Young Women and Pornography:
A Qualitative Investigation in Australia

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BA (Hons)

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This thesis includes two original papers published in peer-reviewed journals and three submitted papers. The central theme of the thesis is women's experience of pornography. The ideas, development and writing of all the papers in this thesis were the principal responsibility of me, the student, working within the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine under the supervision of Dr Maggie Kirkman and Dr Karalyn McDonald. The inclusion of the co-authors reflects that fact that the work came from active collaboration among researchers. In the case of Chapters 1, 2 and 5–7, my contribution to the work involved the following:

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution*	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N*
1	Women's experiences of pornography: A systematic review of research using qualitative methods	Published	Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript first draft and revision, and submission: 80%	Maggie Kirkman: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 12% Karalyn McDonald: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 8%	NO
2	What does 'pornography' mean in the digital age? Revisiting a definition for social science researchers	Accepted	Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript first draft and revision, and submission: 80%	Maggie Kirkman: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 12% Karalyn McDonald: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 8%	NO
5	Pornography and women's sexual pleasure: Accounts from young women in Australia	Under review	Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript first draft and revision,	Maggie Kirkman: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 12%	NO

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution*	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N*
			and submission: 80%	Karalyn McDonald: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 8%	
6	The meaning of consent in young women's accounts of pornography	Under review	Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript first draft and revision, and submission: 80%	Maggie Kirkman: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 15% Karalyn McDonald: Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript revision: 5%	NO
7	Pornography and sexual relationships: Discursive challenges for young women	Under review	Concept, study design, data collection, data analysis, manuscript first draft and revision, and submission: 80%	Maggie Kirkman: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 15% Karalyn McDonald: Concept, study design, data analysis, manuscript revision: 5%	NO

I have not altered the formatting of submitted or published papers within the thesis.

Since submission of this thesis two of the manuscripts have been published (as of 10 May 2019):

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (2019). What does 'pornography' mean in the digital age? Revisiting a definition for social science researchers. *Porn Studies.* doi:10.1080/23268743.2018.1544096

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (2019). Pornography and women's sexual pleasure: Accounts from young women in Australia. *Feminism & Psychology, 0,* 1-24. doi:10.1177/0959353519833410

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I would like to thank the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine for awarding me a six-month scholarship. This funding made my dedication to research in the final stages possible. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work among a community of talented and kind researchers at Global and Women's Health. Thank you for your feedback and companionship.

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Abstract

Pornography offers omnipresent, stimulating, easily accessible sexual content; it is an increasing contributor to social meaning-making in women's sexual lives. There has been, until now, no Australian research exploring what pornography means to women. To understand what is already known, I have systematically reviewed existing research. I found that authors presented women's experiences as complex and nuanced, often paradoxical, varying among and within individuals. I concluded that an accepted and consistently applied definition of pornography is required in order to build a rigorous body of research. After a review of existing definitions and the implications of technological change, I have proposed the first definition of pornography that incorporates consent.

To build on what is already known and to explore the complexities of experience, I conducted interviews with 27 young women. My analysis identifies three prominent themes: pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships. I have found that pornography both enhanced and interfered with pleasure, and the women's accounts were consistent with their place in a culture that subordinates female pleasure to male pleasure. Discursive analysis of their accounts of consent has revealed positioning in feminist, gender, and violence-normalisation discourses that resulted in experiences of agency, victimisation, and subjugation. The women's accounts of pornography within sexual relationships revealed prioritisation of the needs of men, the needs of the relationships, and the ideal of sexual freedom. No discourses prioritised women's needs.

This research has described the nuances of women's meaning-making as they encounter pornography's intersection with their lives. While the women's accounts revealed simultaneous, multiple, and often contradictory discursive positions, there was evident domination of discourses that did not prioritise the needs of women. These discourses do not originate in pornography; it is a vehicle for distribution. Recommendations are designed to challenge the construction of pornography as inevitably problematic, acknowledge women's sexual experiences, improve consent practices, and integrate these results into health services.

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Introduction

'You just take your dick out and she'll want it.' This was the logic offered to me by a 16-year-old man convicted of indecent exposure and penetration of a minor. While working as a psychologist with sexual offenders, I heard comments similar to these from so many young men. When I asked how they had come to this understanding, their consistent response was that they had seen this behaviour in pornography.

In pornography, they would explain, women are always willing to have sex and men always have erections. There is no conversation about what is about to happen and everything is always pleasurable. Socially isolated, lacking in social skills, and fearful of expressing sexual or romantic feelings to a potential partner, these young men turned to pornography in order to understand what sex was. Most of them carried smartphones in their pocket, giving them instant access to billions of pornographic films. Real-life sexual encounters were often disappointing in comparison.

This left me wondering: Was this experience exclusive to sexual offenders? What were the ramifications of a generation of young people learning about sex through pornography? And when and if they did have relationships, how would it impact on young women?

Background to the research

In 2004 I commenced a Bachelor of Arts at the Australian National University. Majoring in psychology, I learnt about developmental theories, neuropsychology, and DSM criteria. I expected that sexuality would also be a focus of our curriculum, given that it is an intrinsic part of the human experience. Other than a brief outline of Freud's Oedipus complex, this discussion was absent. This experience sparked my quest to understand more about sexuality.

When I was completing my internship to become a psychologist, an opportunity arose to work with sexual offenders. While I considered myself vastly inexperienced to manage the complexities of such a role, the temptation to understand how and why people hurt others through sex outweighed my feelings of inadequacy. This role offered supervision, support, and a plethora of opportunities for learning. I jumped in the deep end and learnt to swim.

After three years, I had worked with hundreds of sexual offenders. I was immersed in the darkest complexities of humanity and sexuality. I had to look for the light. I understood that early childhood experiences played an important role in the harmful actions the offenders would later commit. I anticipated that working with younger people would be more proactive and preventive, and inspire more hope for change. Without hope, my front-row seat in the large social epidemic of sexual violence felt too much like the position of a bystander.

