, ‘sexuality is something that’s core to everyone’s identity...That’s a large reason why I access those materials. It’s part of that

expression and development of understanding myself.' And 'I want to have a safe space to explore my own interests without any judgment or my partner picking up on it and thinking that is what I want to pursue without me communicating it' (McKeown et al., 2018, p. 347).

In summary, it appears that there are many different reasons for which women in committed relationships report using pornography.

Discussion

The aims of this systematic review were to explore what motivates women to watch pornography, what purposes/functions pornography serves for women and how women believe pornography influences their sexual and relationship lives. This is the first mixed methods systematic review on this topic. The focus in the review was on women in committed relationships as it was expected that pornography use would have different ramifications for them than for single women. This systematic review had a different focus than another recent qualitative systematic review that reviewed research involving women of any relationship status (single, in casual relationships, and in committed relationships) (Ashton et al., 2018); and it reviewed both qualitative and quantitative research.

Four analytical themes were identified in total, which were consistent with Ashton et al.'s (2018) systematic review, but also extend our understanding about women's pornography use. Two of the themes are overarching: Porn use Enhances (plays a positive role in) women's sexual and relationship lives, and Porn use Disrupts (plays a negative role in) women's sexual and relationship lives. These reflect the fact that pornography use can have both positive and negative roles in women's sexual and relationship lives.

The fact that women's pornography use is complex is also apparent in the other two themes. The theme Reasons for Porn Use illustrates that there are many different reasons that women in committed relationships mention for using pornography e.g., to enhance masturbation and fantasizing, to explore their sexuality but also when there was incongruence between their own and their partners' sexual needs. In the theme Shared Use, watching pornography with a committed

partner had both positive and negative outcomes for women's sexual and relationship lives; it could bring novelty to the relationship but could also mean pressure for women to perform specific sexual acts they might not have wanted to engage in.

Definitional Issues in Pornography Research

In the included articles in this review, the terms pornography and sexually explicit material were used but they were not consistently defined and in only some of the included articles were definitions provided. Pornography research is fragmented when it comes to definitions (Ashton et al., 2018; Kohut et al., 2020; McKee et al., 2020). Often, researchers use different terms for pornography, such as sexually explicit material, erotica, adult films, etc. (Ashton et al., 2018; Kohut et al., 2020). This problem becomes more evident if one looks at research carried out within different disciplines (McKee et al., 2020). McKee et al. (2020) showed that researchers in disciplines such as history, cultural studies and literacy studies prefer to use different definitions for pornography than do researchers from psychology. This makes it challenging for researchers in the pornography area, as searching and finding all the relevant research is not straightforward (Kohut et al., 2020). Future research would benefit if pornography was more clearly and consistently defined.

Cultural Issues in Pornography Research

The cultural context within which pornography is experienced by participants, and also the context in which research is conducted, play important roles in how research is reported in published articles (Ashton et al., 2018). The reviewed research was conducted in only four countries: Australia, USA, Canada and Israel. Three of these countries can be described as having a "Western" lifestyle and a "relaxed" approach when it comes to pornography use, in comparison to non-Western countries. Israel is an exception as it can be considered a mixture of Western and Eastern cultures. Some researchers described the cultural context of their research and made culture-specific observations (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010), others mentioned the culture and the fact that they opted for a consistent cultural background (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019), and many did not mention the influence of the cultural context at all (Bridges, 2007; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Carroll et al., 2017; Daspe et al., 2018; Dellner, 2008; McKeown et

al., 2018; Perry, 2017b; Perry, 2020; Perry & Davis, 2017; Perry & Schleifer, 2018; Poulsen et al., 2013; Resch & Alderson, 2014; Willoughby et al., 2016; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2020). The cultural contexts and, by extension, the cultural norms about pornography use women in committed relationships might have to deal with were not the focus of the analysis in any of the included papers. Cultural contexts and norms should be more fully addressed in future research on pornography use because pornography laws/policies vary markedly across different countries, as do levels of gender equality/inequality. As the included papers for this systematic review come from the four countries mentioned, the themes presented would have been shaped by the cultural contexts of these four countries.

Limitations and Strengths of the Systematic Review

Due to the rapid changes in availability of sexually explicit material via smartphones (Spišák, 2016), new relevant articles published between July 2020 and the publication date of this systematic review will inevitably be missing. Also, as with every systematic review, it is possible that relevant articles have been missed because they did not appear in the searches, although guidance from a librarian and extensive database searches were utilized.

As mentioned in the Results section, relationship length was a problematic issue for this review; one of the inclusion criteria was that women had to be in committed relationships. However, in the included papers, relationship type and relationship length were not always clearly reported. Sometimes relationship length or type were not mentioned at all and sometimes the results were presented in such a way that there was no distinction between participants in committed and uncommitted relationships. Thus, there were a few papers that were initially considered borderline inclusions but in the end were not included in this systematic review because the authors did not clearly state which of the results referred to women in committed relationships and which referred to women not in committed relationships; for example, Borgogna et al. (2018); Cates (2015); Dwulit and Rzymiski (2019). For this systematic review that focused on women in committed relationships, papers were included when relationship length or relationship type were clearly stated - for example, married participants - or when the authors of the papers mentioned that participants reported that

relationships were committed. It would be useful for future research to enquire about, and report, clearer information on relationship length and type, although defining whether a relationship is committed or not is a complex issue. It can depend on what the members of the relationship believe as well as the age of the people involved in the relationship – younger people are highly likely to interpret time involved in a relationship (and the term 'commitment') differently from older people. It would also be of interest to assess changing behaviours and attitudes as relationships develop over time.

Another issue worthy of mention is that some papers were not included in this systematic review because of other issues in how the results were presented; in particular, when it was hard to tell whether specific findings applied to men or women (e.g., Carmenate (2018); Kohut et al. (2017); Minarcik et al. (2016); Staley and Prause (2013)). In other cases, the authors may have been unable to analyse quantitative data for men and women separately due to small sample sizes. Because this systematic review focused only on data pertaining to women, articles that reported data for men and women collectively had to be excluded.

Regarding thematic synthesis, it was considered a useful method for this systematic review, in order to combine and synthesize all the existing research to date and produce analytical themes. However, some scholars have argued that by interpreting an interpretation, qualitative synthesis loses the essence of the original studies (Boland et al., 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Toye et al., 2014).

The included papers did not address sexual wellbeing, a concept that has recently been gaining more attention from sex researchers (Finley, 2018; Kaestle & Evans, 2018; Kilimnik & Meston, 2018; Štulhofer et al., 2016; Štulhofer et al., 2019). Sexual wellbeing refers to an individual's subjective appraisal of their sexuality, the presence of pleasurable and satisfying experiences and the absence of sexual problems (Foster & Byers, 2013, p. 149; Laumann et al., 2006, p. 146). This is not necessarily a shortcoming of the included papers, but it rather shows that pornography research has as yet not focused on the broader topic of sexual wellbeing. Thus, further research on sexual wellbeing in relation to pornography exposure would be useful.

Furthermore, whether the partners of the women who were watching pornography knew about their use or not was not assessed or discussed in the included papers. Future pornography research should include this to enable assessment of whether (and how) this affects women's reactions and their sexual and relationship lives.

This systematic review had some strengths. According to the author's knowledge, this is the first systematic review about pornography use by women who are in committed relationships that has been conducted; it helps shed new light on pornography use by women and to help to correct the historical gender imbalance. Also, it is the first relevant systematic review that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative research. Despite the few methodological issues with definitions of pornography and with how the types of relationships were defined, I endeavoured to be as inclusive as possible in order to review all the relevant research. For example, I included PhD theses as a way to minimize publication bias, because PhD theses reporting negative findings are less often published (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014). I also used a standardized quality assessment tool (Hong et al., 2018) and, as recommended (Higgins & Green, 2008), a second rater independently assessed the quality of a sub-sample of the included papers. Perhaps the key strength of this systematic review, however, has been to identify areas for further exploration in this important emerging field.

Implications of Findings

The findings from this systematic review have implications for clinical practice. From a sexual health perspective, it is important to know whether women who watch pornography believe it increases (or decreases) their sexual satisfaction. Clinicians can use such knowledge to provide permission to women to watch pornography without feeling guilty or "abnormal". According to the Permission, Limited Information, Specific Suggestion, Intensive Therapy (PLISSIT) model (Annon, 1976), people often need to be told by some sort of authority, such as a sexual health clinician, that their sexual thoughts and behaviour are "normal". When people engage in behaviour they believe is immoral, such as watching pornography, they may interpret it as pathological and feel distressed about it (Droubay et al., 2020). Clinicians can provide limited information (Annon, 1976) to women about their sexual concerns, dispel sexual myths that clients might hold (Crooks & Baur, 2011;

Lehmiller, 2014) and make them feel sexually empowered, relaxed and better able to enjoy their sex lives.

As suggested by Maddox et al. (2011), pornography might also be used in clinical settings to help women who have sexual difficulties, such as sexual desire and sexual arousal disorders, to improve their sexual satisfaction and sexual intimacy (Crooks & Baur, 2011; Lehmiller, 2014). Couples facing sexual intimacy problems could also watch pornography as a means to communicate about sexual likes and dislikes and to relax and enjoy sexual intimacy. Communication about sexual likes and dislikes is very important to all domains of sexual function (desire, arousal, erection, lubrication, orgasm) as well as overall sexual function (Mallory et al., 2019).

Understanding pornography consumption is also important because it might influence policy regarding pornography. According to some authors, women are expected to adopt a subservient "pleasing role" in their heterosexual intimate relationships, prioritizing male sexual pleasure (Ashton et al., 2019a). Although it is expected that men watch pornography and talk openly about it, it is still considered unacceptable for women to do so (Ashton et al., 2018; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). It is important to understand more about the extent to which women still feel influenced by societal gendered norms around pornography (Ashton et al., 2018; Spišák, 2017), as this could help guide policy⁷ makers and others to work towards developing education and service provision policies that could minimize gender inequalities. It has been argued that national policies on pornography have an uneven impact on women as the burden has historically been placed on them regarding controlling their reproductive capacity to the relative detriment of their own pleasure (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Fine and McClelland (2006) argued that women need to be provided with the opportunities to develop intellectually, emotionally, economically, and culturally and to be able to see themselves as sexual beings capable of pleasure while simultaneously being aware of social, medical and reproductive risk. For these reasons, it is important to know whether watching

⁷ The word policy is used here to cover/refer to a different range of options of sexual education provided by teachers, by parents or by clinicians, and not just official high-level policy.

pornography helps to challenge women's traditional models of sexuality (Morrison & Tallack, 2005), encouraging gender equality policies and norms.

Understanding pornography use better can also inform relationships and sex education (RSE) for children in schools. Multiple studies have reported that young people are regularly watching pornographic material at young ages; it would therefore be useful for educators to ensure that young people understand what they are watching is fantasy and not "real-life" sex (Smith, 2013). At the same time, however, young people need to be able to make informed decisions about their bodies and their sexual health (Fine & McClelland, 2006). It would be useful for parents and educators to consider whether they would want pornography to be their children's main source of sexual education and, if not, what might be the alternatives. It is also necessary to address gender roles when discussing pornography in educational settings (Smith, 2013). Healthy sexuality requires education about how to achieve pleasure but at the same time requires education about sexual health risks and protection against coercion and violence (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Knowing women's sexual likes and dislikes can help inform RSE programs, to focus more on sexual pleasure and how to achieve it, and on sexual communication and sexual consent issues rather than on risks and dangers of sex. Recently, there have been some calls for pornography literacy education; for example, Dawson et al. (2019) conducted a study using participatory group activities with 18 to 29-year-olds in Ireland and reported that their participants thought that sex education should provide information on how to reduce shame when engaging with pornography and also improve their critical thinking skills regarding body image comparisons; sexual and gender-based violence; fetishising of gay and transgender communities; and lastly, setting unrealistic standards for sex. Comprehensive RSE can help women feel empowered and make safer sexual health choices.

Conclusion

We reviewed the existing research, both qualitative and quantitative, on women's pornography use while in committed relationships. The findings to date suggest that for this group pornography use is associated, both positively and negatively, with their own and their partner's sexual and relationship lives. Researchers can use these findings as a starting point to conduct

further research in the area, to further investigate what makes women choose to watch pornography and whether women believe pornography has a role to play in their sexual and relationship lives.

Chapter 3 – Women Reporting on Their Use of Pornography: A Qualitative Study Exploring

Women's Perceived Precursors and Perceived Outcomes

Abstract

Although research on women's use of pornography is growing, to date neither qualitative nor quantitative studies in this area have paid much attention to the motivations women report for using pornography. This study aimed to explore motivations women describe for using pornography, and outcomes of their pornography use. A qualitative online interview study was conducted with 30 women (*Mean* age 30.23, range 20-47; residing in the UK and in Greece; of varied sexual orientations and relationship status) about their pornography use and preferences. Reflexive thematic analysis was used. Results are organized into two themes: Precursors and Outcomes, with both themes comprising two subthemes; Sexual (for example to learn new sexual techniques, to enhance sexual arousal) and Non-sexual Precursors (to relax, to pass the time); and Intended (enhanced orgasms) and Unintended Outcomes (sexual empowerment). The findings highlight that pornography use for women is complex and can have both positive and negative ramifications for women's sexual lives. The negative outcomes (unrealistic representations) did not stop women from using pornography as use could also enhance their sexual arousal and help them to orgasm. For some women pornography provided sexual empowerment as it allowed them to enjoy themselves without needing a partner. Implications for clinical practice and education are discussed.

In the last two decades digital technologies have increasingly provided people with fast and easy access to pornographic material (Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020; Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2020), making it a normative sexual activity for most people, including women (Ashton et al., 2018). Pornography research has been increasing in the last decade, using both quantitative (Ashton et al., 2019a; Fisher & Kohut, 2017; Kohut et al., 2016, 2017, 2020; Maas, Bray, et al., 2019; Maas et al., 2018) and qualitative approaches (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Attwood et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2018; Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020). However, historically pornography research has focused mostly on men. To date, little attention has been given to women's experiences with their own pornography use (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Chadwick et al., 2018) and, in particular, to women's reported motivations for pornography use. Therefore, this study focused on women's motivations and outcomes of their pornography use. Below research is presented specifically on women's reported pornography use in general, and then with a focus on women's motivation for pornography use and outcomes from that use.

Women's Pornography Use

Research about pornography use has been conducted mostly using mixed gender samples, apart from a few exceptions. Kohut et al. (2018) recruited US heterosexual couples and asked them to complete online surveys to investigate their pornography use, either together or alone. According to the findings, when partners were using pornography together, they experienced more open sexual communication and closeness; when partners did not use pornography together or when one partner did not use pornography at all, sexual communication was inhibited, and the reported closeness was lower. In an online survey that also used a mixed sample of North American women and men (18 to 78 years old), Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2017) aimed to establish whether individuals who watch online pornography fall into one or more of three distinct profiles proposed by Cooper et al. (1999): recreational, highly distressed non-compulsive, and compulsive. Results showed that most women fit the recreational group profile, suggesting that pornography use might be part of an open and active sex life for them rather than being a source of stress and compulsion.

There have been systematic reviews that included studies with women participants. For example, in a systematic review of studies on pornography use and sexual pleasure, McKee et al. (2021b) concluded that sometimes women might feel conflicted between the sexual pleasure they received from their pornography use and wider cultural discourses dictating they should not be watching pornography. Women and heterosexual men are positioned differently with respect to pornography use. Compared with the research on men, the limited research on women has focused more on their subjective experience and sexual agency. A meta-analysis of 50 studies concluded that pornography consumption did not play a role in women's sexual and relationship satisfaction (Wright et al., 2017).

Ashton et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative systematic review of 22 articles that focused on women's experiences of pornography. Women accessed pornography mostly via electronic devices and they encountered pornography intentionally, accidentally, or indirectly through partners' use; pornography was accessed either alone, with partners, or in a social setting. Women expressed empathy mostly towards female actors, and less towards male actors. Women compared their bodies to the bodies of pornography female actors; they mentioned pornography use as a poor form of sex education, but also as a way to become sexually aroused. At the same time, women reported they believed that their use of pornography would be seen as inappropriate by society. In the context of relationships, some women mentioned that pornography use reduced intimacy, while others believed pornography use increased intimacy. Relationship length was not taken into consideration however, and thus the authors could not discuss whether pornography use was differentially related to intimacy depending on relationship length. Finally, some of the women in the studies reviewed believed that pornography use was an adult right and that it should not be censored, although any form of violence depicted in pornography, such as rape, murder, and women's degradation, was disliked.

Research that focused on women's pornography use specifically, has been mostly qualitative so far. A US focus group study with adult women who had diverse sexual orientations, aged between 18 and 64 years, explored the strategies women might use to navigate negative pornography content

for personal benefit during solo use (Chadwick et al., 2018). The authors noted that women often experienced pornography as “risky” because they were likely to encounter negative content that would disrupt their sexual arousal or make them feel bored or uncomfortable. To avoid these risks, women chose to search for pornography that was less likely to contain material they would find distressing, altered the pornographic content they watched, or opted to read pornography of their choice rather than to watch videos. However, because of those risks, some participants stated that they decided not to watch pornography at all. These results suggest that women who chose to use pornography for their own sexual pleasure were active consumers. Even though they had normalized negative experiences with pornography, they were actively choosing what to watch in order to enhance their sexual arousal, rather than being passive consumers of pornography.

In another qualitative study, Ashton et al. (2020) interviewed 27 young Australian women (18-30 years old) to explore how they understood what pornography meant for them. The participants' discourses revealed that they felt that men's sexual needs in relation to pornography were prioritised, men were the gatekeepers of intimacy, women needed to objectify themselves to compete with pornography for intimacy and, finally, that men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment which does not always apply to women. Overall, women felt that their emotional, sexual, and relational needs were relatively disregarded in pornography.

What Motivates Women's Pornography Use

There is some research that has focused on motivations for pornography use but mostly using mixed gender samples. There are a few exceptions where women-only samples have been used (mainly qualitative studies), but these looked at opinions and experiences about partner's pornography use, as well as women's own use.

Perse (1994), in a now rather dated study, conducted an in-person survey using a mixed sample of women and men college students (age range 18 to 23) in the US. Participants were provided with 32 reasons for pornography use and they had to rate “how close their reasons for watching or reading erotica matched” on a five-point scale (1 = not at all, 5 = exactly). Overall, four main motivations for pornography use were identified: sexual enhancement, diversion, sexual

release, and substitution (Perse, 1994). Sexual enhancement was about sexual arousal and learning, and diversion about using pornography out of boredom, for entertainment and to relax. Sexual release was about using pornography for fantasizing and masturbation, and finally, substitution was about using pornography as a replacement for a sexual partner. Apart from using pornography as a substitution for a sexual partner, it has been reported that one of the reasons women choose to use pornography for was as part of their partnered sexual relationships. For example, a US online survey study was conducted with heterosexual couples (*Mean* age = 35.56, *SD* = 10.67). Seventeen reasons for pornography use were provided and participants were asked to indicate which of the reasons was the main reasons for their pornography use. Women reported using pornography mainly as part of their partnered sexual relationships, for masturbation, for help when fantasizing, and because of curiosity (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011).

A similar result regarding using pornography for relationship reasons, among others, has been reported by a US online survey that recruited undergraduate students, women and men (*Mean* age = 20, *SD* = 1.81) in order to identify specific motivations for pornography use (Paul & Shim, 2008). Participants were provided with 23 different reasons for pornography use and were asked to rate how many different times they used pornography for each reason during the last year. A factor analysis revealed four main factors for which participants reported using pornography: relationship, mood management, habitual use, and fantasy. *Relationship* was about using pornography to maintain sexual partnerships and friendships. *Mood management* was about using pornography for entertainment and as help when masturbating. *Habitual use* was about using pornography out of habit or because of compulsiveness. Finally, *fantasy* was about fantasizing about having sexual activities. Across all factors men showed stronger motivations than women. The authors concluded that women were probably consuming less pornography than men because they were less motivated to do so.