Working with juvenile sexual offenders, I noticed the role that pornography played in the lives of these young men. It was consistently used by all the young men I spoke to before they had any real-life sexual contact and it was shaping their view of what sex 'should' be like, what they 'should' look like, and what they 'should' expect from their partner. Their distorted impressions of sex appeared to be playing a role in their actions of sexual violence. The omnipresent access to hand-held devices that could provide limitless access to pornography contrasted to the magazines and dial-up internet used by older sexual offenders. There was something unique about the way pornography was intersecting with the lives of these young people. This would be the impetus for my research. I knew we needed a better understanding of the phenomenon and young people needed more support navigating this experience.

I initially commenced my PhD at another university and hoped to develop an intervention for young people to challenge their (potentially) distorted views arising from pornography. I quickly discovered that there was very little research on pornography, and the research that did exist was correlational analyses that looked at the relationship between pornography and negative outcomes (e.g. Bridges et al., 2013; Lundin et al., 2014; Malamuth et al., 2011; Short et al., 2012). Through discussions with my supervisors, I concluded that we did not know enough about the experience of young people to develop a responsive intervention. After my main supervisor announced she would be on maternity leave for a year, I decided to seek out other researchers who were conducting pornography research. My search led me to Dr Maggie Kirkman and Dr Karalyn McDonald at the Jean Hailes Research Unit (now called Global and Women's Health), Monash University. After I relayed my journey and ideas to date, they suggested I could focus on young women and use qualitative research methods. I felt enlightened by their approach and appreciated the supportive space of the research unit. I decided this was the right supervisor fit for me, and so my PhD research began.

Journey over the course of my research

There are professional and personal experiences that have shaped my research and propelled my growth and learning. I have extracted the most prominent in order to give context to my research.

My experience as a psychologist has given me advantages as a qualitative researcher. Not only was I practised in asking questions and maintaining a line of enquiry in a sensitive and responsive manner, I was also familiar with discussion about intimate details of sexual experiences. Four years of working with sexual offenders had left me feeling unfazed by the most explicit accounts. I felt comfortable and confident asking and hearing about women's experiences of pornography.

Simultaneously, my work history has brought inherent bias in my perception of pornography and I had to adjust my habituated psychological approach to that of a research interview process. I attended a short course on qualitative research, and had discussions with my supervisors about the boundaries and style of questioning needed for interviews and how this contrasts with psychological interventions. I had seen the impact of pornography on a niche portion of the population and had witnessed extreme harm resulting from this. While I felt aware of this bias prior to conducting my research, its influence was unavoidable.

I have continued to work as a psychologist in private practice throughout my PhD. I experienced reciprocal benefit in performing these dual roles. Conducting discourse analysis (Ussher & Perz, 2014) and thematic analysis informed by narrative theory (Bruner, 1986; Kirkman, 2002) has expanded my perspective on human behaviour, and changed the way I discuss and approach psychological treatment. Taking the focus away from pathologisation, I have integrated an understanding of broader social influences when explaining mental health symptoms. Quite often, when women attended treatment for sexual or mental health problems, a sense of isolation and the perception that their experience was abnormal were a large part of their distress. I now use in my practice the perspective and understanding I have gained through my research in order to offer women a sense of context and to normalise their experience of sex and pornography.

Attending conferences and embracing opportunities for professional networking over the course of my PhD have allowed me to identify my position in academic thought. I attended two conferences in 2017: *The World Congress of Public Health* and *Breaking Boundaries. Sexuality, Gender, Reproduction, Health and Rights* (*International Association for Sexuality, Culture and Society*). Presenting, networking, and hearing about the research presented by international researchers have given me a sense of how women's sexuality is viewed by practitioners and researchers in public health, and the global scale of issues that relate to sexuality through culture-specific paradigms. Overall, women's sexuality tends to be minimised, edited, problematised, and medicalised. Emerging and established researchers such as Caroline West, Dr Feona Attwood, Dr Anastasia Powell and Dr Hannah Frith are challenging this, and I have aligned myself with this small cohort.

In the following paragraph, I have chosen to disclose a difficult, traumatic experience that occurred during my candidature. My intention is to be transparent about its inevitable influence on my perception and my process of analysis. As qualitative researchers, we can practise reflexivity in an attempt to minimise our bias and prioritise the words and the meaning presented in the data we gather, but ultimately we are the research tool and our own psychology is integrated into the analysis. We are responsible for sharing enough about our own experiences so that the reader can

understand the results and analysis with this in mind. I will detail my reflexive practice further in the methods section. Here I present aspects of my experience.

At the beginning of 2018, I was sexually assaulted by a friend. This experience shook my sense of trust in the people around me and in myself. To add to this, it happened when I was in the midst of conducting analysis on consent aspects of the interviews, and while I was providing treatment for sexual offenders and victims of sexual assault. The coincidence of this collision was perplexing, confronting, and overwhelming. I encountered my trauma from different angles, on every layer of my life.

In understanding and experiencing sexual assault for myself, I was suddenly hit with the intellectual, emotional, and physical understanding of this experience, and how it may have felt for all the victims/survivors of the sexual offenders I treated, for the victim/survivors of sexual assault I saw in my practice, and for the women I interviewed for my PhD research who disclosed sexual assault. Prior to my assault, I had understood that this experience was devastating and incredibly damaging. My personal experience has led to a depth of understanding that I could not have read in a book or heard in a lecture. I felt a kind of pain I had never felt before.

I questioned how this could have happened to me. I am an educated woman. I am physically and emotionally strong. I am emotionally intelligent. I am proficient at assertive communication. As I grappled with my confusion and disorientation I realised that I, like the women I had interviewed, had internalised responsibility for ensuring my safety, and was looking to myself rather than to my friend or the culture we live in to reconcile my sense of control. The social discourses that contribute to sexual violence are evident in my research, my practice, and my person.

As part of my recovery, I chose to attach meaning to this experience. I chose to see it as an opportunity to channel my passion and understanding. I am, personally and professionally, an advocate for women's diversity, safety, sexual expression, and pleasure. I want to be part of the monumental change this requires.

Overview of research

The aim of my research was to understand how women make sense of their experience of pornography. I consider their experiences in the theoretical context of social constructionism, in which it is accepted that reality is a jointly-constructed understanding based on shared assumptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). Accordingly, understanding women's experiences requires identifying these assumptions and their interaction with internal, psychological experiences and their role in the production of meaning (Crossley, 2003; Harré, 2002).

The chapters that follow represent my journey to achieve my aim. I first set out to understand what is currently known about women's experiences of pornography and what would be useful to know. The first chapter reports my systematic review of existing qualitative research.

During this process I discovered that there is no consistent, generally accepted definition. Accordingly, before commencing my own research I set out to define pornography. My review of existing definitions and technological change is reported in Chapter 2, which concludes with my proposal for a definition of pornography.

Based on the definition and the review of existing research, I established the aims and the methods for my research. While a description of the method is specified in each of my results papers, in the methods chapter (Chapter 3) I provide additional information not included in the papers, expanding on the process of recruitment and my reflexive practice.

In Chapter 4 I explain how I arrived at the topics for each of the results papers, and provide additional information regarding description of the participants and their reported pornography use.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are my results papers, focusing on pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships respectively. Each of the papers includes a literature review pertaining to the subject of focus, details of my method, the results, and discussion of my findings.

In Chapter 8 I summarise the overall findings and reflect on my shift in understanding over the course of my research. I discuss the key implications of my learning and outline recommendations, plans, and dissemination of the results. I then make recommendations for future research and describe the conclusion of my research journey.

Chapter 1
Systematic Review of Existing Research

This chapter is the following publication:

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (2018). Women's experiences of pornography: A systematic review of research using qualitative methods. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(3), 334–347. doi:10.1080/00224499.2017.1364337

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Women's Experiences of Pornography: A Systematic Review of Research Using Qualitative Methods

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Given the proliferation of pornography in personal, relational, and social realms, it is vital to understand women's experiences of this accessible, stimulating, and versatile sexual material. We therefore conducted the first systematic review of research using qualitative methods published in English in peer-reviewed journals. Our search of five databases yielded 22 eligible articles. Thematic analysis of results revealed four broad themes: women encountering pornography, pornography and the self, pornography in the context of relationships, and making sense of pornography. Discussion of themes and subthemes included reflections on women's explanations of intentional and unintentional encounters with pornography, conflicted perceptions of themselves in relation to female pornography actors, diverse perceived effects of pornography on intimate relationships, and tensions between women's arousal to pornography and their values. It was evident that women's experiences of pornography are complex and nuanced, often paradoxical, varying among and within individuals. Our synthesis of results and assessment of limitations suggest (a) that researchers need to define what they mean by pornography and specify any content used in their research and (b) that understanding would be enriched by research that is culturally contextualized and acknowledges public discourses about pornography.

There is no consensus on a definition of "pornography." However, the term usually refers to material produced with intent to sexually arouse the audience (Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, 2016, p. 3). Public access to the Internet since the late 1980s has dramatically changed pornography's content and mode of delivery (Lane, 2001). Technological advances, such as smartphones and virtual reality platforms, have further transformed users' experiences of pornography. As a result of these developments, pornography can provide highly accessible and versatile sexual stimulation, interaction, and expression.

Although women and men are engaged and involved in all levels of the production and consumption of pornography (Needy, 2010), women have received less attention than men in pornography research. Consequently, much less is understood about women's experiences (Attwood, 2005). Pornography is experienced in a social and cultural context (Hall & Bishop, 2007; Ortner & Whithead, 1981) that is inevitably gendered (Attwood, 2005; Laqueur, 1990); the roles of pornography in

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women's lives cannot therefore be safely inferred from what is known about men.

Women's life stages also constitute a significant context. Pornography is likely to be experienced differently depending on a woman's stage of psychosexual development. Adolescent women are navigating changes in their bodies and their sexual desires (Bassin, 1999; Erickson, 1968). Adult sexual development is marked by the formation of sexual identity, the experience of romantic relationships, and parenthood (Choi & Nicolson, 1994). Women's sexual development in middle and older age is a controversial topic. For example, older women are often constructed as asexual (Lai & Hynie, 2011; Vares, 2009). These constructs of women and sexuality are likely to influence women's attitudes to and experiences of pornography.

The little that is known about women and pornography is from research that has used quantitative methods, which has usually compared women with men. For example, it has been found that, in comparison to men, women consume pornography less frequently and start consuming at a later age (Häggström-Nordin, Hanson, & Tydén, 2005; Hald, 2006; Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012; Poulsen, Busby, & Galovan, 2013; Ševčíková & Daneback, 2014). Women are also more likely to consume pornography with a partner (Ševčíková & Daneback, 2014), prefer less hard-core pornography (Hald, 2006; Ševčíková & Daneback, 2014), and are less likely to masturbate while watching pornography (Štulhofer, Buško, & Schmidt,

2012). A relationship has been found between women's perception of pornography as realistic and their endorsement of casual sex; this relationship has not been found for men (Štulhofer et al., 2012). Similarly, exposure to violent or degrading pornography is correlated with past victimization for women but not for men (Romito & Beltramini, 2015).

Research using qualitative methods provides an opportunity to understand what pornography means to women themselves. We therefore set out to review the research evidence generated by qualitative methods. The only existing review of women's experiences of pornography (also including men and young people) was conducted more than a decade ago (Attwood, 2005). This was not a systematic review; it did not provide details of search methods, inclusion criteria, or analysis. However, Attwood provided a very useful overview of the problematic ways in which quantitative research, especially surveys and experimental approaches, endeavors to identify public attitudes toward or isolate harmful effects of pornography, inevitably outside normal circumstances of use, and operating within naive views of media consumption. Attwood also discussed prevailing attitudes of scholars and commentators toward pornography and some challenges to those attitudes.

In her section on women, Attwood (2005) summarized nine articles and gave a brief account of a tenth (an inaccessible paper from a defunct journal). Six of the articles were published in peer-reviewed journals; four of these reported research using qualitative methods—one used standardized interviews and quantitative tests (Cowan, Chase, & Stahly, 1989) and the other was based on Q methodology (Senn, 1993). While Attwood (2005) did not synthesize the results of the research reviewed, she concluded that "pornography is experienced in astonishingly different ways" and that women (as well as men) "are both attracted and repulsed" by pornography (p. 81). According to Attwood, where pornography is concerned, women must contend with their relations to feminism and femininity.

In contrast to quantitative research that has emphasized violence as an outcome of pornography, Attwood (2005) concluded that qualitative research revealed that concerns about attractiveness and body image are more likely outcomes for women. Attwood argued for the value of qualitative research in revealing aspects of the consumption of pornography inaccessible to quantitative research. In particular, Attwood noted that there were no studies of women consumers of pornography.