In an online survey study involving a mixed gender Hungarian sample, specific reasons for pornography use were provided (e.g., "I watch porn to/because..."), and participants rated the frequency these applied to them, on a seven-point scale (1 = never, 7 = all the time). The most

common pornography motivations were sexual pleasure, sexual curiosity, fantasy, self-exploration, lack of sexual satisfaction, boredom avoidance, emotional distraction/suppression, and stress reduction (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021). Sexual reasons arose as the main reason for pornography use in other studies as well. Burtăverde et al. (2021) conducted one qualitative study using an open-ended questionnaire and two quantitative online studies, using a mixed gender sample of undergraduate Romanian students. The most common reasons reported for pornography use were increased sex drive, enhancing sexual performance, social and instrumental reasons, and lack of relational and emotional skills.

Hempel (2012) conducted an online survey with 612 adult US women and qualitative interviews with 29 who volunteered from the original sample, about their experiences with pornography and the degree of alignment with their religious/spiritual beliefs. Women had overall positive experiences with pornography and used it in order to increase arousal, as a form of entertainment, and to increase their sexual knowledge. Similarly, a qualitative interview US study with 30 adult women of diverse social backgrounds reported that the main reasons women used pornography were for boosting sexual arousal and for masturbation (Parvez, 2006).

A study that recruited US college students found that women used pornography less than men did and they used it due to curiosity, for sexual pleasure, and for sexual excitement (Brown, Conner, et al., 2017). Similar results were reported by another mixed-gender US online survey which provided participants with 15 motivations for pornography use, "I view pornography when...", which participants rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Men and women had similar motivations for using pornography but women mostly opted to use pornography for sexual reasons, because of tiredness, and because of boredom (Esplin et al., 2021). Similar results were reported by a study that used a mixed-gender sample of UK and Irish participants, Moynihan et al. (2022) examined the role pornography played in alleviating boredom. Participants were provided with different reasons for pornography use, "I use pornography to..." which they had to rate on a five-point scale (1 = never like me, 5 = very often like me). Results revealed that women and men used pornography as a way to alleviate boredom.

Grubbs, Wright, et al. (2019) conducted a large systematic review of more than 130 studies and found that women and men used pornography for sexual pleasure, but women used pornography less than men. Another systematic review and thematic synthesis (which is presented in Chapter 2) focused on what motivated women (of varied sexual orientations, all in committed relationships) to watch pornography (Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021). Women used pornography to communicate with their partners about sexual issues, to negotiate sexual likes and dislikes, and to increase intimacy but, at the same time, reported they sometimes felt pressure to perform specific sexual acts they did not necessarily want to engage in.

Outcomes from Women's Pornography Use

Pornography use can influence women in different ways. Some previous research has presented outcomes from women's pornography use. A Canadian study with mixed-sex and same-sex couples involved participants, both the women and their partners, keeping a daily diary of their pornography use and of their relationship satisfaction, partnered sexual desire, and partnered sexual activity (Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2020). For women, regardless of their partner's gender, pornography use was positively associated with their own and their partner's sexual desire and with the likelihood of partnered sexual activity. Online surveys that investigated heterosexual US couples' shared pornography use and sexual and relationship satisfaction showed that partners who were dissimilar in solitary pornography use (pornography use alone) had lower sexual satisfaction than partners that were similar in their solitary pornography use, and this finding was not moderated by gender (Kohut et al., 2021).

In another US online survey that used dyadic data from heterosexual couples, it was shown that pornography use was sometimes associated with low relationship satisfaction for both women and men. This association differed by levels of anxious attachment and pornography acceptance (Maas et al., 2018). For women who were high in pornography acceptance, pornography use was not associated with relationship satisfaction, whereas for women who were low in pornography acceptance, use was associated with lower relationship satisfaction. In addition, for women with anxious attachment, greater pornography use was associated with lower relationship satisfaction.

These findings suggest that women might be using pornography to learn how to please themselves and their partners sexually but, at the same time, some might be feeling guilt or shame for this.

In a dyadic study conducted in a large metropolitan city in North America, mixed-sex and same-sex couples who had been together for at least 6 months completed an online survey (Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021). Women's pornography use (either solo or with their partner) was associated with their own greater sexual wellbeing, with more frequent partnered sexual activities, and with lower sexual distress. These results suggest that women's pornography use might promote openness in sexual communication because its use could provide opportunities for discussing sexual preferences, which might in turn enhance the couple's, as well as the women's, own wellbeing.

Ashton et al. (2019a) conducted interviews with 27 young Australian women (18 to 30 years), all of whom had had sex with men, to better understand women's pornography use and sexual pleasure. Women reported that pornography enhanced pleasure through solo pleasure, shared viewing with partners, discovering new sexual preferences, and getting reassurance about their body by watching different genres of pornography that included different body types. At the same time, pornography impeded some women's pleasure via its misrepresentation of bodies and sexual acts, both because of women's concern for the actors' wellbeing and because it disrupted intimacy.

Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) conducted interviews with 27 women (20 to 48 years old, of mixed sexual orientation and relationship status) who resided in the UK, Greece, France, Italy, Switzerland, Brazil, USA, and Australia, to understand the role of pornography in the construction of female sexuality. Women reported that watching pornography helped them enact their sexual fantasies, learn and experiment with their bodies and their sexual partners, as well as better understand their sexuality and express themselves in ways they preferred. At the same time, women understood that pornography reproduced and promoted patriarchal discourses of sexuality. These findings indicate that, although women can feel empowered when they consume pornography, at the same time they can feel "controlled" by patriarchy.

Aims of the Current Study

Overall, it appears that some women choose to use pornography either by themselves or with their partners because they believe they derive some benefit from it, even if they do not like the way women are presented in the pornography they view. However, there are gaps in the literature regarding women's experiences with pornography. Previous quantitative research has most often used mixed-gender samples and results were not always presented broken down by gender. Previous qualitative research has focused on women's opinions and experiences about their partners' pornography use, providing results that are not mainly about women's pornography use. Little research has focused on women's own pornography use specifically, and what role their own pornography use plays in their lives, why women choose to use pornography and what motivates them to do so. Therefore, the aims of this qualitative study were to gain rich information about women's own pornography use in a sample of adult women.

Method

We used a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews. A qualitative method was chosen because it can be used "to explore substantive areas about which little is known" and also "to obtain intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). The guidance in the journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary research in psychology (JARS-Qual) by Levitt et al. (2018) was followed.

The research received ethics approval from the University of Southampton Faculty Research Ethics Committee (ERGO number 61525).

Participants and Recruitment

Adult individuals, 18 years and older, who identified as women, were of any sexual orientation, were consumers of pornography, and resided either in the UK or in Greece were recruited. Participants living in the UK and Greece were chosen because I (who conducted all interviews) am fluent in Greek and in English. Recruitment was conducted via advertising on different

social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. Where moderator approval was needed before any advertising was carried out, such as on Reddit, such approval was always obtained in advance. Snowball sampling through the participants' social networks was also utilized. There were no prior or existing relationships between the authors and the participants.

Many factors play an important role when determining sample size in qualitative studies such as the quality of the data, study scope, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data, the qualitative method, and study design used (Morse, 2000). The initial intention was to interview approximately 30 participants, with scope to increase the sample if the collected data were not felt to be sufficient to address the research question. This decision was based on time constraints, on the fact that previous qualitative researchers have utilized a similar number of participants (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020), as well as a leading sexuality journal's policy about what sample size is required for in-depth interview studies (Dworkin, 2012). The researchers made the pragmatic decision to stop data collection after 30 interviews, because it was considered that the data collected would be sufficient (rich and complex enough) to address the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Dworkin, 2012; Liamputtong, 2009). As this is a relatively new area and there are scant data regarding what motivates women to use pornography, the researchers did not anticipate that data saturation would necessarily be attained. In addition, the concept of data saturation is not relevant to reflexive thematic analysis, which was the data analysis method used, as it cannot be determined in advance of analysis how many participants will be needed to generate meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Sim et al., 2018).

Procedure

In-depth, semi-structured individual interviews were deemed the most appropriate method to collect rich data regarding the participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Liamputtong, 2009). Interested participants contacted me via my email provided on the advertisement and were then sent the participant information sheet and consent form via the SafeSend, a secure online system. Participants did not send any signed forms back to the researcher

as consent was obtained verbally before the start of each interview. The women who agreed to participate were then invited to an online Microsoft Teams video call with me at a mutually convenient time⁸. Participants were given an option of either a video call or a voice call; six opted for voice call. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes (from 42 mins to 82 mins) and were recorded with the participants' permission. Participants were informed that their data would be kept strictly confidential and anonymized and that they could take a break or stop completely at any time. A day after the interview the participants were emailed a debriefing form and a £15 Amazon voucher as compensation for their time and effort. Greek participants were not offered vouchers in Euros, but they were given an explanation of how to convert and use the vouchers in Euros if necessary.

The recordings of the interviews were stored on a password-protected laptop and were only accessed by me, who transcribed the interviews verbatim, anonymized them by allocating random numbers and removing any references to information (names, places, etc.) that may enable identification; the recordings were then deleted. The transcripts were uploaded to and analysed via NVivo 12 software in order to facilitate coding and organizing the results (QSR International, 2021).

Interview Process

Before the interview started, the interviewer provided participants with details regarding the likely length of the interview and about confidentiality issues. Participants were invited to ask any questions they had. The interview started with demographic questions such as age, residence, and relationship status as a way to build rapport, followed by questions about their sexual preferences and behaviours. Following this, more in-depth questions about pornography use, pornography genre preferences and any other relevant topics that came up during the session were asked. The full interview guide is provided in the Appendix B (p. 173).

⁸ Initially the intention was to conduct in-person interviews but due to COVID-19 restrictions all interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams.

Definitions

Acknowledging that there are many different genres and styles of pornography and that it is highly likely that these appeal differently to different women (Maas, Cary, et al., 2019), for this study the term pornography was defined for the participants in a way that is commonly used by pornography researchers: “pornography or sexually explicit material (SEM⁹) is 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 & Malamuth, 2008, p. 616).

Analysis

Because thematic analysis (TA) is not a singular approach but rather a group of approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020, 2021a; Braun et al., 2019), Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021a) reflexive TA was used. The first part of the data analysis was done deductively, meaning that I was looking specifically for reasons women mentioned that motivated them to use pornography; this is how the theme Precursors was constructed. Then, the rest of the analysis was conducted inductively, meaning that I did not have set ideas in mind and the analysis was exploratory; this is how the theme Outcomes was constructed. This method was deemed appropriate because the study's aim was to understand participants' experiences of pornography use and extract suitable themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021a). Further, TA is not linked to a specific theoretical framework, but is rather influenced by the researchers' assumptions and perspectives about what the data represent and what constitutes meaningful knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Braun et al., 2019). The researcher needs to be aware of that and reflect on it (Terry et al., 2017). The inductive method was used because the goal was for the themes to be strongly linked to the data themselves and not be driven by the researchers' preconceptions or interests or by trying to fit the data into pre-existing themes or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

⁹ Throughout this paper the terms pornography or SEM are used interchangeably. Regarding the “use” of pornography the words: use, watch, consume, view, engage, expose to and access are also used interchangeably, although we recognise that these may have somewhat different meanings.

The six steps of reflexive TA were followed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, familiarization with the data was achieved by transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts. The automatic transcriptions produced by Microsoft Teams were used, but they were checked line by line, which helped with the familiarization of the data. Second, initial codes were generated during the data collection process (while still conducting further interviews) and during reading and re-reading the data and coding terms and phrases that appeared relevant to the research question. Third, initial themes¹⁰ were generated by combining similar codes into preliminary themes. Then, the initial themes were reviewed and updated. Next, the themes were finalized and given a clear definition. In the sixth and final step the final report was written, which included the selection of the most prevalent themes along with illustrative quotes from the data. The analysis was not a linear process but was rather an iterative process involving the researcher going back and forth through the different steps. In addition, the researcher played an active role throughout the whole analysis process as she brought in her research values, skills, experiences, and training (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020, 2021a).

I translated the Greek interviews into English. A linguistics expert who was fluent both in English and in Greek checked the translations and also back translated the English versions into Greek, as a way to check for potential misunderstandings; no problems were encountered. Data analysis was conducted mainly by me, while both my supervisors provided feedback and ideas at each step of the analysis. Coding and analysis were discussed in regular meetings between the co-authors.

¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, a code is an analytic unit, used to develop themes and it captures one observation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). By contrast, a theme captures multiple observations, is richer and more complex than a code and it usually contains multiple codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). A sub-theme is a theme-within-a-theme and can be used to provide structure to a large and complex theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It shares the same main concept of a theme but it captures just a certain aspect of it so it cannot stand alone as a separate theme (Terry et al., 2017).

Reflexive Statement

I am a cisgender woman. I took care to make the participants feel comfortable and relaxed in order to share their stories and to use the vocabulary and terminology used by the participants. I also tried to maintain a non-judgmental, exploratory outlook so as not to appear either in favour of, or against, pornography. At all times I tried to respect the women's accounts and understand their experiences from their perspective.

Results***Participant Characteristics***

Interviews were conducted between November 2020 and February 2021 with 30 participants, all of whom self-identified as women. Participants' age range was 20 to 47 years old (Mean age = 30.23). Two of the participants resided in Greece and the rest in the UK. Fifteen of the participants identified as heterosexual, thirteen as bisexual, one as queer and one as pansexual. Fifteen of the participants stated they were in committed relationships, seven were single, four were married, and four said they were dating. No comparisons were made across different sexual orientations and relationship status because the numbers were small, and we did not feel confident about making meaningful comparisons. Eleven of the participants were introduced to the study through other people (snowballing). Four of the participants who were recruited via snowballing had friends who also participated to the study. Further details about the participants are provided in Table 5 (p. 161).

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Detailed analysis of the transcripts led to the identification of two major themes: Precursors and Outcomes. Both of these themes have two subthemes; the former comprises Sexual and Non-sexual Precursors while the latter consists of Intended and Unintended Outcomes, divided into Positive Unintended Outcomes and Negative Unintended Outcomes. We deemed these to be the main themes because these were discussed by all the participants in detail, because they shared meaning and, finally, because each of them was united by a singular idea (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Precursors include the reasons and intended motivations reported by the women preceding their pornography watching. Outcomes describe the results, both positive and negative, of watching pornography.

Precursors

Sexual Precursors. Sexual precursors refer to the sexual reasons and motivations that women reported for actively watching pornography. Women mentioned various different sexual reasons that encouraged them to choose to watch pornography, with the most frequently mentioned being the need to learn new sexual techniques or get new ideas for sexual things to do. Some examples were:

P1(44, CR, H)¹¹: "Sometimes I watch for ideas for things and to keep a fresh perspective on my relationship."

P17(29, CR, H): Not about how sex is done but about how to give a good blowjob, so I would go and watch that. I didn't know before and so I was wondering whether it was simple or not. So, I watched the technical details and moves, and I watched what this can cause to a body. This is what I mean by technical bits.

P18 (26, S, B): "Finding new things. And yeah, just having a bit more, bit of a kind of library (laugh) in my head of fun things to do, or new ways to come."

Learning from pornography also included learning about issues that were not included in sex education provided in schools, such as same-sex sexual relationships:

P14 (29, D, B): When I started dating women and stuff, I was like watching that for like tips really... sexual acts really like just, like different stuff to do, I suppose, because like. I guess like in you know, in like gay sex you're not really taught what to do and such. Whereas like you know, like sex education, growing up you're taught

¹¹ Letter P and a number refer to specific participants. For example, Participant 1 is P1. Then follows participant's age in years; their relationship status as: CR = committed relationship, D = dating, M = married, S = single; and sexual orientation as: H = heterosexual, B = bisexual, Q = queer, P = pansexual.

about straight male straight female so it's kind of like I learned that through porn I suppose.

The next most frequently mentioned reason that women reported for using pornography was because they wanted to enhance their sexual arousal, for example:

P2 (39, D, H): I think I think first and foremost it's having sexual arousal in the first place and using it as a tool.. to.. yeah, I, I feel that way inclined and, and then I go naturally to that as a source of you know, as a way to elevate that feeling.

P5 (31, D, P): "I, I guess I use it as a way to up the arousal, level with my partner and that."

P16 (35, M, H): I do not need pornography to make me more sexually aroused.

Usually, I am already aroused... and so I might want to watch something to get me even more in the mood. So, I usually watch because I already feel aroused, and I want to get on with that feeling.

Another sexual precursor that was mentioned by the participants is that they chose to watch pornography while they were masturbating and that they would not watch it if they did not want to masturbate:

P10 (26, S, H): "To be honest, it's always to do with masturbation. I would never go and just watch a plot. It tends to be very focused... I wouldn't watch pornography for entertainment...I wouldn't watch for the plot."

P12 (26, CR, Q): "So, when I'm watching it... it's usually masturbation by myself."

Watching pornography acted as a visual aid for when women wanted to masturbate and needed help focusing:

P14 (29, D, B): I usually like when I'm masturbating or whatever, I need like visual stuff. I don't really like get off if it's just you know thoughts and things like that. I find it difficult to like shut-off in that way. So, it's more like the visual side of it.

P21 (28, CR, B): Sometimes it just, it takes me ages to come because I get in my own way...I start thinking about the day while masturbating. I'm like I can see I'm not

gonna get off like this (laugh) and it's like nice to have something to focus on that's just got me like, just thinking about sex and kind of gets me to that point.

P6 (22, CR, B): So, if I like, do want to masturbate, then sometimes it's just like nicer when I've like, when I watch porn, just because like I said, like I just find it easier to get aroused than when I'm on my own. So that's the main reason. Even though I know it's not real, it's still like enjoyable for me to engage in.

Pornography was also used by the participants in this study as an alternative to fantasy because sometimes it was difficult to rely on their own imagination. Participant 23 (22, CR, H) said she could never use her own imagination:

I've never been really good at, like masturbating on my own. Like it's not something I understood. I know there are people out there like they can do it on their own, in their own imagination, but I just never could. So, I get frustrated, and I end up just, like looking, like using pornography because it just makes things a bit easier. It provides the base where I built my fantasy on basically.

Similarly, Participant 26 (26, S, B) said that she found it difficult to fantasize because:

When you've been sort of masturbating for several years, I think there comes a point where you can't use your imagination anymore and you, if you've tried a lot of things during sex and you can't think about things that you haven't done anyway because you feel like you've explored all the territories that you want to explore sexually.

Experiencing orgasm was another sexual precursor that women reported. P10 (26, S, H) watched pornography when she wanted to have an orgasm and was struggling to experience it for whatever reason. P16 (35, M, H) said she used pornography because:

I usually watch because I already feel aroused, and I want to get on with that feeling... My aim is to orgasm usually because I feel intrigued inside, either in my mind or in my genitals, and the aim is to continue to have this pleasant feeling and focus on myself and reach orgasm.

Finally, two women [P15 (25, CR, B), P26 (26, S, B)] mentioned being in the mood to watch other people having sex, as a precursor or sexual reason that made them choose to watch pornography. P26 (26, S, B), for example, reported: "Sometimes it's nice to watch other people do stuff that you've done. You know just purely from a sort of voyeuristic perspective."

Finally, P4 (42, M, B) mentioned she watched pornography because she found it was a way to connect with other people: "If somebody sends me a link or I want to send somebody a link about something specific so that, that's building a sexual connection with somebody else."

These are the sexual precursors or reasons that made women actively choose to watch pornography, but women also reported watching pornography for non-sexual reasons.

Non-Sexual Precursors. The non-sexual precursor most often mentioned was that women chose to watch pornography as a way to relax. For example:

P16 (35, M, H): "It is definitely a way to relax. I might have it in my mind and I might know that my husband won't be home for a while and so I put a video on."

P25 (27, CR, B): It's like sort of an indulgence, it's something kind of to do by myself that's just for myself... It's like taking a bath instead of a shower. It's the kind of bit more relax, a bit more relaxing and sort of indulgent, I suppose.

P2 (39, D, H) said that, for her, watching pornography to relax somehow felt like meditation:

Sometimes it's, it's feeling a sense of, of numbness and wanting to stimulate my mind in some way to feel something, you know that I'm under an awful lot of stress which you know I won't, you know, are not relevant to this, but you know sometimes I just do feel like I need to put my head somewhere else. Umm, and it does provide, you know, a bit of almost meditation. In a way you know, it's a different experience.