Following Attwood, we chose to review research that had used qualitative methods as the most appropriate way to capture personal meaning. We decided on a systematic review to ensure that our review was rigorous and comprehensive and that other researchers could achieve similar results by following our method. Our aims were to summarize existing knowledge and to inform future research.

Method

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). These guidelines are designed to assist authors with reporting systematic reviews and include an evidence-based 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram.

Inclusion Criteria

Articles were eligible for inclusion in the review if they reported original research using qualitative methods to investigate adolescent or adult women and pornography, and were published in English in peer-reviewed journals up to April 2016. (We excluded Q methodology because it is a bridge between quantitative and qualitative methods, not exclusively a qualitative method; Brown, 1996.) Having male as well as female participants was not an exclusion criterion, and there was no restriction on the age of participants. Because we wanted to include evidence from all eligible articles, we did not exclude from consideration peer-reviewed papers included in Attwood (2005).

Search Strategy and Selection of Papers

We searched five databases (PsycINFO, Scopus, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Web of Science) using the following terms: ["Porn*" OR "sexually explicit material*" OR "sexually explicit internet material*" OR "x rated" OR "erotica"] AND ["qualitative" OR "interview*" OR "focus group*" OR "in depth"]. To ensure that eligible articles not found on the five databases were detected, we searched Google Scholar using the term "pornography qualitative" and examined the reference list of articles in Table 1. The selection process, in which all authors participated, is outlined in Figure 1.

Assessment of Quality

The quality of selected articles was assessed using an established checklist (Kmet, Lee, & Cook, 2004) modified by the inclusion of an additional criterion: the presence of a statement of approval from an institutional human research ethics committee. Two authors (SA and KM) independently assessed quality, and all three authors discussed and agreed on the final scores.

Data Analysis

The Results or Results and Discussion sections of all articles were analyzed thematically, using a standard, iterative, qualitative method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Where research included both female and male participants, only the text that related specifically to women's experiences was included in the analysis. As new themes were identified in each article, all articles were searched to establish whether that theme could be found there. Whether or not the reviewed articles presented their data thematically, we generated our own themes from the results and took care not to privilege research that had been analyzed thematically. In developing a hierarchical thematic scheme that

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Table 1. *Summary of Reviewed Papers*

Author and Country	Aim	Female Participants (n) (Age Range in Years)	Data Collection	Analysis	Themes[a]
Benjamin and Thusten (2010), Israel	"To better define how women make sense of the radical conceptualization of pornography"	20 (22–53)	Semistructured interviews	Phenomenological analysis	1 Access 1 Intention 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Increases intimacy 3 Negotiating 4 Coercive actions 4 Violent
Boynton (1999), United Kingdom	"Outline different reactions and viewpoints women express when presented with sexually explicit images of the female body"	30 (18–34)	Focus group and survey	Discourse analysis	1 Access 1 Empathy 2 Body 4 Actors complicit
Cameron et al. (2005), United States	"Explore and describe qualitatively the specific experiences with and perceptions of" sites containing content that is sexual in nature "among adolescent Internet users"	22 (14–17) (+ 18 male participants)	Online focus groups	Not specified	1 Intention 1 Empathy
Cavaglion and Rashty (2010), Sweden	"To analyse narratives of Italian female spouses, partners, and live-in friends of male cyber-sex and cyber-porn dependents"	n/a	Analysis of messages on an online forum	Grounded theory and narrative theory	1 Intention 2 Body 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Negotiating 4 Censorship
Ciclitira (2004), United Kingdom	"Explore women's experiences and views of pornography"	34 (23–52)	Interviews	"Historical contexts of the feminist debates in the US and the UK were considered during the analysis of data and the research for this study."	4 Censorship 4 Feminism 4 Violent
Eck (2003), United States	"Explores how heterosexual men and women respond to and discuss opposite- and same-sex nude images in distinctive ways"	22 (18–65) (+ 23 male participants)	In-depth interviews	Not specified	2 Body 3 Reduces intimacy
Häggström-Nordin et al. (2006), Sweden	"Gain an understanding of thoughts and reflections about pornography consumption, and its possible influence on sexual practices, among young women and men"	10 (16–23) (+ 8 male participants)	Interviews	Grounded theory	3 Coercive actions 4 Censorship 4 Feminism
Hare et al. (2014), Canada	"Develop insight into what Canadian young adults perceive to be the influences of consuming SEIM [sexually explicit Internet material] on six components of sexual health"	6 (19–29) (+ 6 male participants)	Semistructured interviews	Grounded theory	2 Body 2 Understanding sex 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Increases intimacy 4 Violent

Study	Aim	Sample	Data collection	Analysis	Themes
Hare et al. (2015), Canada	"To gain insight into" "young adults' perception of the utility of SEIM as a sexual resource"	6 (19–29) (+ 6 male participants)	Semistructured interviews	Grounded theory	2 Body 2 Understanding sex 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Increases intimacy 4 Violent
Lofgren-Martenson and Mansson (2010), Sweden	"Understand the consequences for young men and women and how they think about gender, sexuality, and pornography"	36 (14–20) (+ 15 male participants)	Focus groups	Thematic, phenomenological	1 Setting 2 Understanding sex 2 Social expectations 3 Reduces intimacy 4 Coercive actions
Mattebo et al. (2012), Sweden	"To describe and get a deeper understanding of how groups of young women and men reflect on and discuss pornography"	17 (16–19) (+ 18 male participants)	Focus groups	Grounded theory	1 Setting 2 Body 2 Understanding sex 2 Social expectations 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Coercive actions 4 Violent
McCutcheon and Bishop (2015), Canada	"Explore perceptions of gay male pornography by conducting interviews with women who report this type of sexually explicit material to be erotic"	14 (18–32)	Interviews	Thematic	1 Intention 1 Empathy 2 Understanding sex 2 Arousal
Morrison and Tallack (2005), Canada	"Examine non-heterosexual women's interpretations of 'lesbian' material contained in pornography"	17 (19–41)	Focus groups	Thematic	1 Intention 1 Empathy
Parvez (2006), United States	"Apply the construct of emotional labour to pornographic consumption" to "women from diverse backgrounds"	30 (18–40)	In-depth interviews	Not specified; related to theory of emotional labor	1 Intention 1 Setting 1 Empathy 2 Body 2 Arousal 3 Reduces intimacy 3 Negotiating 4 Feminism 4 Violent 4 Actors complicit
Ramlagun (2012), South Africa	"Understand how young people give meaning to sexuality and relationships in the context of disease and danger"	28 female and male[b] (16–17)	Focus groups	Not specified	1 Access 1 Intention 1 Setting 2 Understanding sex
Rothman et al. (2015), United States	"Understand the pornography viewing habits of low-income Black and Hispanic youth"	14 (16–18) (+ 9 male participants)	Semistructured interviews	Thematic	1 Access 1 Intention 1 Setting 2 Understanding sex 3 Coercive actions 4 Violent