Watching pornography also served to combat boredom and to pass the time, as P24 (34, CR, B) said: "If I'm really, really bored or I feel a little bit like, you know, in a naughty mood I'll just open some porn up and watch it then."

Pornography was watched as a form of entertainment by some of the participants. As P19 (33, M, B) commented:

Like you get pornography of people dressed up as cartoon characters like The Simpsons or something like that and it's quite funny so me and my friends do, you know, when we stumble upon something like that, we will share it with each other for like the comedy effect.

Curiosity was also mentioned as a non-sexual precursor that led some women to watch pornography. Women were curious about the mechanics of certain sexual acts and about specific sexual interests, even if they were not interested in trying these themselves. P12 (26, CR, Q) said:

Just I find in general sex and sexuality very interesting. So, I'll sometimes find myself going down these weird rabbit holes of very specific kind of sexual interests that I'm not interested in, in terms of it doesn't arouse me, but sometimes I just kind of wind up, ending up in a real, kind of like how I did when I was younger, I'd just end up in a really weird place on the Internet where I'm like 'Wow I didn't know that existed'!

Other non-sexual precursors that women mentioned were because they wanted to escape the notion that women do not enjoy sex and to feel sexy and liberated. As P1 (44, CR, H) said:

I mean just by like watching porn, porn from like.. it just made me realize that women can, can be... free of this. And what's the word? I don't know what the word is, free of this notion that you that you can't enjoy sex.

One participant [P8 (24, D, H)] revealed that she was using pornography as a way to process bad sexual experiences she had experienced in the past.

Watching pornography was also a form of distraction for P4 (42, M, B), and a way to procrastinate and to avoid doing work, according to P5 (31, D, P).

Finally, pornography was used as a mode of habit, according to P30 (31, CR, H): "Because that, there would be time and umm it's been a couple of weeks then because it's a habit for me like every couple of weeks to do that."

It is clear from the above that there was a wide range of sexual and non-sexual precursors women cited that motivated them to watch pornography.

Outcomes

The other major theme is Outcomes, which covers the consequences of pornography use. There were two subthemes: intended outcomes and unintended outcomes.

Intended Outcomes. This subtheme relates to the expected outcomes women had related to watching pornography; in other words, it describes what women intended to gain by opting to use pornography. Women expressed that when watching pornography intentionally, they expected to obtain sexual outcomes. For example, some women mentioned that watching pornography helped enhance their sexual arousal and their orgasms, which subsequently enhanced their sexual experiences overall. As P1 (44, CR, H) said: "I think it's a turn on like if you watch porn and then you, you know go, go out to meet your partner. You feel really like turned on, more horny than normal."

P11 (22, CR, H) mentioned: "So, say if I'm on my own and I'm watching it and masturbating and I see it, I'm probably more likely to wanna have sex with my boyfriend when he comes home. Like I'm quite excited for it."

P13 (30, CR, H) stated that watching pornography while masturbating meant that she was able to orgasm more quickly.

In addition, some women said that pornography worked as an enabler to help them explore sexual interests and feel more confident to try different sexual experiences. As P2 (39, D, H) said: "It's helped me feel more confident. And helped me feel a little bit bolder to try different things."

According to P12 (26, CR, Q), pornography use enabled conversations about what she wanted to happen in sexual situations: "I definitely do think that talking about the porn that you like or how you use it allows for some more conversations about what you do want to happen when you're in sexual scenarios."

Unintended Outcomes. This subtheme comprised all the unintended outcomes – both sexual and non-sexual – from watching pornography (i.e., the outcomes women experienced after using

pornography that they had not expected to obtain). The subtheme is divided into Positive Unintended Outcomes and Negative Unintended Outcomes.

Positive Unintended Outcomes. Women talked about body image issues in both positive and negative ways. Some women mentioned that pornography helped them realize that all bodies, of whatever shape and size, are beautiful and accept the way they look. According to P16 (35, M, H), pornography helped her to not feel ashamed about her body: "I believe that the pornographic films I have watched, have helped me a lot not to be ashamed about my naked body."

P18 (26, S, B) said that pornography made her feel more accepting of her body and more self-confident:

The other day I watched porn video with a really big lady in and she was beautiful and I am (big), and that made me feel more accepting of my body and just being, and just thinking yeah if she can be like that then, and she looks great, then you know I should I shouldn't, I should feel happy in my body.

P2 (39, D, H) talked specifically about how pornography helped her accept her breast size:

I've spent my, all my 20s and my teens feeling soooo flat chested and embarrassed about my tit size and it's really nice to watch porn and see that there's loads of small titted women and it's fine! And they're still massively sexy! And men really like them! ... So yeah, I I do think porn is, particularly how stuff is, made me feel much more comfortable, particularly with having small boobs! I love my boobs now!

P3 (45, M, B) talked about how watching pornography helped her to accept the way her vulva looks:

Because I was a...the very typical story, like very ashamed of my vulva. Like I can't remember ever looking at it in a mirror or you know, just feeling like what is that? You know, like how could anyone even look at that? To now 'Oh, they're beautiful and they're so, they're all different! ... And especially the porn that I've been watching, there's women with all different cut types of vulvas It's like every,

there's all sorts of beautiful, diverse vulvas and they're all like having a great time with them, and I think that's, like really helped me to be much more happy and, what's the word? Umm joyful and not ashamed of a part of my body which is wonderful, you know. And the porn has, visual watching women's porn has really helped with that actually.

A few participants added that they found amateur pornography to be more realistic in terms of sexual acts and how bodies look, but again they could not be certain that the material they were watching was not edited. For example, P30 (31, CR, H) said:

I think pornography is not, you got to, when you're watching it you've got to have the mind that it's not a very realistic experience. That the couples, more often than not are acting, it's a performance... sometimes I will watch, I will watch amateur porn which is porn submitted by real people in their own homes. So that is a bit more realistic, but but again, they're only showing, they're only showing what they want to share, so it could be edited.

P11 (22, CR, H) said that when she watches pornography for sexual purposes, she keeps in mind that it is not an actual representation of what sex is about.

Some women mentioned that they ended up being educated by pornography, even though they were not initially using it for inspirational purposes. Watching pornography gave them ideas for sexual positions and sexual techniques to try. For example, P1 (44, CR, H) said: "I do get ideas, quite a lot actually ... Things to do sexually, like situations to make me like, games like role play type situation sometimes."

P19 (33, M, B) commented: "It definitely gives me ideas as to what I would like to try in my sexual life. I'd love to have a threesome, or I'd love to be tied up."

More specifically, some of the participants mentioned that they realized they had an interest in BDSM after watching BDSM scenes in pornography. P29 (24, CR, B) noted:

So, I think through porn it's probably like awakened my interest in say like BDSM or female domination type things because like before, like watching that sort of stuff I wouldn't really be into it. But then when I found out I was like 'oh, this is quite appealing' and then I watched more and more. And then I explored that sexually with partners and then it became like a thing that I was into.

Watching pornography also had other unintended outcomes as it gave some women ideas for things to buy [P1 (44, CR, H)], such as sex cushions and vibrators. Pornography use also highlighted to the participants the intention not to re-enact certain behaviours presented in pornography such as pretending to have an orgasm [P7 (41, S, H)]. Finally, pornography use provided the participants ideas about specific things they would not like to do. As P28 (20, CR, H) mentioned:

I would just say from watching it I have learnt things that like I definitely would not like. Watching it like, I am, I can be.. Yeah, I'm able to like say like, oh, I definitely don't want to do this. Because I've seen, yeah, and I just wasn't, I didn't like how it looks so I didn't, I don't think I would like that.

Another outcome that the participants discussed was that by watching pornography, they felt more sexually empowered because they were able to enjoy themselves, without the need to have a partner, according to P26 (26, S, B):

So, it's quite nice sometimes if I'm watching porn on my own and watching things that turn me on that I'm being super comfortable and being quite at peace with my sexuality and it's just me on my own and it's like that rush of endorphins. It's not come from anyone else, a bloke or anyone else. I'm not doing it for anyone but me. So, I think in that respect I feel quite happy that I can be comfortable with what I watch... You do feel a sense of release afterwards and that's quite empowering, it is a good effect on your body.

P27 (28, S, B) and P29 (24, CR, B) highlighted that pornography helped them feel sexually empowered because they were able to explore what they liked and disliked sexually. P3 (45, M, B)

and P27 (28, S, B) said they felt more confident to explain what they liked to their sexual partners. As P27 expressed:

So, I'm able to go out into the world and when I have sexual intercourse go 'I like it like this. I've learned it through my research for example, this position. I like this position'. This is how I'm doing it, so I'm able to say to a sexual partner 'I want it like this'. So, it helps me feel more sexually empowered because I've been able to say what I like and what I don't like.

Moreover, P24 (34, CR, B) mentioned she enjoyed seeing other women enjoying themselves sexually:

I love seeing a woman enjoying herself, so I can find it empowering for that reason...I do watch porn and you know, sometimes if I watch a woman like really enjoy getting pounded, I'm like 'yes! Keep going' (laugh). So yeah, that can be empowering.

P25 (27, CR, B) differentiated amateur from professional pornography and said that when watching amateur pornography, she felt sexually empowered because it was an actual couple enjoying having sex, whereas professional pornography depicted sexual relationships that were not achievable in their everyday sex life.

P30 (31, CR, H) felt sexually empowered by watching pornography because, according to her, it was a taboo for women but not men to access pornography. Thus, she felt sexually empowered by watching a medium that was supposedly aimed at men only: "I think it's empowering because I suppose it's, it should have been that only men can access it, and it's ... it's fine. It's not taboo for a man to access porn. It is sort of expected that men access it."

Finally, P28 (20, CR, H) stated that because she belonged to an ethnic minority group, she felt empowered by watching pornography because it provided sexual freedom for her as sexual matters were not usually talked about in her community.

Included in the subtheme of unintended outcomes were two additional topics. One is that pornography normalized body functions. As P3 (45, M, B) said:

All the things that your body does used to embarrass me, so I was quite inhibited, but through watching porn and like the sexual language around porn and you know 'you make me so wet' and things like that, like to change it from an embarrassing thing to a positive sexy, sexy thing has really changed my sex life and I'm much more confident.

The other outcome is that pornography use made clear that sexual relationships are not supposed to look or be the same for everyone and that not everyone has the same sexual preferences. For example, P28 (20, CR, H) said that by watching pornography she realized that sex does not necessarily have to be rough or violent, despite the fact that the majority of the pornography videos she was able to find depicted rough and violent sex.

Negative Unintended Outcomes. Alongside the positive outcomes that were mentioned, some women also stated that pornography had negative influences on their sex lives. For example, P10 (26, S, H) said that a lot of mainstream pornography portrayed blonde, white people and that this was not representative of herself; P11 (22, CR, H), P13 (30, CR, H), P14 (29, D, B), and P21 (28, CR, B) said that sometimes watching pornography made them feel less confident about their bodies. As P6 (22, CR, B) said:

There have been times when it's sort of like had a negative impact just in terms of like how it makes me feel about myself. Umm so like there's definitely been times where I feel like I should like look more like the people that I'm looking at or that I should be like acting in the way that they are.

In contrast to what P3 (45, M, B) (above) said, P12 (26, CR, Q) reported that watching pornography made her feel negative about her vulva specifically:

When I was a teenager/young adult when they were kind of, you know they would make a lot of comments about, you know, just in general vulvas being gross. So, what I saw in porn would end up being echoed in real life.

P22 (29, S, H), P23 (22, CR, H) and P28 (20, CR, H) also said they realized that people in pornography have to look good because it is their job to look good and that it should not be an expectation for everyday people to look that good. For example, P28 said:

I do like try to remind myself that acting like on professionally recorded videos, when you see the actors and they are being paid, they probably exercise a lot or do things like that. Like I try to remind myself that it's OK that I don't look like that or I don't experience that.

Apart from body image issues, many of the women talked about how they realized, after watching, that what was depicted in pornography was not realistic, and that it was not an actual representation of what really happens. This realization regarding pornography was not something women had thought of before and it was not an outcome they expected when they started watching pornography. They noted that pornography actors are acting because this is their job, and the sex scenes are choreographed and reshot again and again in order to make everything look perfect. P14 (29, D, B) said:

I actually watched a program on Channel 4. I think it was called Mum Porn & Me or something and it was a group of mums. And they basically like went behind the scenes in porn films and stuff and spoke to stars and they were like, yeah, it's just a job. It's just acting, and it made me realize, like how staged it actually all is, like how unreal. It's not real at all and a lot of them like, you know it's just a job to them.

Included in the Unintended Outcomes subthemes were two other negative consequences; P21 (28, CR, B) and P26 (26, S, B) talked about how watching pornography made them feel desensitized by it and that they needed to watch more extreme pornography in order to achieve the desired sexual arousal. P21 said that she did enjoy watching pornography, but:

On the flip side, if I use it a lot, I also become more desensitized and have to kind of, find more and more extreme stuff to watch. Like not ... not super extreme, but like kind of more like, more rough or like try kinks that I'm not usually into just to try it like because I've started to become desensitized, so it's kind of like it's good in moderation.

Similarly, P26 mentioned:

When you start quite early, you can watch sort of, I don't know common types of porn like normal heterosexual porn or whatever, and you get bored of that and you need something more and more, like different or weird to get yourself off. And then you go to like things that don't turn you on in real life, but you just watch it. So, I think maybe in a weird way, just through more sexual activity and more porn you watch, you get desensitized to it, but you're still going back to it to get more.

Additionally, P29 (24, CR, B) mentioned a different problem she faced. By watching pornography, she was able to masturbate to orgasm and after that she felt that she was not interested in having sex with her partner. She felt as if her sexual desire for her own partner had decreased because she had watched pornography.

Discussion

The aims of this exploratory qualitative study were to obtain information regarding motivations for pornography use, the functions of pornography use reported by women and possible changes pornography use brought about in their sexual lives. Results were organized into two major themes: Precursors and Outcomes. Both these major themes had two subthemes; the first one was Sexual and Non-sexual precursors and the second was Intended and Unintended outcomes. Previous research has shown that women's pornography use can have both positive and negative roles in women's sexual lives (Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021). Early in the data analysis process it became clear that women's pornography use is a complex issue, as has been reported in previous studies (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Ciclitira, 2004; Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021). This was not only because women intentionally used pornography for both sexual and non-sexual reasons, but also because there were some precursors and outcomes women reported that have not been identified in previous research.

The sexual precursors reported by women for pornography use have been noted in previous studies involving women and men, although the methods used have not been the same as in this current study and thus provided a greater insight into some of the issues that were known already. Women described choosing to use pornography in order to learn new sexual techniques, to enhance

arousal, to masturbate, as an alternative to fantasy, and to orgasm, which has been reported by previous research (Attwood et al., 2021; Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Conner, et al., 2017; Burtäverde et al., 2021; Chadwick et al., 2018; Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020; Esplin et al., 2021; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; Gurevich et al., 2017; Hempel, 2012; Parvez, 2006; Paul & Shim, 2008; Perse, 1994; Prause, 2019; Weinberg et al., 2010). Kohut et al. (2017) conducted an international qualitative “bottom-up” analysis with 430 men and women participants and they also found that participants used pornography as a source of information and experimentation, just as my participants said that they used pornography to learn new sexual techniques and get new ideas for sexual things to do. Similarly, Weinberg et al. (2010) found that the more pornography heterosexual and non-heterosexual women used, the more motivated they were to experiment sexually. A mixed methods systematic review (Litsou, Byron, et al., 2021) on pornography use and sexual learning showed that pornography was intentionally used as a source of education, such as learning about sexual identities and about sexual techniques. The current findings are in accordance with this review's findings. Less commonly reported in previous research was the finding that one of the reasons women were using pornography was to watch other people having sex (Burtäverde et al., 2021).

Previous research that has focused specifically on women's pornography use has shown the role that pornography plays in women's sexual lives. For example, Ashton et al. (2018), on the basis of their systematic review, reported that women's intentional pornography use enhanced their sexual arousal and also that they used pornography as a source of sex education, in order to obtain information about sexual acts. In Ashton et al.'s (2019a, 2020) reports, it was also evident that pornography was used by women for sexual pleasure, sexual arousal, and for education purposes.

There are also several non-sexual reasons that motivate women to use pornography. The findings regarding some of the non-sexual precursors identified in the current study were consistent with previous studies but other precursors my participants reported have not been identified in previous research. For example, Paul and Shim (2008) found that a sample of mostly white women and men in the US used pornography to relax, as a form of entertainment, out of habit, because they

were bored and because they wanted to procrastinate. Using pornography as a way to relax and relieve stress was also discussed by a mixed-gender sample in Kohut et al.'s (2017) study. Using pornography as a way of relaxing, passing the time, combating boredom, as a form of entertainment, out of curiosity, as a distraction, as a way to procrastinate and out of habit has also been previously reported (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Conner, et al., 2017; Burtăverde et al., 2021; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; Hempel, 2012; Parvez, 2006; Paul & Shim, 2008; Perse, 1994).

Two specific non-sexual precursors that have not been reported in previous research were first using pornography in order to process bad sexual experiences from the past. This finding suggests that pornography, and especially pornography that is in accordance with an individual's sexual preferences, might be used in clinical settings as a therapeutic tool. The second precursor was that women were using pornography in order to escape the notion that women do not enjoy sex in general and to feel sexy and liberated. In other words, pornography was used as a tool by the participants to go against specific ingrained ideas regarding how they should feel and act about sex and during sex.

The outcomes women reported were divided into intended and unintended. The intended outcomes refer to what women expected (and/or hoped for) and what they obtained from their pornography use. For example, they used pornography because they wanted to orgasm, and they did indeed experience an orgasm by using it, which is consistent with previous research (Ashton et al., 2019a; Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021; McNabney et al., 2020). One of the intended outcomes noted by our participants - using pornography as an enabler to help them explore - has not previously been reported. This was about realizing potential new sexual interests through pornography use and feeling confident to try them. This exploratory role of pornography is something that could be considered in clinical settings for women seeking to improve their sex lives.

The unintended outcomes highlight that even when women used pornography without expecting to get something out of it, its use did influence, for example, the way they viewed their bodies, their sexual empowerment, and the sexual ideas or sexual practices they might learn. Some

women also said that pornography use helped them feel sexually empowered because they were able to enjoy themselves without the need of a partner and because they felt free to explore what they liked and what they disliked sexually; similar results have been reported by previous research (Daskalopoulou & Zanette, 2020). In previous research sexual empowerment has been associated with more frequent pornography use for heterosexual and non-heterosexual women (Weinberg et al., 2010). Our results are contrary to those reported by Ashton et al. (2020), who described how women felt that men's needs (rather than their own) were prioritised through the use of pornography. Our participants discussed how pornography helped them realize that sexual relationships are not supposed to be the same for everyone and that not everyone has the same sexual preferences.

Overall, the participants appeared to enjoy using pornography and used it regularly in their lives. Despite mentioning that pornography could have a negative influence on them - for example, on the way they viewed their bodies - women mainly talked positively about its use. Additionally, participants mentioned that they felt that what was depicted in pornography was unrealistic and not an actual representation of what happens in real life sexual situations. Similar criticism about lesbian pornography being unrealistic and targeted to male viewers has been reported by lesbian and bisexual women (Morrison & Tallack, 2005). However, pornography being defined as unrealistic is a complicated and difficult issue to address (Byron et al., 2020; Litsou, Byron, et al., 2021).

Another unintended outcome that was reported by one of our participants was that using pornography made them less interested in having sex with their partners, which has been reported in some previous studies (Kohut et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2019). A possible explanation could be that as women were receiving sexual pleasure through pornography, they did not feel the need to engage sexually with their partners. Feeling desensitized by pornography use was also reported as an unintended outcome by my participants. Previous research has reported that an early start to pornography use would mean that, subsequently, users, men and women, would require more aggressive content (Seigfried-Spellar & Rogers, 2013). Further research is needed on this topic.

Two further unintended outcomes that were reported by our participants had not been reported by previous research. The first one was that pornography use had inspirational purposes, meaning that regardless of the reasons women initially used pornography, they ended up being inspired by it to try different sexual activities they had not tried before, or even realizing that they had specific sexual interests. The second one was that pornography use normalized body functions for participants. By being exposed to women's bodies in pornography, women got better accustomed to the normality of, for example, getting wet and that helped them feel more confident about their bodies. Some of the participants discussed that they were not aware how female bodies function, and that pornography helped them feel more certain they functioned "normally".

Issues of guilt or shame due to pornography use were not discussed by our participants, which is in contrast with some previous studies (Floyd et al., 2022; Kohut et al., 2017). This may have been because the participants seemed quite "sex positive" and able to have active sex lives, without thinking that enjoying sex is immoral and possibly allowing this to disrupt their sexual experiences. Previous research has shown that religious people who watch pornography tend to experience distress about it because they believe that using pornography is morally wrong (Perry, 2017a; Perry & Schleifer, 2019). Our findings suggest that our participants had liberal ideas regarding their sexuality and their pornography use, as in this group of participants religion did not seem to play a role in their pornography use and their sexual lives. Five of the participants stated they were spiritual, meaning being good to one another, appreciating relationships, practicing mindfulness etc. That did not appear to play a role in their pornography use and sexual lives either. It is likely that women can obtain the most positive outcomes from pornography use if they do not allow moral and religious values to interfere with their experiences.

Implications

The findings have possible useful implications for clinical practice. Knowing what might motivate women to watch pornography may be valuable in clinical settings to help women who face sexual difficulties, such as low sexual desire and sexual arousal, improve their sexual satisfaction and sexual intimacy (Lehmiller, 2014; Maddox et al., 2011). In addition, apart from sexual difficulties,

knowing what motivates women to watch pornography can also be useful in clinical settings where women expect to get support and approval to feel sexually empowered and have joyful sexual lives (Annon, 1976). On a personal level, women could be encouraged to use pornography to explore their own sexual preferences and, in this way, have more satisfying sexual lives, either by themselves or with partners. Pornography use could also help women explore masturbation techniques, and in this way, be able to orgasm more frequently and easily, should they wish to. Self-help books and couple therapy focusing on pornography use could also help women gain knowledge about pornography and about themselves. Knowing what is sexually satisfying can also improve women's relationships, as it would be easier to let their partners know about their sexual preferences, possibly enhancing their individual and mutual sexual satisfaction.

Understanding the outcomes women experience from watching pornography can also be used to inform relationships and sex education (RSE) in schools. Exploring the ways that pornography may influence how young women feel and look about their bodies can be incorporated into RSE discussions in the curriculum. In addition, knowing about women's sexual likes and dislikes can inform RSE programs to focus more on sexual pleasure and how to achieve it, and on sexual communication and sexual consent issues.

Post Interview Reflections

The one-to-one online interviews between the researcher and the participants enabled rapport to be built and encouraged the participants to share detailed information about their experiences and thoughts related to their sexual lives and pornography consumption (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Liamputtong, 2009). Conducting the interviews online did not seem to hamper participants' openness and willingness to share personal details.

I, who took the lead on data analysis, recognize that reality is relative to the experiences of the participants and thus I took at face value what the participants reported. Also, I acknowledge that my attitudes about pornography use are fairly liberal, given that I was raised and have lived in countries that have few formal restrictions regarding pornography access.

Overall, the majority of the participants were very talkative and eager to share their experiences in the interviews. All of them said that they were very happy to be able to talk to someone about their pornography use as they did not have the chance to do so very often. At the end of the interview all the participants spontaneously said that the interview was a positive experience and that they were happy they took part. A few of the participants expressed an interest to see the published results in the future and gave permission to me to keep their contact details for this purpose.

Limitations and Strengths

One limitation of this study was that the sample likely consisted of sex-positive women, that is women who felt relaxed and were open to discussing their pornography use and related issues regarding their sexuality. All but one of the participants had positive views about pornography. However, the study would not have been possible with a sample of women who were unwilling to discuss their pornography use. Results would almost certainly have been different if more women with negative opinions about pornography use had been interviewed. All the women interviewed resided either in the UK or in Greece, where there are few formal restrictions when it comes to accessing pornography. Results would likely have been different if women from other countries with different broader contexts around pornography access had been included; this applies to both formal restrictions - such as legal constraints - as well as the impact of strong religious taboos. It is also important to note that the use of snowball sampling might have impacted the results. Four of the participants were referred by a friend who had also participated in the study, so they might have had similar experiences, similar demographics and social contexts. Lastly, the sample contained a higher proportion of bisexual women than would be expected in the population generally.

Despite these limitations, this study was one of the first to explore what motivates women to access pornography using one-to-one qualitative interviews. These interviews gave the opportunity for women to discuss their personal experiences and their opinions in-depth and to enable us to gain a rich understanding of the issues involved. Another strength of this study was that it included women with different sexual orientations, rather than only heterosexual women. In addition, a

pornography definition was provided to the participants before the interviews, which ensured that pornography meant the same thing to all participants in the context of the questions asked.

Previous research, mostly quantitative and using mixed gender samples, has shown that men, in comparison to women, usually report higher frequency of pornography use, as well higher motivation to use pornography (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021; Burtăverde et al., 2021; Hald & Malamuth, 2008). In many studies, results were not reported separately for men and women, making it difficult to enhance our understanding about women's pornography use. Finally, previous research has often used student samples, making the findings not generalizable to women's pornography use. The current qualitative study has provided greater insight of the experiences women have regarding their pornography use.

Future Research

The findings of this study can be used to develop further research around women's pornography use. Future research could compare participants from different countries with different policies around pornography and different religious contexts. It would also be informative to study the relative frequency of some of the motivations and the outcomes of women's pornography use identified in large-scale surveys.

Conclusion

This study explored women's motivations for pornography use and outcomes from that use. Pornography use had both positive and negative implications for women's sexual lives. Despite the negative implications in women's sexual lives, most of the time women were able to achieve the sexual outcomes they were looking for, such as sexual arousal and orgasm.

Chapter 4 – Women's Motivations and Outcomes of Pornography

Use: A Large-Scale International Survey

Abstract

Research focusing on women's pornography use has been increasing in the recent years. In this international online survey, women were asked about the motivations, outcomes, their sexual satisfaction, and emotions associated with their pornography use. Participants were 3330 women (mean age 27.5 years), all of whom had used pornography at least once in the past six months. The most common motivations reported by women to use pornography were: to masturbate, to orgasm, to enhance sexual arousal, and as an alternative to fantasy. The most common outcomes of their pornography use were: unrealistic depictions, sexual empowerment, negative body ideas, and desensitisation. Frequent pornography use was associated with higher sexual satisfaction, being single was associated with lower sexual satisfaction, and partnered pornography use was associated with higher sexual satisfaction than solo pornography use. Regarding women's emotions after pornography use, women who reported higher pornography use reported lower negative emotions and higher positive emotions; older women reported fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions after pornography use; finally, women reported that using pornography with sexual partners played a role in their negative and positive emotions after pornography use, whilst using pornography by themselves did not play a role in their emotions. The findings contribute to the literature on women's pornography use and their sexual satisfaction. Implications for future research and clinical practice are discussed.

Early research on pornography focused on men, often motivated by concerns about male aggression (Malamuth, 1981; Malamuth & McIlwraith, 1988; Malamuth & Ceniti, 1986; Malamuth et al., 1986). This primarily male focus has persisted over many years (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019), although there has been an increased interest in women's pornography use in the past two decades (Ashton et al., 2018, 2019a, 2020; Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021).

Much of the recent research on women's use of pornography has been qualitative. Two interview studies involving the same sample of Australian women who had sex with men were conducted by Ashton and colleagues; one focused on women's personal experiences with pornography in relation to their sexual pleasure (Ashton et al., 2019a), and the other on women's perspectives of the influence of pornography on their sexual relationships (Ashton et al., 2020). Research has also been conducted on how women actively engage with pornography in order to achieve positive experiences alongside how they handle associated negative content (Chadwick et al., 2018). Women reported using three strategies to do this: searching for pornography they categorised as low risk, choosing women-friendly pornography, and opting to read pornographic content rather than watching videos (Chadwick et al., 2018).

Two recent systematic reviews have been published: one on women's own reported pornography use and their experiences of their partners' pornography use (Ashton et al., 2018), and the other on women's own reported pornography use when they are in relationships (Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021). Below, we provide a summary of findings from previous literature on women's motivations for, and outcomes related to, pornography use, the focus of the current study.

Women's Motivations for Pornography Use

Although research on women's use of pornography is growing, research on reported motivations for their use of pornography is limited (Burtäverde et al., 2021). A better understanding of why women choose to use pornography can enhance our comprehension of whether women believe pornography enhances and/or has a negative influence on their sex lives.

The limited research that has been conducted to date on women's motivations for pornography use can be divided into research identifying sexual reasons, mood regulation reasons, and educational reasons.

Research on Reported Motivations

Previous research has identified that mainly sexual reasons motivate women to use pornography. For example, a now rather dated US questionnaire study recruited 330 men and women college students (aged between 18 and 23), who had ever used some type of pornographic material and provided them with a list of pornography types and 32 pre-selected reasons for pornography use (Perse, 1994). The motivations identified were: *Sexual enhancement* related to learning techniques and ideas for sexual activities and boosting sexual arousal. *Sexual release* was about masturbation and fantasy. Finally, *substitution* referred to using pornography as a replacement for a sexual partner. Unfortunately, the findings were not reported separately for men and women users and the study was carried out prior to widely available online access to pornography so its relevance to the present time may be limited.

Similar sexual motivations for pornography use were reported by Bridges and Morokoff (2011) who recruited 217 US heterosexual couples to complete an online questionnaire about different types of pornography and to rate how often they used each type. They were also presented with a list of specific reasons for pornography use and selected all that applied to them, as well as specified the primary reason for their pornography use. Of those who reported using pornography, motivations were identified separately for men and women. The most common sexual reasons given by women were as part of their partnered sexual activities, solo sexual stimulation, and as an aid to fantasy. Men used pornography for solo sexual stimulation, as part of their partnered sexual activities, out of curiosity, out of boredom, for stress reduction, because the material was available, help with fantasizing, and because they were feeling lonely (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011). A key gender difference was that men more often used pornography for masturbation, while women mainly reported use in partnered sexual activities. Men also reported significantly greater frequency of use of pornography than women (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011).

Pornography use motivations of relationship and fantasy were reported by a US study that recruited a mixed sample of 321 undergraduate students (mean age 20 years old) to complete an online questionnaire (Paul & Shim, 2008). Different motivations for pornography use were provided to the participants and they rated how many times they consumed pornography for each specific reason. Results were similar for men and women, the most common being relationship and fantasy. The relationship motivation reason had both a sexual and a social component, where pornography was used with partners or friends. Fantasy was about enhancing sexual fantasising.

Hungarian women and men (age range 18 to 54) reported similar motivations for pornography use such as sexual pleasure, fantasy, and lack of sexual satisfaction. They had to complete an online questionnaire, and they were provided with specific reasons for pornography use for which they had to rate the frequency of use on a seven-point scale (1= never, 7 = all the time) (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021). In comparison to women, men reported stronger motivations across all domains apart from sexual curiosity. Sexual pleasure has been reported as the main reason women chose to use pornography for in a US study that recruited a sample of male and female US college students (Brown, Conner, et al., 2017). Participants rated their agreement with specific reasons for their pornography use on a 5-point scale (1 = never like me, 5 = always like me). Overall, women reported using pornography considerably less than men did. Similar findings were reported by Esplin et al. (2021) in a mixed-gender US sample, which provided participants with reasons for pornography use and they rated their level of agreement on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Women reported using pornography for sexual reasons. Similarly, Grubbs, Wright, et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review on pornography use and sexual motivation involving N = 130 studies. The main reason that men reported using pornography by themselves was to seek sexual pleasure, sexual excitement and for masturbation. Women also used pornography by themselves for sexual pleasure but at lower rates than men.

In a Romanian study with male and female undergraduate students Burtăverde et al. (2021) used an open-ended questionnaire, where participants reported the main three reasons they used pornography for. Many different reasons were reported, and these were grouped using content

analysis into three themes for women and men with the sexual one being a desire for sexual activities. Apart from using pornography to improve sexual performance, men endorsed the reasons for pornography consumption more strongly than women; this is an indication that men and women's pornography use should be studied separately. In accordance with the desire for sexual activities reported above, arousal and masturbation were reported by women as the main reasons for pornography use in a US qualitative interview study with 30 adult women of diverse social backgrounds (Parvez, 2006). However, the women also stated they occasionally experienced discomfort and emotional distress after using pornography because they were worried about the female actors' well-being; in addition, they reported that their personal experiences with sexual violence made them more sensitive to coercion depicted in pornography.

Another US study which used dyadic data from mostly mixed-sex couples (age range 19 to 74) focused on the associations between individual and partnered pornography use frequency, motivations and sexual wellbeing (Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021). Participants were provided with a list of reasons for pornography use and were asked to indicate the degree to which the statements described their pornography consumption, on a five-point scale. Women's pornography use, partnered and individual, was associated with their own greater sexual wellbeing. Women with higher frequencies of individual pornography use reported more frequent partnered sexual activities. Women with higher frequency of partnered pornography use reported greater sexual well-being and lower sexual distress.

Apart from the above sexual reasons, other reasons that have been identified by previous research that motivate women to use pornography can be classified broadly as mood regulation reasons. Perse (1994) in their study identified diversion that was described as a distraction and an escape from boredom, and as providing entertainment and relaxation. Other mood regulation reasons identified by Bridges and Morokoff (2011) were boredom, stress reduction, ease of material availability, and feeling lonely. Boredom avoidance, stress reduction, and emotional distraction/suppression, mood improvement, seeking excitement, tiredness and need to unwind, for entertainment, and because of novelty are reasons have been reported by other researchers as well

(Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Brown, Conner, et al., 2017; Burtăverde et al., 2021; Esplin et al., 2021; Hempel, 2012; Parvez, 2006). Mood management has also been reported by previous research and was about using pornography for entertainment, to balance one's mood and as a masturbation aid (Paul & Shim, 2008). Habitual use referred to using pornography as a habit and because of compulsiveness, by the same study (Paul & Shim, 2008). Another study showed that UK and Irish participants used pornography as a means to escape boredom but the authors did not analyse results separately for women and men (Moynihan et al., 2022).

Finally, women's motivations for pornography use can be classed as sex education or exploration reasons. Hempel (2012) conducted two studies in the US: an online survey with multiple choice questions about pornography use which 645 women completed, and an interview study with 30 women about their experiences with pornography. Both samples consisted mostly of White, liberal, and well-educated women of any sexual orientation who were pornography users. Women reported primarily consuming pornography to increase their sexual knowledge. Results were consistent across both studies. Other common reasons included curiosity about sexual practices (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Conner, et al., 2017), educational reasons (Parvez, 2006), self-exploration (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021), and to learn about sex and improve sexual performance (Burtăverde et al., 2021).

Outcomes of Women's Pornography Use

Using pornography usually has some influence on some aspect of women's sexual lives, including their sexual attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs; these outcomes may be short-lived or they may be longer-lasting (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019). Outcomes sometimes are also referred to as "perceived effects"¹² in the literature, as they refer to what women *think* about the role pornography plays in their sexual lives. Exploring pornography use outcomes can help enable a fuller understanding of women's sexual lives, whether women believe that pornography use plays a negative or positive role in their sexual lives, whether they experience guilt or shame for using it, and

¹² The phrase "perceived effects" implies causal relationships and thus, it is not used in this study.

how and if it could be used for therapeutic purposes in clinical settings. Outcomes of pornography use can be sexual and/or non-sexual; both are considered below.

Sexual Outcomes

In a systematic review by Grubbs, Wright, et al. (2019) key findings identified were positive associations between pornography use and casual sexual behaviour and attitudes, greater diversity in sexual preferences and risky sexual behaviours.

McNabney et al. (2020) conducted a mixed online and pen-and-paper survey with women from the US and Hungary, who rated outcomes on a five-point scale (1 = almost never to 5 = almost always). Women reported that pornography use helped them become more easily sexually aroused, better able to orgasm, and experience greater sexual pleasure during masturbation. No associations were reported between pornography use and relationship and sexual satisfaction with their primary partners. In an international online study involving participants from Canada, US, Australia, France, Italy, Japan, Turkey and the UK (Kohut et al., 2017), men and women replied to open-ended questions about pornography use and their responses were thematically analysed. Pornography use, either alone or with partners, was reported to contribute positively to sexual experimentation, to improve sexual communication among partners, to act as a sexual outlet when there were no available partners, to enhance sexual comfort, and to reduce interest in having sex with a partner. Based on a pen-and-paper survey with a Danish mixed-gender sample, Hald and Malamuth (2008) found that women aged between 18 and 30 years old (relationship status was not reported), experienced significantly more positive than negative outcomes regarding their pornography use overall and positive outcomes on their sex lives and on their attitudes towards sex. In a qualitative interview study, women reported that pornography use could make them feel sexually empowered as it could allow them to control their own self-pleasure, sexuality, and bodies (Ashton et al., 2019a).

Sexual Satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is commonly studied in relation to pornography use. In the systematic review by Grubbs, Wright, et al. (2019) some studies showed a relationship, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, between women's pornography use and sexual satisfaction, although others reported no association with sexual satisfaction. The most consistent

finding, however, was that there was no significant association between pornography use and women's sexual satisfaction. A meta-analysis covering 50 studies reported that women's sexual satisfaction was generally not associated with pornography use (Wright et al., 2017). In an online survey with heterosexual couples Bridges and Morokoff (2011) also found no association between pornography use and women's sexual satisfaction irrespective of whether they accessed pornography with their romantic partners or alone. Three studies conducted by Kohut et al. (2021) with heterosexual couples about their shared pornography use showed that sexual satisfaction was higher among couples who used pornography frequently together compared with partners who did not use together. In another online study of heterosexual married couples, wives' pornography use correlated significantly with their pornography acceptance, but was negatively associated with their own sexual satisfaction, and positively associated with couple sexual satisfaction (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017). Wright et al. (2019) conducted an online survey with a mixed sample of men and women who were not in partnerships. A negative association was found between women's pornography use and their sexual satisfaction; the more women relied on pornography use for sexual excitement, the lower was their reported level of general sexual satisfaction.

Sexual satisfaction is, however, difficult to assess as most of the validated scales on the construct focus on partnered activities and ask more about relationship quality than individual sexual satisfaction (McKee et al., 2021b). When no validated scales are used, sexual satisfaction has been measured with questions constructed by the researchers. These two different approaches make it very challenging for research to deliver consistent and comparable findings.

Non-Sexual Outcomes

Some research has reported on non-sexual associations with pornography use. Floyd et al. (2022) did an online survey with a mixed-gender US sample but results were not reported separately by gender. One non-sexual outcome reported was shame among people who, due to moral incongruence, believed that using pornography was immoral and were distressed after using it. Moral incongruence is a perceived misalignment between one's moral or religious beliefs and one's sexual behaviour (Grubbs et al., 2020; Grubbs & Perry, 2019).

A critical review showed that moral incongruence regarding pornography use was associated with experiencing greater psychological distress (Grubbs & Perry, 2019). The association between distress and moral incongruence was also reported in a meta-analysis (Grubbs, Perry, et al., 2019) and in an online survey conducted in Poland (Lewczuk et al., 2019). One US study found an association between both men's and women's reports of experiencing depressive symptoms due to pornography usage and believing it is immoral (Perry, 2018).

In an international qualitative study of women and men (involving participants from Canada, US, Australia, France, Italy, Japan, Turkey and UK), being educated and informed about personal likes, dislikes and techniques were reported outcomes of pornography use but, at the same time, pornography could create unrealistic expectations about appearance, performance, likes and dislikes (Kohut et al., 2017). However, results for men and women were not presented separately.

There has been little focus on changes in emotions, either positive or negative, associated with accessing pornography. In a mixed-gender online survey in Malaysia, there was a positive association between internet pornography use and psychological distress among women pornography users (Tan et al., 2022). However, these authors focused on "problematic" internet pornography use without providing a specific definition of it, and despite acknowledging the fact that there is no academic consensus about what "problematic" internet pornography is. Psychological distress after pornography use was also reported by women in another online survey (Böthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021).