(Continued)

Table 1. *(Continued)*

Author and Country	Aim	Female Participants (*n*) (Age Range in Years)	Data Collection	Analysis	Themes[a]
Ševčíková et al. (2015), Czech Republic	"Shed light on the qualitative experiences of adolescent girls who encounter bothersome sexual content"	14 (11–19)	Online interviews	Grounded theory	1 Access 1 Intention 3 Coercive actions 4 Violent
Shaw (1999), Canada	"Understanding the impact of pornography consumption on women's lives"	32 (19–89)	Semistructured interviews	Thematic	1 Intention 1 Empathy 2 Body **3 Reduces intimacy** 3 Negotiating 3 Coercive actions 4 Censorship 4 Violent 4 Actors complicit
Smith (2013), United States	"Explore participants' motivations for viewing sexually explicit material"	39 (18–32) (+ 12 male participants)	Semistructured interviews	Thematic	1 Access 1 Intention 1 Setting 1 Empathy 2 Arousal
Walker et al. (2015), Australia	Understand "young people's" "views and knowledge" of "use of pornography," including "prevalence and consequences," "gendered differences," and if "porn has" anything "to do with sexting"	18 (15–20) (+ 15 male participants)	Secondary analysis of interview transcripts	Grounded theory	1 Access 1 Intention 3 Coercive actions 4 Violent
Wang and Davidson (2006), China	Understand the "sexual behaviours of 40 unmarried young women in rural China with a focus on sexual debut, risk-taking behaviours, and reproductive health consequences"	40 (16–23)	Focus group, in-depth interviews, and survey	Thematic	1 Access 1 Setting 2 Understanding sex 3 Increases intimacy
Zitzman and Butler (2009), United States	"Study the independent and interaction effects of compulsive pornography use and interpersonal deception on attachment experience in the pair-bond relationship"	14 (18–55)	In-depth interviews	Hermeneutic interpretative	1 Intention 3 Reduces intimacy

[a] Key to themes and subthemes—(1) *women encountering pornography*: access = 1 access; intention = 1 intention; setting = 1 setting; empathy = 1 empathy; (2) *pornography and the self*: body = 2 body; understanding sex = 2 understanding sex; arousal = 2 arousal; perceived social expectations = 2 social expectations; (3) *pornography in the context of relationships*: pornography consumption reduced intimacy = 3 reduces intimacy; pornography consumption increases intimacy = 3 increases intimacy; negotiating pornography use in relationships = 3 negotiating; pornography and nonconsensual or coercive actions = 3 coercive actions; (4) *making sense of pornography*: censorship beliefs = 4 censorship; feminism as a construct for understanding pornography = 4 feminism; violent pornography = 4 violent; pornography actors are complicit in their exploitation = 4 actors complicit.

[b] Number of female participants not specified.

best incorporated the results from all studies, diagrams and flowcharts were used to aid conceptual understanding. Any differences of opinion among the three authors were resolved by discussion.

Reflexive Statement

We, the authors, are female, feminist, and trained in the discipline of psychology. Our ages range from late twenties to late sixties. We were alert to potential biases in assessing the quality of the articles, interpreting the results, and drawing conclusions. We took care to reflect on and discuss (among ourselves and with other scholars) any feelings aroused by what was reported in each article and to ensure that we evaluated the research with rigor. We did, however, maintain our emphasis on understanding and valuing women's perspectives on their experiences.

Results

Included Papers

Details of the 22 articles are in Table 1. To avoid giving undue influence to the study described in two articles, we report our results according to the number of contributing studies ($N = 21$) rather than the number of papers. Studies were conducted in nine countries: the United States ($n = 6$), Canada ($n = 5$), Sweden ($n = 4$), the United Kingdom ($n = 2$), Australia ($n = 1$), China ($n = 1$), Czech Republic ($n = 1$), Israel ($n = 1$), and South Africa ($n = 1$).

Quality Assessment

Quality assessment scores ranged from .55 to 1; details are in Table 2. Articles reporting results of 18 studies did not describe researchers' practice of reflexivity. There was no statement of having been given approval by a human research ethics committee in six articles. We contacted authors about this omission; two replied that they had received approval (Parvez, 2006; Zitzman & Butler, 2009) and a third that formal approval was not required by the research institution at the time (Eck, 2003). Articles reporting four studies failed to mention any aspect of the process of data analysis; articles reporting a further eight studies had insufficient description of data analysis. No article was assessed as being too poor for inclusion.

The Term *Pornography*

The term *pornography* was not used or defined consistently in the reviewed articles, although material designed for sexual arousal was implicit. Some authors commented on the challenges of defining pornography and asked their participants what meaning they attached to the word. Research that employed an experimental design and elicited women's responses to specific content material limited their investigation of pornography to that content and viewing context. In presenting our results, we use the word *pornography* to refer to the subjective application of the term by authors or participants.

Themes

We identified four broad themes concerning women and pornography: women encountering pornography, pornography and the self, pornography in the context of relationships, and making sense of pornography. These themes are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and interact, reflecting women's internal and external engagement with pornography.

Women encountering pornography. Women were reported as explaining how they first encountered and continue to encounter pornography, how it was accessed, whether the access was intentional, in what setting this access occurred, and how they engaged with pornography through the experience of empathy.