Further research is needed on the actual outcomes of women's pornography use, emotions women might experience after accessing pornography, and whether use of pornography is related to women's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Understanding these issues better could help to enhance women's sexual lives and support them with difficulties they might experience regarding their sexual health.

Objectives and Research Questions of the Current Study

It is clear that there are some significant gaps in research on women's pornography use. First, it is not clear why women choose to use pornography, what they expect to (and do) obtain

from pornography use, and what emotions they experience after use. Second, previous research has reported conflicting results regarding whether women's own pornography use has positive or negative associations with their sexual satisfaction and relationships. Third, much of the research has been conducted with mixed gender samples and most often the results have not been disaggregated by gender. When results are reported separately for women and men, men usually have higher scores on scales or questionnaires which measure pornography use motivations and/or outcomes, and report using pornography more often than do women. Finally, research has often been conducted with student samples which limits their generalisability.

A recent qualitative study, which is presented in the previous chapter, interviewed women residing in UK and in Greece (N = 30, mean age 30.23, range 20-47) about their experiences of using pornography (Litsou et al., 2023a). Women reported both *sexual* and *non-sexual* motivations for engaging with pornography. The findings indicated that there were *intended* and *unintended* outcomes from their pornography use, which could either enhance or diminish sexual experiences. The current study was informed by the key themes reported in Litsou et al. (2023a). The primary aim was to explore the motivations and outcomes of pornography use in a large online international survey of adult women of diverse sexual orientations. A secondary aim was to explore the associations between pornography use and women's sexual satisfaction, and positive and negative emotions reported following pornography use.

We sought to answer four research questions:

1. What are women's most frequently reported motivations for accessing pornography?
2. What are women's most frequently reported outcomes of pornography use?
3. What are the associations between women's pornography use and their sexual satisfaction?
4. What are the associations between pornography use and subsequent negative and positive and emotions?

Method

Participants

To be included, participants had to self-identify as women, be at least 18 years old, to have used pornography at least once in the last 6 months, and to be able to read and understand English. Recruitment was conducted via advertisements on social media (Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook).

Measures

Demographic Questions. Participants were first asked whether they self-identified as women; if not, then the study was terminated. Then followed questions about age, employment status, sexual orientation and previous sexual relationships, as well as how sexually interested they were in women, in men, or had no sexual interest in other people (adapted from Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012). Subsequent items asked about relationship status, the importance of religion in their everyday lives and how often they attended services or meetings connected to their religion (adapted from Kohut & Štulhofer, 2018). The final question asked about frequency of pornography use in the past six months.

Pornography use. Frequency of pornography use in the last six months was measured with a 6-point Likert type variable, which asked: in the past six months, how often have you used pornography? The six options that were provided to the participants were: "once a week or more", "once every two weeks", "once a month", "once in two months", "once in three months", and finally, "never". If the participants chose "never" then they were led automatically to the end of the survey. For the analyses, this categorical variable was recoded into three roughly equal groups of higher use ("once a week or more"), medium use ("once every two weeks"), and lower use ("once a month", "once in two

Pornography Use Motivations. Questions relating to participants' reported motivations for pornography use were constructed based on the Litsou et al. (2023a) study. Participants were asked to indicate, on slider scales ranging from 0 (no occasion) to 100 (every occasion), the number of occasions of pornography use in which they experienced the motivations listed. A sample item was

"Thinking about all the occasions that you have used pornography in the past six months, on how many of those occasions have you used pornography because you wanted to masturbate? /to orgasm? / to learn something sexual?" etc. A list of all 18 included motivations is provided in Table 6 (p. 164). Analysis was conducted separately, item by item, for each of the 18 motivations. Because variables were presented on slider scales, variable means are presented as presenting frequencies did would not be meaningful.

Pornography Use Outcomes. Similarly, participants' reported outcomes were assessed with questions based on Litsou et al. (2023a). Participants were asked to indicate, on slider scales ranging from 0 (no occasion) to 100 (every occasion), the number of occasions of pornography use in which they experienced the outcomes listed. A sample item was *"Thinking about all the occasions that you have used pornography in the past six months, on how many of those occasions pornography use made you feel sexually empowered? Made you feel 'desensitised'?"* etc. A list of all 10 included outcomes is provided in Table 6 (p. 164). Analysis was conducted separately, item by item, for each of the 10 outcomes. Similarly, because variables were presented on slider scales, variable means are presented as presenting frequencies would not be meaningful.

Sexual Satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction was measured using The New Sexual Satisfaction Scale (NSSS), which comprises two 10-item subscales: the Ego-Centred subscale and the Partner/Sexual Activity-Centred subscale (Brouillard et al., 2020). Participants rated the level of their sexual satisfaction using 5-point Likert scales. The two subscales and the NSSS total are computed by summing the relevant items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Brouillard et al., 2020). The scale has demonstrated reliability, with Cronbach's α for the overall scale being .94–.96, $\alpha = .91$ –.93 for the Ego-Centred subscale and $\alpha = .90$ –.94 for the Partner/Sexual Activity-Centred subscale (Brouillard et al., 2020). Validity of the scale was also established by its authors (Brouillard et al., 2020). For this study the NSSS total score Cronbach's α was excellent, $\alpha = .94$. Only the NSSS total was used in the analyses reported, which measures women's sexual satisfaction. The NSSS total score had a normal distribution.

Relationship Status. Relationship status was assessed by asking the participants to describe their relationship status at the time they completed the survey. Participants were given 5 choices: single, dating, committed relationship/s but not cohabitating, married or in cohabitating relationship/s, and finally, prefer not to say. For the analyses, this categorical variable was recoded into three roughly groups of single, dating, and committed/married/cohabitating women.

Using pornography by yourself. This was a slider scale variable, ranging from 0 (no occasion) to 100 (every occasion), measuring the number of occasions in which participants used pornography by themselves, in the past six months. The question read: thinking about the occasions that you have used pornography in the past six months, on how many of those occasions have you used pornography by yourself? A score of zero indicated that in all the times participants used pornography, they used it by themselves zero times, indicating that probably they used it with someone else. A score of 100 indicated that in all the times participants used pornography, they used it by themselves. This variable did not have a normal distribution (Skewness = -2.89, Kurtosis = 7.44). Because this variable was presented on a slider scale, variable means are presented as presenting frequencies would not be meaningful.

Using pornography with a sexual partner/s. This was a slider scale variable, ranging from 0 (no occasion) to 100 (every occasion), measuring the number of occasions in which participants used pornography with a sexual partner/s, in the past six months. The question read: thinking about the occasions that you have used pornography in the past six months, on how many of those occasions have you used pornography with a sexual partner/s? A score of zero indicated that in all the times participants used pornography, they used it with a sexual partner/s zero times, indicating that probably they used it alone. A score of 100 indicated that in all the times participants used pornography, they used it with a sexual partner/s. This variable did not have a normal distribution (Skewness = 3.23, Kurtosis = 10.35). Because this variable was presented on a slider scale, variable means are presented as presenting frequencies would not be meaningful.

Positive And Negative Emotions After Pornography Use. A list of eight researcher-generated questions about emotions after pornography use was presented to participants and they had to

choose, on a five-point Likert scale (from never to always), how often they experienced these different emotions (loosely adapted from Grubbs et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha for negative emotions was $\alpha = .941$, indicating excellent reliability. Cronbach's alpha for positive emotions was $\alpha = .879$, indicating good reliability. Four questions related to negative emotions (ashamed, bad, guilty, have negative emotions) and four to positive emotions (happy, good, fine, have positive emotions). A sample item was *"Thinking about how you feel after you use pornography, for the statements below please select the response that best represents your answer: after I use pornography, I feel ashamed"*. Total scores (SUM) were computed for positive and negative emotions, by summing the relevant positive and negative emotions accordingly. Higher scores indicated higher emotions, either positive or negative. Analyses were conducted with SUM negative emotions and SUM positive emotions. Both variables were continuous. SUM negative emotions variable did not have a normal distribution (Skewness = 0.86, Kurtosis = 0.19). SUM positive emotions variable was normally distributed.

Participants' Age. This was a continuous variable, showing participants' age in years, and it was not normally distributed (Skewness = 1.28, Kurtosis = 2.44).

Procedure

An online questionnaire was constructed using the Qualtrics survey platform (<https://www.qualtrics.com>) and was advertised on social media (Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook). Potentially interested participants accessed the online questionnaire via a link provided in the adverts. Initial screening questions established whether participants met the study inclusion criteria (age, gender identification, pornography access, and English fluency). Participants then read the participant information sheet and consented by ticking a box at the end of this. The following definition of pornography was provided to the participants to ensure they had a clear understanding of how the term was being defined: "Pornography or Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) is any kind of material intended to create or enhance sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient and at the same time contains explicit exposure and/or descriptions of genitals and sexual acts" (Hald & Malamuth, 2008, p. 616). Upon completion, participants were presented with a debriefing statement; this and the participant information sheet included information about free services to contact in case participants experienced distress. Participants were also given the option to participate in a draw to

win one of five £25 Amazon vouchers by accessing a separate survey to submit their email address. As the two surveys were separate, there was no way of linking the participant's data and their email address. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. It went live in the last week of February 2022 and was closed in mid-April 2022. The study received ethics approval from the University of Southampton Faculty Research Ethics Committee (ERGO number 70558).

Data Analysis

Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample were analysed via frequencies and means comparisons. Means were calculated for participants' reported motivations for accessing pornography and reported outcomes of pornography use.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the associations between sexual satisfaction for women and women in groups of high, medium, and lower pornography use. The Hochberg's GT2 post hoc test was used to assess specific differences among groups, as proposed by Field (2018), because the sample sizes were very different. The effect size eta squared (η^2) for a one-way ANOVA was calculated and reported. Reporting eta squared (η^2) was considered meaningful because it measures the size of an observed effect and it shows the strength of association between variables (Field, 2018). Similarly, a one-way Anova was also conducted to assess the associations between women's sexual satisfaction and relationship statuses.

Spearman correlations were calculated to determine the associations between women's sexual satisfaction and using pornography by themselves, as well as using pornography with a sexual partner/s.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the variables of women's frequency of pornography use and their relationship status.

Two multiple linear regressions were calculated to determine whether women's relationship status and using pornography, either by themselves or with sexual partners, were independently associated with women's sexual satisfaction or not.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test and a post-hoc test were used to determine whether there were differences in SUM Negative emotions among 3 different groups divided on their frequency of pornography use: higher, medium, and lower use. Additionally, a one-way Anova was used to determine whether there were differences in SUM Positive emotions among 3 different groups differing in their frequency of pornography use: higher, medium, and lower use. Again, Hochberg's GT2 post hoc tests and eta squared (η^2) were calculated to show the strength of the association between variables.

Spearman correlations were calculated to determine the associations between SUM negative and SUM positive emotions and participants' age.

Finally, two multiple linear regressions were conducted to examine the extent to which women using pornography by themselves or women using pornography with partners predicted negative emotions or positive emotions after their pornography use. Again, the SUMs for positive and negative emotions were used in the analyses.

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 28.

Results

The initial recorded number of responses was 5079. Participants were removed from the dataset if they did not identify as women ($N=294$), responded wrongly to the attention check question ($N=982$) or had over 30% data missing ($N=473$). Data were missing completely at random. The NSSS was observed to have the most missing data ($N=974$). This happened because half of the scale's questions were about partnered sexual activities and so participants who did not have partners skipped those questions. Thus, for this scale data were not, strictly speaking, missing but were better described as "not applicable". Missing data were handled on a pairwise deletion basis, which means conducting statistical analysis with cases that contain some missing data. This allowed the use of more of the data and so there were slightly varying sample sizes for each variable. The final total sample size for analyses, not involving NSSS scores, was 3330.

Sociodemographic and Sexual Background Characteristics

The mean age of the participants was 27.5 years (range 18 to 70). Most participants lived in the USA (48.3%), UK (12.1%), Canada (7.6%) and Australia (3.2%); the remaining approximately 29% of participants came from 73 additional countries. Most of the sample were working full or part-time (56.9%), and/or were students (30.2%). About 59.8% reported that religion was important to them, 28.5% reported it was "somewhat important" and 11.7% said that religion was "not important". Two thirds of the sample (66.2%) reported never attending a religious service or meeting.

Being heterosexual was reported by 42.7%, followed by "bisexual" (36.3%), "pansexual" (8.7%), "queer" (4.7%), "gay or lesbian" (4%), "asexual" (1.8%), other (1%) and, finally, 0.08% preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation. Previous sexual relationships included "men only" (53.7%), "both men and women" (33.2%), "women only" (3.2%) and "no sexual relationships" (9.3%). Current relationship status was described as being "married or cohabiting" (39.7%), "committed relationship but not cohabiting" (22%), "single" (27.8%) and "dating" (10%).

Relationship status was categorised into three groups, as the options given to the participants were forced choice: single ($N=926$), dating ($N=333$), and committed, cohabiting or married ($N=2056$); there were 15 participants with missing data. Pornography use was grouped into three roughly equal groups as the options given to the participants were forced choice: higher use ($N=1545$, once a week or more), medium use ($N=963$, once every two weeks) and lower use ($N=822$, once a month, once in two months, once in three months).

Research Question 1: What are Women's Most Frequently Reported Motivations for Accessing Pornography?

Reported motivations for accessing pornography are presented in Table 6 (p. 164), from the most to the least common. As can be seen, the most common motivations were *to masturbate*, *to orgasm* and *to enhance sexual arousal*. The least common motivations were *to learn something sexual*, *to initiate discussions with sexual partners* and *to connect with someone else*.

Research Question 2: What are Women's Most Frequently Reported Outcomes of Pornography Use?

Reported outcomes of accessing pornography are presented in Table 6 (p. 164), from the most to the least common. The most common outcomes were *made women think what is depicted in pornography is unrealistic*, *made women feel sexually empowered*, and *made women feel negative about the way their body looks*. The least common outcomes were *that pornography use caused distress*, *made women feel that sexual relationships should look like the way they are presented in pornography* and *made women feel less sexual desire for their sexual partner/s*.

Research Question 3: What are the Associations Between Women's Pornography Use and their Sexual Satisfaction?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were differences in sexual satisfaction among groups of women with high, medium, and lower pornography use. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in sexual satisfaction across pornography use groups, $F(2, 2353) = 3.231$, $p < 0.040$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$, a small effect size. In post-hoc Hochberg GT2 comparisons the higher pornography use group showed a trend towards having significantly higher sexual satisfaction than the lower use group ($p = .050$). However, there were no statistically significant differences in sexual satisfaction between the higher use and medium use groups, nor between the medium use and the lower use groups.

Additionally, an analysis was conducted on women's relationship statuses and their sexual satisfaction. A one-way Anova revealed a statistically significant difference in sexual satisfaction across the three different relationship statuses: single, dating, committed/married/cohabitating, $F(2, 2342) = 14.79$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.012$, a small effect size. Post-hoc Hochberg GT2 comparisons showed that single women had significantly lower sexual satisfaction than women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women, $p < .001$. However, there was no statistically significant difference in sexual satisfaction between women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women.

Furthermore, whether using pornography by themselves or with sexual partners, played a role to women's sexual satisfaction was explored. Spearman correlations were conducted as both variables, using pornography by themselves and using pornography with a sexual partner/s did not have normal distributions.

A Spearman correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between women's sexual satisfaction and using pornography by themselves. There was a weak negative correlation between women's sexual satisfaction and using pornography by themselves, which was statistically significant, $\rho(2354) = -.192$, 95% BCa CI [-0.23, -0.15], $p < .001$. The more women reported using pornography by themselves, the lower was their reported sexual satisfaction.

Similarly, a Spearman correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between women's sexual satisfaction and using pornography with a sexual partner/s. There was a weak positive correlation between women's sexual satisfaction and using pornography with sexual partners, which was statistically significant, $\rho(2353) = .212$, 95% BCa CI [0.17, 0.25], $p < .001$. The more women used pornography with their partners, the higher was their reported sexual satisfaction.

However, after these results further analyses were considered necessary to investigate whether relationship status played a role in women's pornography consumption (specifically whether single women were using pornography more than women in other relationship statuses or not). A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between the variables of women's frequency of pornography use and their relationship status. As described above, both variables were categorical with three categories each. The relationship between these variables was significant $\chi^2(4, N = 3315) = 49.199$, $p < .001$, with single women using pornography more frequently than women who were dating and women who were committed/married/cohabitating; and women who were committed/married/cohabitating using pornography less frequently than the two other groups of women.

Because the relationship between women's pornography consumption and their relationship status was significant, further analyses were conducted to determine whether women's relationship

status and using pornography, either by themselves or with sexual partners, were independently associated with women's sexual satisfaction or not. A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which women using pornography by themselves or women's relationship status with partners was associated with their sexual satisfaction. Tests to check whether the data met the assumption of multicollinearity indicated that it was not a concern (using pornography by yourself: Tolerance = .991, VIF = 1.003; relationship status: Tolerance = .997, VIF = 1.003). Results are presented in Table 7 (p. 166). The overall model was significant: $F(2, 2344) = 35.456$, $p < .001$, total R square = 0.029. After controlling for relationship status, using pornography by yourself was independently and negatively associated with sexual satisfaction. Similarly, after controlling for using pornography by yourself, relationship status was independently and positively associated with sexual satisfaction, with single women having significantly lower sexual satisfaction than women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women, $p < .001$. However, there was no statistically significant difference in sexual satisfaction between women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women.

Similarly, a multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which women using pornography with sexual partners or women's relationship status with partners was associated with their sexual satisfaction. Tests to check whether the data met the assumption of multicollinearity indicated that it was not a concern (using pornography with sexual partners: Tolerance = 1.000, VIF = 1.000; relationship status: Tolerance = 1.000, VIF = 1.000). Results are presented in Table 8 (p. 167). The overall model was significant: $F(2, 2343) = 51.947$, $p < .001$, total R square = 0.042. After controlling for relationship status, using pornography with sexual partners was independently and positively associated with sexual satisfaction. Equally, after controlling for using pornography with a sexual partner/s, relationship status was independently and positively associated with sexual satisfaction, with single women having significantly lower sexual satisfaction than women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women, $p < .001$. However, there was no statistically significant difference in sexual satisfaction between women who were dating and committed/married/cohabitating women.

In conclusion, all the above results from the analyses indicated that women's sexual satisfaction was independently associated with their relationship status, and with whether they were using pornography either by themselves or with their partners.

Research Question 4: What are the Associations Between Pornography Use and Subsequent Negative and Positive Emotions?

Analyses were conducted to check the associations between the pornography use variable, which was a categorical variable with 3 groups, and SUM negative emotions (a continuous, not normally distributed variable), and SUM positive emotions (continuous, normally distributed variables). Thus, a Kruskal-Wallis H test and a one-way Anova were conducted.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test and a post-hoc test were used to determine whether there were differences in the SUM Negative emotions variable among 3 groups differing in their frequency of pornography use: higher, medium, and lower use. The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was a statistically significant difference in negative emotions among the three different pornography use groups, $\chi^2(2) = 38.086$, $p < 0.001$, with a mean score of 1487.24 for higher pornography use frequency, 1577.64 for medium pornography use frequency, and finally, 1734.17 for lower pornography use frequency. A post hoc test revealed there were statistically significant differences in negative emotions between the higher use and the lower use groups, $p < .001$, as well as between the medium use and the lower use groups $p < .001$. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the higher use and the medium use groups. Thus, women who reported higher pornography use reported lower subsequent negative emotions.

Similarly, a one-way Anova revealed a statistically significant difference in SUM positive emotions across the three groups differing in their frequency of pornography use: higher, medium, and lower use, $F(2, 3146) = 72.595$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.044$, a small effect size. Post-hoc Hochberg GT2 comparisons showed that women who used pornography more frequently had significantly higher positive emotions than women who were in the medium, $p < .001$, and lower pornography use frequency groups, $p < .001$. Also, women in the medium pornography use frequency had significantly

higher positive emotions than women in the lower pornography use frequency, $p < .001$. Thus, women who reported higher pornography use reported higher subsequent positive emotions.