Access. Pornography was represented as easily accessible and an inevitable part of women's social and developmental experience. Most commonly, access was reported using the Internet on computers or smartphones (Rothman, Kaczmarsky, Burke, Jansen, & Baughman, 2015; Ševčíková, Simon, Daneback, & Kvapilík, 2015; Smith, 2013; Walker, Temple-Smith, Higgs, & Sanci, 2015) and, in older research, magazines and DVDs (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Boynton, 1999; Shaw, 1999). Videotape access was identified only in countries with limited resources (Ramlagun, 2012; Wang & Davidson, 2006).

Intention. Exposure was reported as intentional, accidental, or indirect through a partner's use. Adolescent and adult women alike were presented by authors as intentionally seeking pornography. Accidental exposure was more the province of adolescents, predominantly arising from social media or when they used an Internet search engine (Cameron et al., 2005; Parvez, 2006; Ramlagun, 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Ševčíková et al., 2015; Smith, 2013; Walker et al., 2015). Quotations from adult women discussing their use of pornography (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015; Morrison & Tallack, 2005) could be interpreted as intentional access, although researchers did not explicitly describe it as such. Even when they did not directly view pornography, adult women experienced its effects indirectly through a partner's use (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009).

Setting. Access to pornography was reported to occur alone, with a partner, or in a social setting. Some participants of various ages reported viewing pornography on their own (Parvez, 2006; Ramlagun, 2012), exclusively with a male partner (Parvez, 2006; Smith, 2013; Wang & Davidson, 2006), or both on their own and with a male
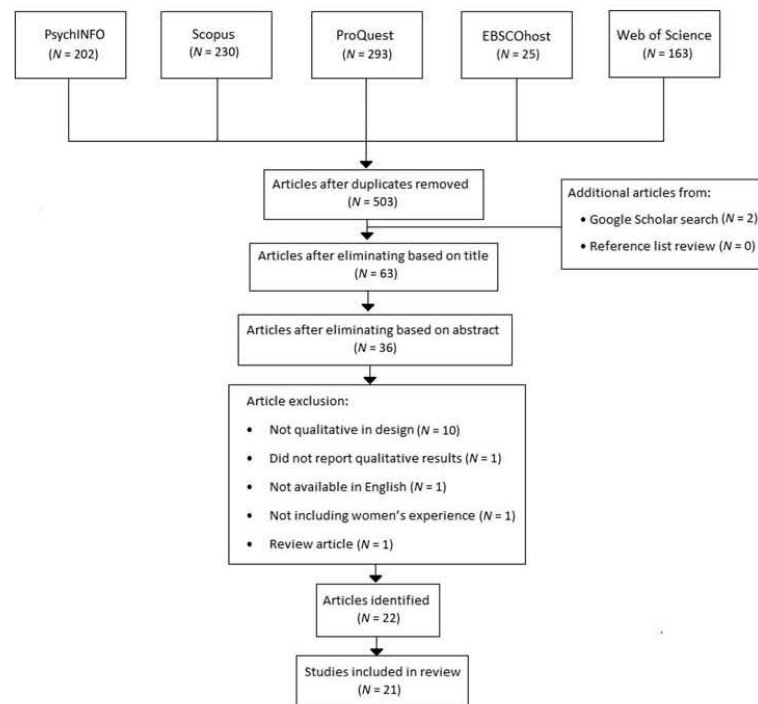
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Figure 1. Flowchart of the number of articles yielded in the search, the process of exclusion, and the articles (and studies) reviewed.

partner (Mattebo, Larsson, Tyden, Olsson, & Häggström-Nordin, 2012; Parvez, 2006; Ramlagun, 2012). According to researchers, adolescents reported viewing pornography with female and male peers as part of social activity (Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013; Wang & Davidson, 2006) in settings such as at school, at home, or at a friend's house (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013).

Empathy. When describing the manner in which some women engage with pornography, empathy with pornography actors was an interpretation offered by Parvez (2006); we employed it to discuss similar accounts from other studies (Boynton, 1999; Cameron et al., 2005; McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015; Morrison & Tallack, 2005; Parvez, 2006; Smith, 2013). Although women's accounts suggested feelings of empathy predominantly for female actors (Boynton, 1999; Cameron et al., 2005; Morrison & Tallack, 2005; Parvez, 2006; Smith, 2013), they were also described in one article in ways suggestive of empathizing with male actors (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015). Women commented on how the pornography actors' facial expressions revealed their feelings and reflected on whether the actors were comfortable with how they looked and with the sexual activity (Boynton, 1999; Shaw, 1999). Empathy was

also influenced by perceived realism. Women assessed pornography as unrealistic when emotional reactions lacked "genuineness" and there seemed to be no intimacy between actors; this disrupted their identification with the actors and diminished their pleasure (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015; Morrison & Tallack, 2005; Parvez, 2006; Smith, 2013).

Women in two studies were reported as reflecting on the female actors' motivations for participating in pornography (Boynton, 1999; Parvez, 2006). Although monetary gain was considered the primary motivator, some participants believed that women might "have a lot of fun" while making money, while others thought it was an experience only to be endured as a means to financial support (Parvez, 2006, p. 622). Women were also reported as reflecting on the potential impact of involvement in pornography, such as how family members might react to the images (Boynton, 1999), and proposing drug addiction, emotional instability, and compromised intimacy as consequences of porn acting (Parvez, 2006).

Pornography and the self. Pornography was reported as relating to how women feel about their bodies, their understanding of sexual activity, their experience of arousal, and how they construct potential social attitudes to their use of pornography.