Next, associations were explored between participants' negative and positive emotions after pornography use and their age, which was not normally distributed. A Spearman correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between SUM negative emotions and participants' age. There was a weak negative correlation between negative emotions and participants' age, which was statistically significant $\rho(3147) = -.256$, 95% BCa CI [- .292, -.220], $p < .001$.

Again, a Spearman correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between SUM positive emotions and participants' age. There was a weak positive correlation between participants' positive emotions and participants' age, which was statistically significant $\rho(3147) = .165$, 95% BCa CI [.132, .199], $p < .001$. These results indicated that with increasing age, women experienced more positive emotions after their pornography use and less negative emotions.

Finally, the relationships among negative and positive emotions and women using pornography either by themselves or with sexual partners were explored. A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which women using pornography by themselves or women using pornography with partners predicted negative emotions after their pornography use. Tests to check whether the data met the assumption of multicollinearity indicated that it was not a concern (using pornography by yourself: Tolerance = .785, VIF = 1.274; using pornography with sexual partners: Tolerance = .785, VIF = 1.274). Results are presented in Table 9 (p. 168). The overall model was significant: $F(2,3145) = 11.553$, $p < .001$, total R square = 0.007. Only one of the independent variables was significantly associated with the dependent variable; women using pornography with their sexual partners was associated with fewer negative emotions after pornography use ($\beta = -.078$, $b = -.017$, $p < .001$). Women using pornography by themselves was not associated with reporting negative emotions, $p = .490$.

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which women using pornography by themselves or women using pornography with partners predicted positive emotions after their pornography use. Tests to check whether the data met the assumption of multicollinearity

indicated that it was not a concern (using pornography by yourself: Tolerance = .785, VIF = 1.274; using pornography with sexual partners: Tolerance = .785, VIF = 1.274). Results are presented in Table 10 (p. 169). The overall model was significant: $F(2,3145) = 24.313$, $p < .001$, total R square = 0.15. Only one of the independent variables was significantly associated with the dependent variable; women using pornography with their sexual partners was significantly associated with more positive emotions after use ($\beta = .118$, $b = .0.21$, $p < .001$). Women using pornography by themselves was not associated with reporting positive emotions, $p = .564$.

Discussion

The aims of this large-scale international survey were to explore women's pornography preferences, motivations women give for pornography use, and reported outcomes of their pornography use. We also examined whether women's own pornography use was associated with their level of sexual satisfaction and the frequency with which they reported positive or negative emotions (or both) after using pornography. Participants were all women who had used pornography at least once in the previous six months.

Motivations

Regarding motivations for pornography use, women reported that the most common reasons, in order of prevalence, were sexual motivations such as *to masturbate*, *to orgasm*, *to enhance sexual arousal*, *as an alternative to sexual fantasies* and *to enhance sexual experiences*. This is consistent with findings from previous studies, using somewhat different measures, that found that sexual motivations were the most common reasons women gave for using pornography (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Brown, Conner, et al., 2017; Burtăverde et al., 2021; Esplin et al., 2021; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; Parvez, 2006; Paul & Shim, 2008; Perse, 1994; Prause, 2019).

Other common reasons that encouraged women to access pornography were *for relaxation*, *for entertainment*, *for distraction from everyday demands*, because of *boredom* and *out of habit*. These are also in accord with results reported by previous studies (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Moynihan et al., 2022; Paul & Shim, 2008; Perse, 1994). However, in some of these studies results

were reported jointly for women and men. Pornography use as a means of entertainment was mentioned by participants in a women-only sample (Hempel, 2012). Boredom and a need to unwind were noted as motivations for both women and men in a study by Esplin et al. (2021), and mood improvement was reported by participants in Burtăverde et al.'s (2021) study. Pornography can be considered an easily accessible tool that helps some women unwind and relax.

Sexual curiosity was another reason that women reported using pornography for, again in accordance with findings from other studies (Bóthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2021; Bridges & Morokoff, 2011). This could be attributed to the participants' interest in finding new ideas for sexual acts. A similar but less commonly reported motivation for pornography use was to learn something sexual, also reported in previous research (Burtăverde et al., 2021; Hempel, 2012; Parvez, 2006). A less common motivation for pornography use in this study was to initiate discussions with partners; similar results were also reported by Kohut et al. (2017). The least common motivation for pornography use reported by our participants was to connect with someone else. This is in contrast with a study that reported connecting with someone was the main reason for pornography use (Paul & Shim, 2008).

Outcomes

Women reported various outcomes or "perceived effects" from their pornography use, mainly concerning the role they thought that pornography played in their sexual lives. The most commonly reported outcome was that they believed what is depicted in pornography was unrealistic. This issue with pornography being unrealistic and creating unrealistic expectations for people's sexual perceptions has been reported in other studies (Chadwick et al., 2018; Kohut et al., 2017; Morrison & Tallack, 2005). This finding suggests that women can be sceptical about the pornography they choose to use; despite making the choice to use it, they do question whether what they consume actually reflects reality. In other words, they are informed and active consumers of pornography, rather than engaging passively with it (Chadwick et al., 2018; Parvez, 2006). This could be attributed to the fact that we live in a digital age where information is accessed very easily through smartphones and the internet. Another issue to consider is what is actually meant by

pornography being unrealistic (Byron et al., 2020; Litsou, Byron, et al., 2021). Sexual intercourse happening in pornography is real but what is not real is how sexual relationships are presented, often as if no emotional connection is ever needed and without discussions about sexual preferences and about consent. The current findings add to the few existing studies highlighting that many women believe that pornographic depictions are not accurate representations of reality (Chadwick et al., 2018; Kohut et al., 2017; Morrison & Tallack, 2005).

The second most commonly reported outcome was that pornography use made women feel sexually empowered, meaning having autonomy and self-determining their sexual lives. This might be because pornography offers the opportunity for women to experience sexual arousal and satisfy their sexual needs by themselves, without the need to have a partner. In some studies women have stated that they opted for pornography use when their partners were not interested in engaging in sexual activity or were unavailable sexually, meaning that pornography provided an alternative outlet (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Perse, 1994; Ramlagun, 2012) that helped them feel sexually independent and empowered. More specifically, there might be a bidirectional relationship between pornography use and sexual empowerment because using pornography can increase women's feelings of sexual empowerment and, equally, exercising a choice to use pornography and satisfy needs reflects sexual empowerment (Klein et al., 2022). Further, the fact that women had the option to choose the type of content they wanted to use without worrying about what others might think, might have helped them feel sexually empowered (Litsou, Graham, et al., 2021). This study builds on and advances findings about women's sexual empowerment and pornography use.

Pornography appeared to have both positive and negative influences on the way women viewed their bodies. Some women may have compared their bodies with female pornography actors and concluded they did not look as good as the actors did whereas, for some others, after comparing themselves to the female actors, they determined they looked attractive. Research conducted on whether pornography consumption is associated with women's own body image has shown consistently that pornography use is not associated with negative body self-image for most women. Specific findings are that pornography use does not play a role in the way women view their genitals

(Hustad et al., 2022), the way women view their bodies or breast size (Cranney, 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2014), and is not associated with body satisfaction or dissatisfaction, requests for labiaplasty (Jones & Nurka, 2015), or with pubic hair removal behaviour (Stone et al., 2017). In contrast, pornography has been reported to provide sexual comfort and body acceptance for women (Ashton et al., 2019a). The current survey's mixed results about the way women view their bodies is another example of the complex role pornography can have in women's sexual lives (Ashton et al., 2018; Litsou et al., 2023a).

One outcome that was reported by some women was that they felt desensitised by pornography use. A definition was provided to the participants clarifying that desensitised meant that, "with increasing pornography use, women needed to access something different or more extreme to become sexually aroused". It is a common belief that the more pornography consumers use, the more desensitised they become, and they need more "hardcore" content to get sexually aroused (Hald & Malamuth, 2008; Shor & Seida, 2018). However, Shor and Seida (2018) analysed the 269 most watched mainstream pornographic videos uploaded to Pornhub from 2008 to 2016 to examine whether these had gradually become more violent, according to users' requirements and, if that was the case, to assess whether these videos had a higher number of views. They did not find a rise in aggressive content, and they reported that videos containing aggressive acts were not receiving more views. Additionally, these authors found that videos depicting women's sexual pleasure were more popular than videos portraying aggression. Some studies have shown that women and men participants did not report negative effects from pornography use or report feeling desensitised by using it (Hald & Malamuth, 2008). Other research, however, has reported that both men and women who began pornography use at a younger age were increasingly more likely to engage with more aggressive content, suggesting they became desensitised by pornography use (Seigfried-Spellar & Rogers, 2013).

As expected, there were sexual outcomes from pornography use, which could provide ideas to women for sexual activities that they had not thought about before. This could be because initially women opted to access pornography for other reasons but ended up finding material depicting

sexual activities they had not thought about before, had not planned to look for, and that had instilled ideas for new sexual activities to try. This outcome of pornography acting as a source of information was also reported by Kohut et al. (2017).

Sexual Satisfaction

In the current study we found that frequent pornography use, either alone or with partner, was associated with higher sexual satisfaction. Additionally, it was shown that women who were in some kind of a relationship or partnership experienced higher sexual satisfaction than single women. This could be because women who were in partnerships were maybe having sexual activity more often than single women, which was associated with them experiencing higher sexual satisfaction.

Furthermore, women who used pornography mainly with their sexual partners appeared to experience higher sexual satisfaction than women who were using it alone. In order to interpret these results, I investigated whether single women were using pornography more than women in relationships. It was also investigated whether using pornography by themselves or using pornography with sexual partners, or relationship status were independently associated with women's sexual satisfaction or not. Relationship status and using pornography either by themselves or with sexual partners did play a role in women's sexual satisfaction. This could be because women who use pornography have a higher interest in sexual activities or because frequent pornography use enhances women's sexual desire, which could lead to increased sexual activities and greater sexual satisfaction. The direction of this relationship (if it is indeed a simple relationship) is not clear.

Emotions

Regarding women's emotions/reactions after pornography use, women who reported higher pornography use reported lower negative emotions and also reported higher positive emotions. This can be an indication that women who use pornography more have an overall positive perspective of their sexuality and thus they experienced more positive emotions. However, the opposite explanation is also possible, that because women have an overall positive perspective of their sexuality, they tend to use pornography more: thus, more positive feelings are experienced. The direction of this relationship is not clear.

Regarding participants' age, the older participants were, the less negative emotions and the more positive emotions they reported after pornography use, likely indicating that as women grow older, they become more accepting of their sexuality and more relaxed about their pornography use. Comparisons between women who used pornography alone vs. with sexual partners, showed that partnered use was more often associated with fewer negative and more positive emotions than solo use. Women using pornography by themselves was not associated with reporting negative or positive emotions after pornography use. A possible explanation for this could be that when women used pornography as part of their partnered sex life and another person/s was involved, they were more invested in these sexual relationships and thus, that played a role for their emotions. However, when they used pornography by themselves, they were not as much invested in the experience, so that did not play a role for their emotions.

With a few exceptions (Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021; Floyd et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2022), few studies have focused on the relationship between pornography use and subsequent emotions. Results from this study offer a useful step for future research.

Implications

Most of the outcomes identified in this study have not as yet been studied in depth and so they require further investigation to enable better understanding about what women might or might not gain by accessing pornography, and what role pornography use plays in their lives. Further research is also needed to better understand whether pornography use enhances or diminishes women's sexual satisfaction.

The results from this study have implications for clinical practice. Sometimes women might require "permission" from themselves to access (and enjoy) pornography and giving them that permission can help them feel sexually empowered and independent. Women experiencing sexual difficulties such as reduced sexual desire and arousal might also benefit as clinicians could suggest pornography use to improve those issues. Clinicians might also recommend pornography use to enhance couples' sexual communication and sexual intimacy or suggest women-centred pornography to enhance their sexual empowerment.

Strengths and Limitations

Regarding strengths, to our knowledge this is the first study to explore women's pornography use with a large international and diverse sample. The questions were informed by an in-depth qualitative study on women's motivations and outcomes of pornography use, as presented in Chapter 3 (Litsou et al., 2023a). To the authors' knowledge, the use of slider scales is a measurement technique that has not been used in other studies in this area and it provides participants with a greater range of response options and flexibility for their answers than the more frequently used 5 – or 7 – point scales.

There were some limitations of this study. The first is that the sample was based on self-selection and therefore we had no control over who the participants were. Additionally, the sample was likely comprised mostly of "sex positive" women who would be comfortable in answering questions about their sexuality. Another limitation is possible recall bias, although we focused on behaviours that occurred during the last six months. An additional limitation was the use of the NSSS because it was relevant only to women in relationships and thus women without partners could not answer all the questions. A further limitation was the study's lack of focus on masturbation, one of the main motivations that participants reported using pornography for, as well as religiosity, which plays a role in women's views of pornography.

Conclusion

The findings show that pornography can play both a negative and a positive role in women's sexual lives. For some women pornography use was reported to have a positive influence, for others a negative influence, and for others a mix of positive and negative influences. Women reported many different motivations for their pornography use and many outcomes (both positive and negative and sexual and non-sexual) from their pornography use. The findings contribute to the literature on women's pornography use and their associated sexual satisfaction. Finally, the findings on emotions women experience after pornography use, under-researched to date, were novel findings and can be used to stimulate future research.

Chapter 5 – General Discussion

The Combined Key Qualitative and Quantitative Findings of the Papers

Within the thesis I have presented three research papers on women's pornography use. The first paper was a systematic review that synthesised the research on what motivates women in committed relationships to use pornography, what functions pornography serves for women, and how women believe pornography influences their sexual and relationship lives. Through thematic synthesis four analytical themes were identified. Two overarching themes were: Porn use enhances women's sexual and relationship lives, and Porn use disrupts women's sexual and relationship lives. These two themes reflect the complex role that pornography plays in women's sexual and relationship lives and, more specifically, that pornography can play simultaneously both a positive and a negative role. The third theme identified Reasons for porn use reflecting the myriad potential reasons that women in committed relationships use pornography for, such as to enhance sexual fantasy and masturbation, to explore their sexuality, etc. The fourth theme was Shared use, and concerns women using pornography with their partners and how that use could bring novelty into their relationships but also could bring pressure for them to perform sexually in a specific way.

The second paper reported on an in-depth interview study that explored the functions of pornography use reported by women of any sexual orientation and relationship status, and possible changes pornography use might have brought in their sexual lives. Results were organised into two major themes, each with two subthemes. The first theme was Precursors, with the subthemes of Sexual precursors and Non-sexual precursors, and the second theme was Outcomes, with the subthemes of Intended outcomes and Unintended outcomes. The theme Sexual precursors covered all the sexual reasons for which women reported using pornography; for example, using pornography to enhance their sexual arousal. The theme Non-sexual precursors comprised all the non-sexual reasons for which women reported using pornography; for example, using pornography as a way to relax. The theme Intended outcomes covered everything women intended to gain by using pornography, for example, enhanced orgasms. The theme Unintended outcomes referred to all the

unintended and unplanned results that women gained through their pornography use, for example changes in body image – be these positive or negative.

The third paper reported on a large international online survey that explored women's motivations for, and reported outcomes from, their pornography use, as well as the associations between women's pornography use and their sexual satisfaction, and between pornography use and positive or negative emotions (or both) after using pornography. Reported motivations for pornography use, as well as reported outcomes from pornography use were presented. Women's higher frequency of pornography use, either by themselves or with partners, was associated with higher sexual satisfaction. Further, women who used pornography mainly with their partners reported higher sexual satisfaction than women who were using pornography mostly by themselves. Positive and negative emotions after pornography use, were also explored. More negative emotions after pornography use were reported by women who were using pornography less frequently, by women who were younger, and by women who were using pornography by themselves. More positive emotions after pornography use were reported by women who were using pornography frequently, by women who were older, and by women who were using pornography with their partners.

The Combined Contribution of the Papers

Below, the key findings of the research are discussed. The systematic review of the qualitative and quantitative research investigated women in committed relationships and their pornography use. The results showed that motivations for using pornography and its functions were complicated matters for women. Women reported that pornography played both a positive and a negative role in their sexual and relationship lives. Even though women actively chose to use pornography for many different reasons, and they aimed to gain positive outcomes from that use, many times they reported negative outcomes as well; for example, they could be choosing to use pornography to enhance their sexual arousal and this was achieved but, at the same time, they were also receiving messages about unrealistic expectations for their sexual and relationship lives.

The qualitative study investigated the functions of pornography use reported by women, across varied relationship statuses and sexual orientations, and possible changes pornography use had brought, and could bring, to their sexual lives. The findings illustrated the complexity of women's pornography use. There were many different reasons, sexual and non-sexual, women chose to use pornography and there were many different outcomes that women gained from their pornography use, both intended and unintended. The sexual precursors that motivated women to use pornography have been to some extent reported in previous research, but the qualitative data provided a more in-depth understanding of these issues. Two specific non-sexual precursors had not been previously reported – using pornography to process negative experiences from the past and using pornography to escape the social notion that women do not enjoy sex. These findings have implications for clinical practice and sexual education, which are discussed in the next section.

Another novel finding was that some women reported using pornography to explore sexual interests and sexual activities that they had not thought about before. The unintended outcomes reported by participants highlighted the fact that many times there would be outcomes from women's pornography use that they had had no prior intention of obtaining. Some of these outcomes were positive for the women, such as pornography helping them feel sexually empowered, and others were negative, for example, that using pornography made them feel uninterested in engaging in sexual activities with their partners. Again, as mentioned above, these results highlighted the complicated nature of women's pornography use.

The third study, the online survey, aimed to explore women's reported preferences, reported motivations, and reported outcomes from pornography use. The associations between pornography use and women's sexual satisfaction were also assessed, as well as women's emotions, positive, negative or both, after pornography use.

Sexual Satisfaction

Women's pornography use and associations with their sexual satisfaction were also explored in the third study (Chapter 4). Previous research on this topic has produced conflicting results, as discussed in Chapter 4. There are also methodological shortcomings in this area of research, as

researchers sometimes have used validated questionnaires to measure sexual satisfaction, but others have constructed their own questions. Additionally, different findings about the association between sexual satisfaction and pornography use are evident when women use pornography by themselves and/or with their partners (Brown, Carroll, et al., 2017; Kohut et al., 2021).

It is relatively straightforward to ask participants in quantitative research to rate their sexual satisfaction using a few questions or by using a standardised questionnaire, without getting too involved in the details. However, given that sexual satisfaction in relation to pornography use is quite a complex issue, a qualitative approach to investigate this in depth could be considered more appropriate. Nevertheless, sexual satisfaction was not discussed by the participants in the qualitative study.

In the third study, the quantitative survey, frequent pornography use, either alone or with partner/s, was associated with higher sexual satisfaction, and less frequent pornography use was associated with lower sexual satisfaction. Additionally, women who were using pornography mainly with their partners appeared to experience higher sexual satisfaction than women who were using it alone. It is possible that this was a reflection of women in our study being sex-positive, meaning that having a positive outlook towards sexual matters was associated with high sexual satisfaction when using pornography. This could be considered a self-fulfilling prophecy; a person expecting to get something specific and ending up getting that (Biggs, 2011; Madon et al., 2011). An alternative explanation could be that women who used pornography frequently had high levels of sexual desire which led to them engaging in sexual activities more often, which in turn was associated with them experiencing greater sexual satisfaction.

Emotions

Regarding women's own pornography use, their emotions after using pornography have not been the focus of much previous research in this area. One of the few studies that explored this compared whether pornographic or neutral videos produced more positive or more negative emotions for both men and women participants; participants reported both more positive and more negative emotions after watching the sexual film compared to the neutral film (Prause et al., 2013).

Another study that measured positive and negative emotions after online pornography use by undergraduate students showed that the most common emotions reported by women were feeling entertained and feeling disgusted, followed by excitement (Goodson et al., 2000). Sexual shame was reported by participants in another study after pornography use and this was deemed by the authors to be due to their moral incongruence and their belief they were addicted to online pornography (Floyd et al., 2022). In other studies, sexual distress after pornography use was reported by women participants (Bóthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2022). More specifically, one study showed that participants experienced distress after pornography use but only when they perceived themselves to be addicted to pornography (Grubbs et al., 2015).

In the first and second studies reported in this thesis, emotions were not assessed. However, after conducting the qualitative interviews, investigating emotions after pornography use, either positive or negative, was considered to provide insight into women's experiences with pornography. Results were as expected and showed that in general, the more positive emotions women experienced after pornography use, the lower were the negative emotions they reported. Older participants who volunteered for this survey, experienced fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions; this could be an indication of women feeling more self-confident and more accepting of themselves as they grow older. Older women accepting changes in their sexual lives as a natural process in life has been reported by previous research (Towler et al., 2022). (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019)

Cultural Issues

Although it was not the focus of the research conducted for this thesis, consideration of the cultural context in which pornography is experienced is important. This is not only because different countries have different regulations and laws related to accessing pornography, but also because different cultures have different social perspectives regarding pornography. Some countries have "relaxed" regulations regarding pornography access and use, meaning that there are no official restrictions. However, there are a few countries with relaxed pornography regulations that have tried in the past to regulate online pornography access by introducing age verification schemes, requiring

online pornography website visitors to prove they are over 18 by providing either some form of ID such as passport or driving licence, or by providing a bank card number. The UK is one of the countries which plans to enforce the age verification scheme (Government UK, 2022). Nevertheless, there have been criticisms that users are always able to find loopholes around such restrictions (Carter, 2022). Other countries have more strict regulations regarding pornography access or even ban pornographic sites altogether (Procida & Simon, 2003).

Living in different countries with different pornography access restrictions could play a role on how and if women would be motivated to access pornography and which potential outcomes they may obtain. It became clear from the systematic review that pornography researchers have seldom acknowledged the cultural context in which their research had been conducted, nor the cultural context(s) in which their participants experienced pornography. Some exceptions do exist; for example, Benjamin and Tlusten (2010) addressed the Israeli context in which they conducted their research by providing a short description about what is happening in Israel regarding pornography use, pornography research, and the public debate surrounding those issues. Other researchers mentioned the cultural context of their research and the reasons that made them choose a certain cultural background without, however, addressing the possible impact the cultural context might have had on their participants (Ashton et al., 2019a, 2020; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2019).

The qualitative study (Chapter 3) included women participants residing either in UK or in Greece. The aim was for two consistent cultural backgrounds to be in place for the way all the participants experienced pornography. It was also a pragmatic decision because, as the main researcher who conducted all the interviews, I have a very good understanding of the cultural and social background in these two countries. The third study reported (Chapter 4) did not address social and cultural issues as it was an international survey with participants coming from seventy-seven different countries, with many different official pornography regulations and cultural and social norms. Thus, it would be very challenging to assess how the countries that participants came from are rated on degrees of liberalism and conservatism, and then investigate if that made any difference

on the way they experienced pornography. Additionally, it was considered to be outside the scope of the current research.

Women tend to underreport their pornography use due to cultural and social norms dictating that it is "unethical" and "uncommon" for a woman to use pornography (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019). Additionally, women might feel conflicted about the sexual pleasure they receive from their pornography use and social and cultural norms dictating that they should not be using pornography (McKee et al., 2021b). This might have an influence on what emotions women experience after pornography use. Future pornography research should try to incorporate and address cultural issues of pornography access and attitudes.

Implications of Findings

Results of the research conducted for this thesis have implications and provide directions for future research. The outcomes from women's pornography use identified, particularly from the third study, have not been studied in depth and thus further research is required in order to get a better understanding regarding what women obtain from using pornography and what role pornography plays in their lives. The issue of whether pornography use enhances or diminishes women's sexual and/or relationship satisfaction should be investigated further as results from previous research have been conflicting. Additionally, further research is needed on the emotions, positive and/or negative, women experience after pornography use. It would be useful for a standardised tool about emotions to be developed in the future for researchers to have a clear and coherent idea about women's emotions after their pornography use. Regarding cultural issues, more research is needed with samples from different countries around the world which have different laws around pornography access, different religion, and different acceptance of pornography, as some countries are more accepting to pornography use and others less so. This type of research will help us obtain a better understanding of how pornography is used and viewed around the world, a better understanding of what motivates different populations to use pornography, as well as the outcomes from their pornography use. Furthermore, additional pornography research could lead to the development of a theory that helps us to understand pornography use and the role it plays in women's sexual lives.

These results have important implications not only for future research, but also for clinical practice. Clinicians working with women clients and health professionals could either discuss existing pornography use or propose pornography consumption (Maddox et al., 2011). This could help clients gain a better understanding about what is actually depicted in pornography, which is called porn literacy (Byron et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2019; Vandenbosch & Van Oosten, 2017). It might also help women clients who are facing sexual arousal and sexual desire difficulties to overcome these difficulties (Cass, 2007).

Additionally, understanding motivations and outcomes from women's pornography use could be used to inform RSE for young people in schools. It is not possible to control young people's pornography use, but it would be useful to engage with young people and offer them the means to understand pornography better. School based RSE is the most popular source of information about sexuality issues (Macdowall et al., 2015; Newby et al., 2012), and previous research has shown that RSE should be about reducing shame, improving critical thinking skills, relationships, and addressing sexual violence among other topics (Dawson et al., 2019; Newby et al., 2012). As has been discussed above, teaching porn literacy to young people could help them better understand pornography and use it in a way that enhances their sexual lives, rather than pornography being a problematic issue (Byron et al., 2020). Additionally, knowing women's sexual likes and dislikes through their pornography use can inform RSE programmes to focus on sexual pleasure, how to achieve sexual pleasure, sexual communication, and sexual consent.

Finally, a better understanding of pornography consumption can influence policy regarding pornography. Fine and McClelland (2006) have argued that historically there has been a focus on regulating women's reproductive capacity without necessarily paying attention to their sexual pleasure. Understanding more about both the negative and the positive outcomes associated with women's pornography use and taking those into consideration when creating policies would be a key consideration in order to ensure women's sexual pleasure.

Reflecting on my Role as a Researcher

Having presented the key findings of the research I conducted, I would like to situate myself with regard to the rapport I developed with the women I interviewed for the qualitative study, with regard to the findings, and to how I reported the findings from my research. It is important for the researcher to be reflexive, meaning to acknowledge her role in the whole research process, and she needs to be aware of her assumptions, her skills, her previous experiences and her values because all these play a role in her interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021a). Reflexivity is an ongoing process throughout the whole duration of the research process and researchers should continuously critique, appraise and evaluate how their subjectivity influences the whole research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

I am a cisgender woman and I have a background in psychology and sexology. I have a small amount of clinical experience, in addition to academic experience. Therefore, I feel confident and comfortable discussing sexual health related matters with people. I have a liberal perspective when it comes to sexual rights and more specifically issues regarding pornography use. I have been raised and I now live in countries where regulations around pornography access and use are fairly relaxed, with very few formal restrictions.

During the interview process with my participants, I took care to make them feel comfortable to share their personal stories and information with me. I made an effort to use terminology and vocabulary my participants used. I tried to be respectful and understanding of the women's accounts. Based on participants' positive comments and positive feedback after our interviews were finished and, based on the fact that they were very talkative during the interview process and very willing to share their personal information with me, it is my understanding that rapport was built between the participants and me. During the data analysis process for both the qualitative study and the quantitative study, I tried to maintain a non-judgmental, exploratory outlook and I was neither in favour nor against pornography use. I have upheld this outlook throughout the whole of my thesis journey.

Limitations and Strengths

Pornography is a rapidly changing field due to the advances in technology which allow for instant, easy, and anonymous pornography access (Donevan & Mattebo, 2017; McKeown et al., 2018). Therefore, it is probable that by the time this thesis is submitted, some information might be missing as new research is published.

Sexual satisfaction in relation to pornography use was not the main focus of the research conducted for this study. Sexual satisfaction was assessed in the third study because, as stated above, previous results on this topic are conflicting. It would have been useful if I had focused on pornography use and whether it has a positive or a negative association with sexual satisfaction in both studies, and also tried to disentangle it from relationship satisfaction. Additionally, masturbation has been linked to pornography use by previous researchers (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; McNabney et al., 2020; Paul & Shim, 2008) and participants mentioned this as one of the main motivating factors that women used pornography for. However, the research described in this thesis did not focus on masturbation specifically.

Another limitation was that the majority of the participants in the studies were (presumably) sex positive women. This was certainly the case in the qualitative study, and it is highly likely that the majority of the women who completed the third study were also sex positive, although there was no way to assess this. Additionally, all the data were self-reported by the participants and there was no way of checking whether participants gave honest reports or not, or whether the participants suffered recall bias. Finally, all the research conducted was cross-sectional and thus no causal conclusions can be made.

However, the research conducted for this thesis also had strengths. All studies described focused on women's own pornography use, helping to fill gaps in the literature and provide a fuller understanding of the area. A specific pornography definition was used for all the research conducted, which helped to ensure that participants had a clear and consistent understanding. An additional strength is that the research described has used both qualitative and quantitative methods, which makes it more possible to arrive to more rich and complete descriptions and understanding of

women's pornography use, than by using a single methods approach (Kelle, 2006; Malina et al., 2011; Migiros & Magangi, 2011; Yardley & Bishop, 2017). Using a mixed methods approach allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of the research questions (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018).

General Conclusion

The findings of this research have highlighted the complex role that pornography plays in women's lives. There are many motivations which women report for using pornography and there are a range of outcomes that women report obtaining from their pornography use. These motivations and outcomes can be seen both as positive and negative by women. The findings provide a useful insight into women's pornography use and can be used to build future research.

Tables

Table 1 *Search Strategy for Databases*

Search terms for: PsychINFO, Medline and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global

porn* OR "sexually explicit material*" OR "visual sexual stimul*"	AND	wom?n* OR female*	AND	pleasur* OR sex* OR desire* OR arousal OR satisf* OR orgasm* OR excite* OR motivat* OR function* OR impact*	AND	relationship* OR commit* OR exclusive* OR partner* OR husband* OR wi?e* OR spouse*
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Search terms for Web of Science

porn* OR "sexually explicit material*" OR "visual sexual stimul*"	AND	wom?n OR female*	AND	pleasur* OR sex* OR desire* OR arousal OR satisf* OR orgasm* OR excite* OR motivat* OR function* OR impact*	AND	relationship* OR commit* OR exclusive* OR partner* OR husband* OR wife* OR wive* OR spouse*
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Table 2 *Characteristic of Included Papers*

Authors, Year & Location	Aims	Women Participants & Sample Sizes	Methods	Key Findings
Ashton, McDonald, and Kirkman (2019) Australia	To increase knowledge of how women themselves understand sexual pleasure in the context of pornography.	27 women who had sex with men aged 18-30; about half in intimate relationships.	In-depth interviews & thematic analysis supported by narrative theory - Bruner's narrative mode of thought	Pornography was constructed as interfering with pleasure through its misrepresentation (of bodies, sexual acts, and expression of pleasure), women's concern for actors' wellbeing, and its disruption of intimacy. Accounts were consistent with women's place in a culture that subordinates female pleasure to male pleasure. Pornography plays complex, dynamic roles in the production of pleasure, acting in the domains of physiology, psychology, relationships, ethics, society, and culture.
Ashton, McDonald, and Kirkman (2020) Australia	To investigate how young women themselves understand what pornography means for and in relationships.	27 women, aged 18-30, half in relationships	In-depth interviews, discursive analysis	Young women are perplexed by the interaction of pornography with relationships and attempt to make sense of what it means through discourses of intimacy, fidelity, and sexual freedom. Pornography mediates intimacy; men are the gatekeepers of intimacy; for intimacy, women need to objectify themselves to compete with pornography; religions equate pornography with infidelity; using pornography is relaxation and therefore not infidelity; men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment; and sexual freedom is paramount.
Benjamin and Tlusten (2010) Israel	To better define how women make sense of the radical conceptualizations of pornography as reinforcing the	20 women aged 22-53, all in intimate relationships,	Semi-structured interviews, analysis according to Giorgi's (1985) four	A process was identified in women who expect to have passionate and sexually active relationships. Three main dimensions of couples' relationships emerged: (a) the individual space, (b) cooperation and (c) relationship work

	hierarchical nature of heterosexuality, the relationship between consuming sexually explicit material and the stability of intimate relationships.	length 1-33 years	stages of phenomenological analysis	ethics. Embracing pornography and using it as a guiding resource for developing couples' sexuality is characteristic of women for whom togetherness implies the need to nurture mutual passion.
Bridges (2007) Online survey, not specified but probably participants from USA as they had to access specific USA websites devoted to psychological studies	Three hypotheses were examined: negative interpretations of a partner's SEM use would be related to lower dyadic satisfaction; interactive SEM use would result in more negative partner interpretations of that use; and distressed couples would be less reliable reporters of each other's SEM use. The study also explored how feminist values, depression, and sexual functioning correlated with interpretations of a partner's SEM use.	124 women aged 19-76, all in exclusive heterosexual relationships, average duration 9.16 years	Online survey. Reliability and validity analyses were conducted, and measurement model evaluated. Tools used: Dyadic Adjustment Scale or DAS-7, Index of Sexual Satisfaction or ISS, the Feminist Perspectives Scale or FPS, the Patient Health Questionnaire, a mix from Triangular Love Scale - Passionate Love Scale - Miller Social Scale	The first research hypothesis was partially supported: both direct and mediated effects were present. For women, her SEM use was directly and positively related to sexual and dyadic satisfaction, but the effects of her male partner's SEM use were fully mediated by her interpretations of that use. Higher female partner use of SEM resulted in more positive interpretations of her use and more positive relationship outcomes. The second hypothesis was unsupported. There was no evidence that participants whose partners used interactive SEM were more distressed than participants whose partners used more conventional materials. The third hypothesis was unsupported. Couples exhibited high reliability in reporting one another's use of SEM, but distressed couples were just as reliable reporters as well-functioning couples. Results from exploratory analyses revealed that sexual functioning and feminist values were not related to SEM use or distress over partner SEM use. In women, higher levels of depression were related to higher levels of distress over a partner's SEM use.
Bridges and Morokoff (2011) Online survey, not specified but probably	To assess how the sexual media use by one or both members of a romantic dyad related to relationship and sexual satisfaction.	217 heterosexual couples (mean age 34 years; couples were	Online survey. Correlations of age, depression, and sexual functioning with relationship	A higher frequency of men's sexual media use related to negative satisfaction in men, while a higher frequency of women's sexual media use related to positive satisfaction in male partners. Reasons for sexual media use differed by gender: Men reported primarily using sexual media for

<p>participants from USA as they had to access specific USA websites devoted to psychological studies</p>		<p>together for an average of 9.16 years</p>	<p>and sexual satisfaction by gender. Two structural models were analyzed. Structural equation modelling to test the associations between men's and women's sexual media use and men's general dyadic satisfaction was. Tools used: Dyadic Adjustment Scale or DAS-7 and Index of Sexual Satisfaction.</p>	<p>masturbation, while women reported primarily using sexual media as part of lovemaking with their partners. Shared sexual media use was associated with higher relational satisfaction compared to solitary sexual media use.</p>
<p>Brown et al. (2017) USA</p>	<p>Three hypotheses were proposed for how pornography use, and acceptance relates to heterosexual couple relationships, particularly the level of sexual satisfaction.</p>	<p>335 heterosexual married couples (mean age 36 years)</p>	<p>Survey in person. Structural equation modelling within Mplus software. Tool used: the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE).</p>	<p>The shared variance of pornography acceptance was positively associated with both spouses' pornography use and that spouses' pornography use was negatively associated with their own sexual satisfaction. Wives' pornography use was found to be positively associated with the couple's shared variance of sexual satisfaction, but pornography use did not significantly mediate the relationship between pornography acceptance and sexual satisfaction.</p>
<p>Carroll, Busby, Willoughby, and Brown (2017)</p>	<p>Research questions: What are men and women's pornography patterns (i.e., frequency of use, used together or alone patterns, acceptance, etc.) at different</p>	<p>21,555 participants (mean age 31 years) who reported they</p>	<p>Online survey. Frequencies, Multivariate analysis of covariance</p>	<p>There is a notable "pornography gap" between many partners and for some opposite-sex couples there is significant conflict related to pornography. Many of the couples who experience congruence or a similar pattern of</p>

<p>Online survey, not specified but probably participants from USA because they completed a specific questionnaire used in USA</p>	<p>stages of relationship commitment? How aware are partners at different stages of relationship commitment of their partner's pornography use (i.e., perception of use versus partner's reported use)? Are there differences in men and women's pornography use (i.e., frequency of use, used together or alone, etc.), pornography attitudes (i.e., acceptance, boundaries, etc.), and levels of pornography conflict at different stages of relationship commitment?</p>	<p>were in a casually dating (n=655), serious dating (n=6,167), engaged (n=8,720), or married (n=6,013) heterosexual relationship. 53% of the sample was female.</p>	<p>(MANCOVA). Tool used: the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE).</p>	<p>use between partners are those in which both abstain from using pornography.</p>
<p>Daspe, Vaillancourt-Morel, Lussier, Sabourin, and Ferron (2018)</p> <p>Online survey, locally advertised, probably participants from Canada</p>	<p>To explore whether low relationship quality and sexual dissatisfaction strengthen or weaken the association between frequency of Internet pornography use and perceived lack of control over this behavior.</p>	<p>565 women, aged 18-55</p>	<p>Online survey. Descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted using SPSS version 20. Regression analyses were conducted in Mplus, version 6.12. Tools used: a four-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and other Likert scale items created by the authors.</p>	<p>Frequency of pornography use was positively associated with perceived lack of control for both men and women. Frequency of pornography use was negatively associated with sexual satisfaction in men. Perceived lack of control was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction in men. Length of the relationship was negatively associated with frequency of pornography use in women and with relationship and sexual satisfaction in both men and women.</p>

<p>Dellner (2008) USA</p>	<p>To examine how pornography use is related to aspects of relationship functioning in committed relationships.</p>	<p>266 women, average age 28; all in a committed relationship 6 months or longer.</p>	<p>Online survey. G*Power was used to perform post-hoc analyses on statistical power for each of the main research hypotheses. One-way ANOVA, non-experimental correlational design, multiple regression for mediation analyses. Tools used: Relationship Assessment Scale, Crucible Differentiation Scale, Crucible Sexual Inventory.</p>	<p>Findings support the strength of the differentiation construct as the relationships between pornography use and relationship and sexual satisfaction disappeared after controlling for differentiation. Exploratory analyses on motivation revealed two factors—using pornography to "Cope" and using pornography to "Augment". The "Augment" motivation factor was found to have neutral or slightly positive relationships with study variables, whereas the "Cope" motivation factor was found to have strong negative relationships with differentiation, relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.</p>
<p>Leonhardt and Willoughby (2019) Online survey, not specified but probably participants from USA</p>	<p>To evaluate how two components of sexual content (pornography use and provocative sexual media use) were associated with several components of sexual satisfaction (time spent on foreplay, variety, overall satisfaction, frequency, love and affection, and time spent on</p>	<p>858 participants, 46.5% female, aged 18-77, in committed romantic relationships</p>	<p>Online survey, structural equation model, bivariate associations, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Tools used: Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction and other Likert</p>	<p>Higher pornography use was significantly associated with lower satisfaction with sexual variety and time spent on intercourse for men, yet not associated with any sexual satisfaction outcomes for women. Greater use of provocative sexual media for men and women was significantly associated with lower satisfaction with the love and affection in the sexual relationship. Provocative sexual media use for women was also associated with lower satisfaction with sexual variety, overall sexual satisfaction, and time spent on intercourse.</p>

	intercourse) for both men and women.		scale items created by the authors.	
McKeown, Parry, and Tracy Penny (2018) Canada	To explore the possibilities of women's consumption enabled through digital technologies. Research questions explored: How do women use digital technologies to consume pornography online? In what ways do digital technologies enable women's consumption of online pornography?	11 women aged 23-47.	In-depth interviews, thematic analysis	Findings illustrate the ways women can use digital technologies to consume pornography online in ways that help them to fulfil their sexual needs, embrace and explore their sexual selves, connect in sexual relationships, and normalize their sexual desires.
Perry (2017) USA	To test whether more frequent pornography use influences marital quality later on and whether this effect is moderated by gender.	Number of participants not clearly stated but 45% were women, aged 18-80, married participants	Online survey. Descriptive statistics correlations, regression models. Dataset from Portraits of American Life Study (a national representative panel survey).	Married persons who more frequently viewed pornography in 2006 reported significantly lower levels of marital quality in 2012. Pornography's effect was not simply a proxy for dissatisfaction with sex life or marital decision-making in 2006. Frequency of pornography use in 2006 was the second strongest predictor of marital quality in 2012. The negative effect of porn use on marital quality applied to husbands, but not wives. Wives who viewed pornography more frequently, reported higher marital quality than those who viewed it less frequently or not at all.
Perry (2020) USA	To establish a dominant pattern in the association between pornography use and relationship quality in a way that mitigated these issues.	Number of women participants not clearly stated, age 18-80, participants were married	Datasets from 30 nationally representative surveys (not stated whether online or in person), bivariate	Pornography use was either not associated or negatively associated with nearly all relationship outcomes. Significant associations were mostly small in magnitude. Except for one unclear exception, pornography use was never positively associated with relationship quality. Associations were only occasionally moderated by gender, but in inconsistent directions.

			association, full regression models	
Perry and Davis (2017) USA	To examine whether Americans who use pornography, either at all or more frequently, are more prone to report experiencing a romantic breakup over time.	Number of participants not clearly stated but 53% were women, aged 19-80; 57% were married, 6% were cohabitating	Surveys online and in person, Longitudinal data, descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, binary logistic regression analyses. Dataset from Portraits of American Life Study (a national representative panel survey).	Americans who viewed pornography at all in 2006 were nearly twice as likely as those who never viewed pornography to report experiencing a romantic breakup by 2012, even after controlling for relevant factors such as 2006 relationship status and other sociodemographic correlates. This association was considerably stronger for men than for women and for unmarried Americans than for married Americans. Analyses showed a linear relationship between how frequently Americans viewed pornography in 2006 and their odds of experiencing a breakup by 2012.
Perry and Schleifer (2018) USA	To examine the relationship between pornography use and marriage. It aimed to determine whether married Americans’ pornography use predicted their likelihood of divorce over time and under what social conditions.	2,120 married couples, aged 20-80	Survey in person, longitudinal data, logistic regression models, associations. Dataset from the GSS (a nationally representative face-to face survey of noninstitutionalized English or Spanish speaking American adults).	The probability of divorce roughly doubled for married Americans who began pornography use between survey waves and this relationship held for both women and men. Discontinuing pornography use between survey waves was associated with a lower probability of divorce, but only for women. The association between beginning pornography use and the probability of divorce was particularly strong among younger Americans, those who were less religious, and those who reported greater initial marital happiness.