Table 2. *Quality Assessment*

					Quality and Assessment							
Author (Date)	Question/ Objective Clearly Stated?	Design Evident and Appropriate to Answer Study Question?	Ethics Approval?	Context for Study Is Clear?	Connection to a Theoretical Framework/ Wider Body of Knowledge?	Sampling Strategy Described, Relevant, and Justified?	Data Collection Methods Clearly Described and Systematic?	Data Analysis Clearly Described, Complete, and Systematic?	Use of Verification Procedures to Establish Credibility of the Study?	Conclusion Supported by the Results?	Reflexivity of the Account?	Score[a]
Benjamin & Tlusten (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	No	Yes	No	.72
Boynton (1999)	Partial	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	No	.59
Cameron et al. (2005)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Partial	Partial	Yes	No	No	Partial	No	.55
Cavaglion and Rashty (2010)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	No	.64
Ciclitira (2004)	Yes	Yes	No[b]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No[b]	.64
Eck (2003)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	.64
Häggström-Nordin et al. (2006)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	.82
Hare et al. (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.91
Hare et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.91
Lofgren-Martenson and Mansson (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1
Mattebo et al. (2012)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.91
McCutcheon and Bishop (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.91
Morrison & Tallack, 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	.86
Parvez (2006)	Yes	Partial	No[c]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	Yes	.73
Ševčíková et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	.81
Shaw (1999)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	.68
Smith (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Partial	.86
Ramlagun (2012)	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Partial	No	No	Yes	No	.55
Rothman et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	.95
Wang and Davidson (2006)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	.86
Walker et al. (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.86
Zitzman and Butler (2009)	Yes	Yes	No[c]	Yes	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	.73

[a] Papers were scored depending on the degree to which the specific criteria were met ("yes" = 2, "partial" = 1, "no" = 0). A score was calculated for each article by summing the total score obtained across relevant items and dividing by the total possible score.
[b] Ethics approval and reflexivity were not mentioned. The article was based on a dissertation that included statements about ethics approval and reflexivity.
[c] Ethics approval was not stated in the article. The author was contacted and indicated that ethics approval was obtained.

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Body. Women were reported as making diverse judgments when they compared their own bodies to the bodies of pornography actors. Comparisons were made to weight, body shape, facial features, and pubic hair, resulting in idealization and subsequent feelings of inadequacy, or normalization, or criticism of such actors' bodies and characters.

Participants were quoted as saying, for example, "I wish I had a body like that" (Eck, 2003, p. 697) and "I don't have a perfect body like those porn stars" (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010, p. 280). Conversely, participants in two studies were reported as saying that the variety of bodies featured in pornography made their bodies feel "normal" and that this variety was a more positive representation than the idealized bodies in mainstream public media (Hare, Gahagan, Jackson, & Steenbeek, 2014, 2015; Mattebo et al., 2012). Women criticized actors as "fake" or "not realistic" because breast implants, artificial nails, dyed hair, and low body weight were not "normal" (Boynton, 1999; Eck, 2003; Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999). Occasionally, women were quoted as criticizing an actor's character, calling her a "tramp" (Parvez, 2006, p. 620), "tart," "whore," or "fat pig" (Boynton, 1999, pp. 455, 456).

Understanding sex. Adolescent participants described pornography as either a useful or a poor form of "education." On the one hand, adolescents welcomed pornography as a source of sexual education in the absence of realistic and useful information from schools or parents (Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Mattebo et al., 2012; Ramlagun, 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Wang & Davidson, 2006). They were reported as wanting to understand more about how their bodies worked sexually and using pornography for information on sexual acts and to learn about sex in a nonjudgmental context (Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Ramlagun, 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013; Wang & Davidson, 2006).

Other adolescents asserted that pornography was a poor form of education with unrealistic information about sexual practices and gender roles (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013). In particular, participants in two studies said that the absence of condoms in pornography set up unrealistic expectations (Mattebo et al., 2012; McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015). One participant described the unrealistic speed at which sex was enacted (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010), and another said that the way in which men control women in pornography is not only unrealistic but also objectionable (Mattebo et al., 2012).

Arousal. Researchers in three studies reported their participants as being aroused by pornography or presented comments that could be interpreted to mean that women were experiencing arousal (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015; Parvez, 2006; Smith, 2013). Women were recruited to one study specifically because they found gay (male) pornography "erotic," which the authors concluded was synonymous

with women finding the images "arousing" (McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015, p. 77).

Perceived social expectations. Articles from two of the studies reported women's reflections on the social perception of pornography users: that women are less sexual than men (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012). As a result, women thought that their use of pornography and expressed sexuality would be seen as inappropriate. For example, when making sense of her own arousal to pornography, an adolescent was quoted as saying that women's use of pornography was "not allowed by society" (Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010, p. 572).

Pornography in the context of relationships. Researchers described women's strategies for navigating pornography in relationships. It was found that, when women encountered pornography in the context of their relationship, it could be assessed as either increasing or reducing intimacy. Researchers also reported women's accounts of negotiating pornography use in a relationship and unwanted sexual contact after pornography use.

Pornography consumption reduces intimacy. Women in seven studies were reported as comparing their bodies and their sexual activity to those of the female pornography actor, fearing that they would be unable to meet their partners' expectations of their appearance or sexual performance (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Eck, 2003; Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). As a result, they felt inadequate (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009) and unattractive (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Women described their partners' use of pornography as leading to disconnection from those partners, loss of sexual and emotional intimacy, and dissatisfaction with the relationship (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Women who discovered that their partners used pornography in secret reported losing trust in them and described changes in the relationship dynamics (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Shaw, 1999; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Women were described as worrying that their partners would be thinking about pornography while having sex with them or that they would use their bodies to enact what they had seen in pornography (Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999). Because pornography depicts sex in the public domain, some women felt a loss of the privacy within which they thought sexual intimacy should take place (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Shaw, 1999).

Pornography consumption increases intimacy. Women in three studies assessed pornography as having a positive impact on their relationships (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Wang & Davidson, 2006). The women discussed watching pornography with their partners

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to inspire new sexual activities or as part of their sexual engagement (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Wang & Davidson, 2006). Pornography was also identified as enabling sexual communication between partners, with one woman telling researchers that pornography helped her and her partner discuss their sexual desires and become more sexually open with each other (Hare et al., 2014, 2015). Another woman said that watching pornography increased her knowledge of her own sexuality and facilitated the communication of her sexual needs to her partner (Hare et al., 2014, 2015).

Negotiating pornography use within a relationship.
Women demonstrated diverse and conflicting attitudes to or experiences of managing pornography within their intimate relationships. Women in three studies were found to accept their partners' use because it is "his space" or "his right" (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999). One woman was reported as justifying pornography use on evolutionary grounds as deriving from testosterone and "natural" sexual needs (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010). Women also accepted pornography use within a relationship if they identified it as constituting mutual sexual practice to enhance their sexual relationship (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Wang & Davidson, 2006). In contrast, Shaw (1999) reported that women frequently implied they did not want their partners to use pornography, a preference overtly stated by four women; one woman said that she preferred her partner's use to remain hidden. Women were also described expressing conflict between their feelings of inadequacy in relation to their partner's pornography use and their beliefs that they should not prohibit his use (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Parvez, 2006). A fourth perspective came from women in two studies who believed that their role as wife or girlfriend required them to please their partner sexually, including accepting his use of pornography and viewing pornography with him (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Parvez, 2006) even when it was for "[his] pleasure, not [hers]" (Parvez, 2006, p. 625).