<p>Poulsen, Busby, and Galovan (2013) USA</p>	<p>To explore how the use of pornography in a committed relationship is related to the sexual quality and relationship satisfaction reported by each partner.</p>	<p>617 married or cohabitating couples (17-58 years) at the time of the study</p>	<p>Survey in person, descriptive statistics, discriminant analysis, paired-sample t-test. Tool used: the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE).</p>	<p>Male pornography use was negatively associated with both male and female sexual quality, whereas female pornography use was positively associated with female sexual quality.</p>
<p>Resch and Alderson (2014) Canada</p>	<p>To investigate honesty regarding pornography use and mutual consumption between partners, along with honesty and mutual use as predictors of satisfaction.</p>	<p>340 heterosexual women (18-41 years), in committed relationships of at least 6 months</p>	<p>Online survey, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), simple linear regression. Tools used: Pornography Distress Scale and Couples Satisfaction Index.</p>	<p>Participants reporting more honesty showed higher satisfaction and lower levels of distress, and participants disclosing mutual use showed lower levels of distress, although no differences were reported in satisfaction. Honesty regarding pornography use significantly predicted relationship dissatisfaction.</p>
<p>Willoughby, Carroll, Busby, and Brown (2016) USA</p>	<p>To examine how different patterns of pornography use between romantic partners may be associated with relationship outcomes.</p>	<p>1755 heterosexual couples; average age of women 27 years</p>	<p>Online survey. Cross-sectional, mediation analyses. Descriptive statistics, hierarchical regression models, structural equation models. Tool used: the Relationship Evaluation</p>	<p>Greater discrepancies between partners in pornography use were related to less relationship satisfaction, less stability, less positive communication, and more relational aggression. Mediation analyses suggested that greater pornography use discrepancies were primarily associated with elevated levels of male relational aggression, lower female sexual desire, and less positive communication for both partners which then predicted lower relational satisfaction and stability for both partners. Discrepancies in pornography use at the couple level were related to negative couple outcomes. Pornography differences may</p>

			Questionnaire (RELATE).	alter specific couple interaction processes which, in turn, may influence relationship satisfaction and stability.
Willoughby and Leonhardt (2020) USA	To explore actor and partner associations between pornography use, sexual dynamics, and relational well-being.	240 committed heterosexual couples, women aged 18-60	Online survey. Preliminary bivariate correlations. Tools used: Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction, parts from the Relationship Evaluation Questionnaire (RELATE) and other Likert scale items created by the authors	Female pornography use was associated with higher female sexual desire but no other dependent variables. Male pornography use was associated with a wide array of negative well-being indicators, including less male and female relationship satisfaction, lower female sexual desire, and lower male positive communication. Couple pornography use was associated with higher reported sexual satisfaction for both partners but no other well-being indicators. Partner knowledge of use had little direct association with well-being, but some evidence suggested that unknown individual use may be associated with less sexual satisfaction but more relationship satisfaction.

Table 3 *Quality Evaluation of Included Studies Using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool by Hong, Q., Pluye, P., Fàbregues, S., Bartlett, G., Boardman, F., Cargo, M., Dagenais, P., Gagnon, M.-P., Griffiths, F., Nicolau, B., O' Cathain, A., Rousseau, M.-C., & Vedel (2018)*

Studies	Qualitative Studies					Quantitative non-randomized					Quantitative Descriptive				
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5
Ashton et al. (2019a)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y										
Ashton et al. (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y										
Benjamin and Tlusten (2010)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y										
Bridges (2007)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Bridges and Morokoff (2011)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Brown, Carroll, et al. (2017)											Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Carroll et al. (2017)											Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Daspe et al. (2018)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Dellner (2008)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Leonhardt and Willoughby (2019)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
McKeown et al. (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y										
Perry (2017b)						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
Perry (2020)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Perry and Davis (2017)						Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
Perry and Schleifer (2018)						Y	Y	Y	C	Y					
Poulsen et al. (2013)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Resch and Alderson (2014)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Willoughby et al. (2016)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y
Willoughby and Leonhardt (2020)											Y	Y	Y	C	Y

Y= Yes; C= Can't tell

- 1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?
- 1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?
- 1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?
- 1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?
- 1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?
- 2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed?
- 2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline?
- 2.3. Are there complete outcome data?
- 2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided?
- 2.5. Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?
- 3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population?
- 3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)?
- 3.3. Are there complete outcome data?
- 3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis?
- 3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?
- 4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?
- 4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?
- 4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?
- 4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?
- 4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?
- 5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?
- 5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?
- 5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?
- 5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?
- 5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?

Table 4 Sources of Themes

Themes	Methodology	Analytical Themes				Sub Themes											
		Porn use enhances – plays a positive role	Porn use disrupts – plays a negative role	Shared Use	Reasons for Porn Use	Sexual satisfaction	Relationship satisfaction	Sexual desire	Marital quality	Sexual quality	Porn Use and Separation	Porn Disrupting Pleasure in Relationships	Intimacy	Pornography Acceptance / Porn as Infidelity	Lack of Control	Unrealistic Expectations	
Ashton, McDonald, and Kirkman (2019)	Qualitative		+	+									+	+			+
Ashton, McDonald, and Kirkman (2020)	Qualitative			+													
Benjamin and Tlusten (2010)	Qualitative			+													
Bridges (2007)	Quantitative	+	+		+	+	+	+						+			
Bridges and Morokoff (2011)	Quantitative	+	+		+	+	+										
Brown et al. (2017)	Quantitative	+	+			+									+		

Carroll, Busby, Willoughby, and Brown (2017)	Quantitative		+											+			
Daspe, Vaillancourt-Morel, Lussier, Sabourin, and Ferron (2018)	Quantitative	+	+			+	+									+	
Dellner (2008)	Quantitative	+	+			+	+										
Leonhardt and Willoughby (2019)	Quantitative	+	+			+											
McKeown, Parry, and Tracy Penny (2018)	Qualitative			+	+												
Perry (2017)	Quantitative	+						+									
Perry (2020)	Quantitative		+							+							
Perry and Davis (2017)	Quantitative		+							+							

Perry and Schleifer (2018)	Quantitati		+							+						
Poulsen, Busby, and Galovan (2013)	Quantitative	+					+			+						
Resch and Alderson (2014)	Quantitati	+					+									
Willoughby, Carroll, Busby, and Brown (2016)	Quantitative															
Willoughby and Leonhardt (2020)	Quantitative	+				+			+							

Table 5 *Participants' Details*

Participant	Age	Nationality	Place of Residency	Type of Call	Recruitment	Mode of Occupation	Relationship Status	Sexual Orientation	Status of Religiosity¹³
Participant 1	44	British	UK	Video	Twitter	Working	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 2	39	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Working	Dating	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 3	45	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Working	Married	Bisexual	Spiritual
Participant 4	42	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Working	Married	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 5	31	British	UK	Video	Twitter	Working	Dating	Pansexual	Not Religious
Participant 6	22	British	UK	Video	Twitter	Student	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 7	41	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Working	Single	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 8	24	Indian	UK	Video	Twitter	Student	Dating	Heterosexual	Spiritual
Participant 9	47	Dutch	UK	Video	Twitter	Working	Single	Heterosexual	Spiritual
Participant 10	26	British Indian	UK	Video	Facebook	Working	Single	Heterosexual	Not Religious

¹³ In this group of participants religion did not seem to play a role for their pornography use and their sexual lives. Five of the participants stated they are spiritual meaning being good to one another, appreciating relationships, practicing mindfulness etc. That did not appear to play a role to their pornography use and sexual lives either.

Participant 11	22	British Polish	UK	Video	Facebook	Working	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 12	26	USA	UK	Video	Twitter	Student	Committed Relationship	Queer	Not Religious
Participant 13	30	Italian	UK	Video	Twitter	Student	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 14	29	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Student	Dating	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 15	25	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Student	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 16	35	Greek	Greece	Voice	Facebook	Working	Married	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 17	29	Greek	Greece	Video	Snowballing	Working	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 18	26	British	UK	Video	Snowballing	Working	Single	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 19	33	British	UK	Voice	Reddit	Student	Married	Bisexual	Religious
Participant 20	22	British	UK	Video	Reddit	Unemployed	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Religious
Participant 21	28	British	UK	Voice	Snowballing	Working	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 22	29	British Chinese	UK	Video	Reddit	Working	Single	Heterosexual	Not Religious

Participant 23	22	Greek	UK	Video	Snowballing	Student	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 24	34	British	UK	Video	Reddit	Working	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 25	27	British	UK	Voice	Reddit	Student	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 26	26	British Indian	UK	Voice	Snowballing	Working	Single	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 27	28	British	UK	Video	Reddit	Unemployed	Single	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 28	20	Trinidad & Tobago	UK	Voice	Reddit	Student	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious
Participant 29	24	British Thai	UK	Video	Reddit	Working	Committed Relationship	Bisexual	Not Religious
Participant 30	31	British	UK	Video	Reddit	Working	Committed Relationship	Heterosexual	Not Religious

Table 6 *Reported Motivations for Accessing Pornography and Reported Outcomes of Accessing Pornography (N = 3330)*

Motivations	Mean	S.D.
To masturbate	90.11	21.59
To orgasm	81.78	30.65
To enhance sexual arousal	74.89	33.88
As an alternative to fantasy	64.28	35.12
To relax	46.47	36.68
To enhance sexual experiences	45.44	38.76
To entertain yourself	42.24	36.37
To distract yourself from everyday demands	37.51	36.35
To watch other people pleasuring themselves	34.23	35.78
Out of boredom	33.29	32.19
Out of habit	27.32	32.45
To procrastinate	26.68	31.29
To feel sexy	25.59	33.95
Out of curiosity	19.78	26.96
To feel liberated from societal pressure	14.10	26.46
To learn something sexual	12.00	22.31
To initiate discussions with sexual partners	9.40	20.89
To connect with someone else	8.68	21.13

Outcomes	Mean	S.D.
Made women think that what is depicted in pornography is unrealistic	68.68	28.89
Made women feel sexually empowered	37.86	34.17
Women felt negative about the way their body looks	34.10	33.93
Made women feel desensitised	31.20	33.66
Provided ideas for sexual things to do	30.33	29.45
Women felt positive about the way their body looks	29.00	31.37
Made women feel more relaxed about the way their body functions	21.41	29.72
Pornography use caused distress	16.03	25.91
Made women feel that sexual relationships should look like the way they are presented in pornography	14.23	24.32
Made women feel less sexual desire for sexual partner/s	13.05	24.46

Note. Means range for motivations and outcomes 0-100. Ns varied slightly from 3314 to 3327 due to missing data for some items.

Table 7 *Multiple Linear Regression for relationship status and using pornography by themselves as the Independent Variables, and NSSS total (for sexual satisfaction) as the Dependent Variable*

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	72.943	1.892				38.553
Using pornography by yourself	-.102	.014	-.144	-7.089	<.001	-.130	-.074
Relationship status	2.577	.527	.100	4.895	<.001	1.545	3.610

Table 8 *Multiple Linear Regression for relationship status and using pornography with a sexual partner/s as the Independent Variables, and NSSS total (for sexual satisfaction) as the Dependent Variable*

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	62.826	1.449		43.348	<.001	59.984	65.668
Using pornography with a sexual partner/s	.148	.016	.184	9.090	<.001	.116	.180
Relationship status	2.434	.522	.094	4.659	<.001	1.409	3.458

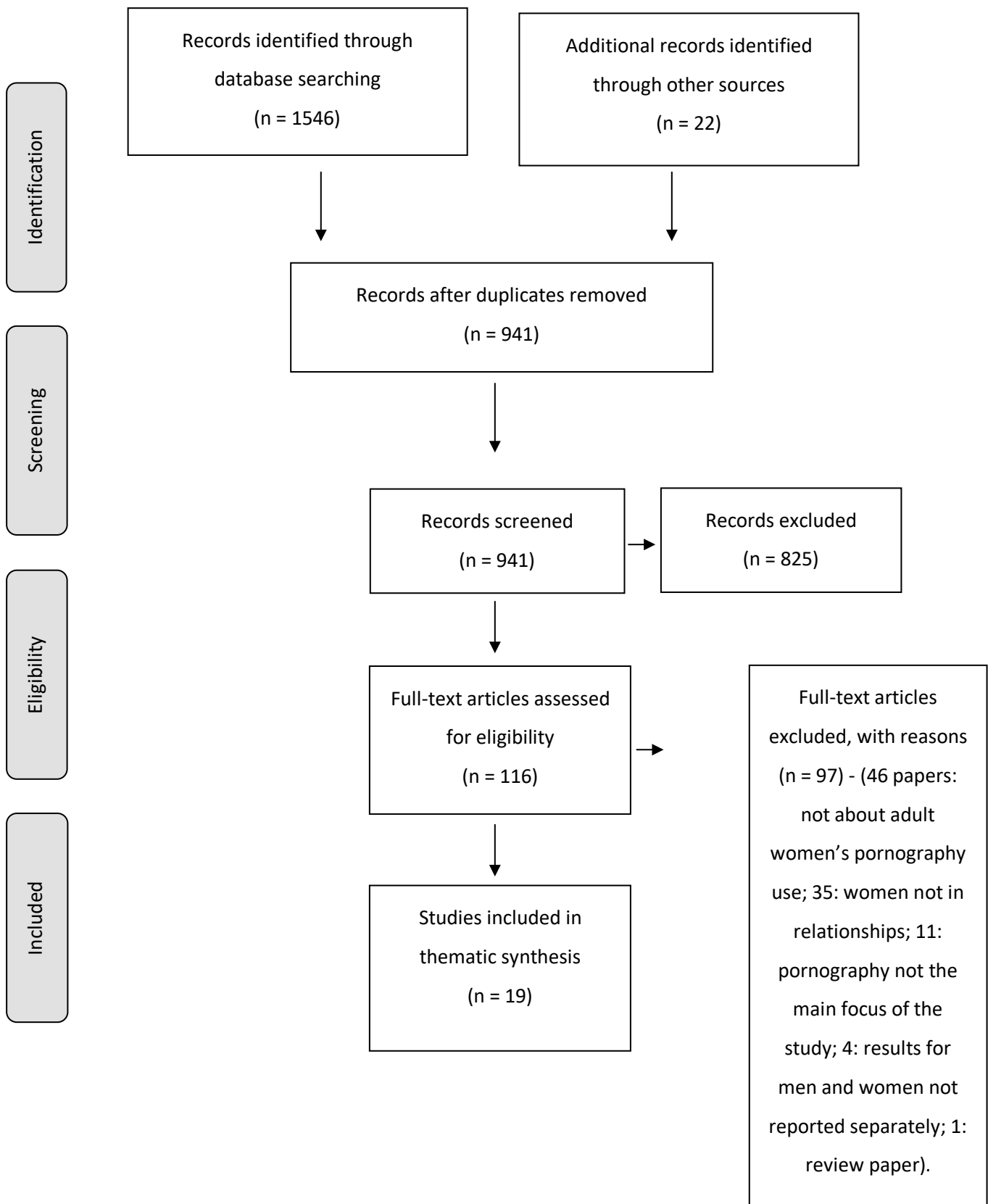
Table 9 *Multiple Linear Regression for SUM of Negative Emotions and Independent Variables of using pornography by themselves and using pornography with sexual partners*

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	8.547	.341		25.039	<.001	7.878	9.216
Using pornography by yourself	.002	.004	.014	.691	.490	-.004	.009
Using pornography with sexual partners	-.017	.004	-.078	-3.894	<.001	-.026	-.008

Table 10 *Multiple Linear Regression for SUM of Positive Emotions and Independent Variables of using pornography by themselves and using pornography with sexual partners*

Variables	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence	
	Coefficients		Coefficients			Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	13.060	.276		47.356	.000	12.519	13.601
Using pornography by yourself	-.002	.003	-.012	-.577	.564	-.007	.004
Using pornography with sexual partners	.021	.004	.118	5.889	<.001	.014	.028

Appendix A PRISMA flowchart



Appendix B Interview Guide

This is a list of the topics discussed in the interviews. The list is not exhaustive, and the questions were not asked in this specific order.

1. How you think of yourself/ describe yourself?
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you currently reside/live?
4. How did you hear about this study?
5. How would you describe your relationship status at the moment?
6. Apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often do you attend services or religious meetings?
7. How important would you say that religion is in your everyday life?
8. Can you please describe to me who do you usually feel sexually attracted to?
9. Would you like to tell me about your past sexual experiences a bit? Who have you mostly dated?
10. Women mention different sources they have used to learn about sexual matters. Can you explain how you learnt about sexual matters?
11. Would you like to tell me how often in the past 12 months, have you viewed pornography?
12. Women might choose to watch pornography by themselves or with their partners. Could you please describe to me how do you watch pornography, when you have a partner?
13. Women watch pornography for many different reasons. Would you like to explain to me what motivates you to watch pornography?
14. What do you believe are the functions of pornography use for you personally?
15. How do you think pornography use influences your sexual life?
16. Some women believe that pornography affects their sexual behaviours. Is this an experience that you had? Can you talk about this?
17. Some women mention that pornography somehow affects their sexual expectations. Is this an experience that you had? Can you talk about this?

18. Based on the fact that there are many different types/genres of pornography, what do you usually choose to use/watch?
19. How has the use of pornography affected your communication about sexual issues with sexual partners?
20. Some women say they feel pressured by societal norms dictating that it is not acceptable for women to watch pornography and talk openly about it. What is your opinion on that, regarding your pornography use?
21. How has the lockdown, 1, 2 and 3, played a role in your pornography watching habits? Can you please explain?
22. Why did you decide to participate in my study?

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