Pornography and nonconsensual or coercive actions.
Women in seven studies were reported as experiencing or knowing someone who had experienced coercion or nonconsensual sexual acts following a partner's or male friend's pornography use (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Ševčíková et al., 2015; Shaw, 1999; Walker et al., 2015). Women could feel pressured to imitate sexual acts seen in pornography (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tyden, 2006; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Shaw, 1999; Walker et al., 2015) and frequently described their male partners or friends watching pornography, getting "ideas," and coercing their female partners to replicate the behavior. One woman, for example, said that her boyfriend pressured her to give him a "blow job" and have sex in "all these different positions" (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006, p. 389). It was common for women to tell researchers that, because pornography actors seemed to enjoy sexual acts, their male

partners assumed that their female partners would also enjoy them, failing to understand that these acts may be physically or emotionally unpleasant or demeaning. Women named particularly disagreeable acts promoted by pornography as bondage (Shaw, 1999) and anal sex (Rothman et al., 2015). Overtly nonconsensual behavior was reported in only one study, in which two adolescent girls spoke about watching pornography with boys at school and subsequently observing these boys "slapping girls' butts" and "grabbing boobs" (Rothman et al., 2015, p. 740), behavior which the girls attributed to viewing pornography.

Making sense of pornography. It is evident that pornography intersects with important, pivotal, and sensitive domains of women's lives. In the articles reviewed, researchers described women making sense of these intersections through considering censorship, utilizing the theoretical constructs of feminism, defining boundaries around the use of violence, and expressing the belief that women in pornography are complicit in their exploitation. In the process of making sense, conflict or dissonance among women's beliefs, behaviors, and desires were also reported.

Censorship beliefs. The role of censorship in pornography was raised in articles from four studies (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Ciclitira, 2004; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Shaw, 1999). Some women expressed the belief that adults have the right to use pornography and that pornography should not be censored (Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Ciclitira, 2004; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Shaw, 1999). Even women with very negative views about pornography did not support censorship in general (Ciclitira, 2004), although two studies reported that most women argued children should be protected from pornography (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Shaw, 1999).

Feminism as a construct for understanding pornography. Articles from three studies included feminism as a tool for understanding pornography (Ciclitira, 2004; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Parvez, 2006). Women who identified as feminist tended to construct pornography as degrading to women, designed for men, and representing men's oppression of women for economic and sexual gain. Women in one study that specifically related feminism to pornography (Ciclitira, 2004) were quoted drawing on feminist literature in their discussion of pornography. These women concluded that pornography exploits women and perpetuates inequality between women and men. At the same time, they were aware that their assessments of pornography's adverse effects on women and society were at odds with the sexual enjoyment they usually experienced when they viewed pornography (Ciclitira, 2004).

Violent pornography. Women were frequently reported as disliking violence in pornography (Benjamin & Tlusten, 2010; Ciclitira, 2004; Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Mattebo et al., 2012; Parvez, 2006; Rothman et al., 2015;

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Ševčíková et al., 2015; Shaw, 1999; Walker et al., 2015), particularly depictions of rape and murder (Ciclitira, 2004; Rothman et al., 2015). Pornography was found to be particularly abhorrent when it subjugated or degraded women for (men's) sexual excitement; women were quoted reflecting on women's social disadvantage and gendered violence (Hare et al., 2014, 2015; Mattebo et al., 2012; Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999; Walker et al., 2015). In contrast, a woman in one study that linked pornography with her personal history reported a preference for "extreme things" in pornography (Parvez, 2006); her history of sexual trauma may be implicated in her preference, given her account that her body "shut down" when she viewed pornography.

Pornography actors are complicit in their exploitation. Women in some studies were reported not to construct women's involvement in pornography as arising from social forces but to judge women actors as complicit in their exploitation (Boynton, 1999; Parvez, 2006; Shaw, 1999). For example, one woman was quoted as saying that female actors in pornography were exploiting themselves when "they said yes" (Parvez, 2006, p. 620). Women in another study were described as differentiating themselves through comparing "the choices of the sex workers to their own choices" (Parvez, 2006, p. 18). Women could demonstrate unflattering opinions of women porn actors while benefiting from their work; for example, one woman was quoted as dismissing women who are exploited in pornography because they "allow it to be that way," while reporting frequent use of pornography with her partner for sexual exploration (Parvez, 2006, p. 620).

Discussion

This is the first systematic review of research reporting the use of qualitative methods to understand women's experiences of pornography. It is apparent that research using qualitative methods can take us beyond mere comparison with the male experience to understanding how women may engage with pornography and the meanings they ascribe to it. The conclusions to be drawn from our review, while consistent with Attwood's (2005) earlier work, deepen and extend our understanding of this growing literature and add the confidence of systematic and comprehensive inclusion of relevant research. The thematic structure developed from the results of all reviewed articles offers a framework for understanding women's complex and diverse experiences of pornography. Women may identify pornography as valuable, as detrimental, as a mix of the two, or as initiating dissonance.

Pornography interacts with both external and internal processes and is not experienced or understood consistently from one woman to another, or even within an individual woman. Women's internal processes include emotional responses to the content of pornography, arousal, the development of sexual preferences, and accumulating

information about sexual acts. Pornography also engages with women's perception of themselves in their environment, which includes their relationships and their construct of themselves as a social commentator or consumer with ethical responsibilities. Inconsistencies in external and internal experiences or meanings can be difficult to reconcile; this review reveals various aspects of these tensions.

Women's sexual desires may lead them to seek information, model sexual behavior (Choi & Nicolson, 1994), and experience arousal. Pornography is an important source of all of these, as our review demonstrates. Whether women assess pornography as consumers or find meaning in others' consumption, they do so through perceptions of themselves, perceptions of social and partner expectations, and their values. Pornography may align with a woman's sexual and body ideals and represent valuable sexual discovery or normalization. Other women may find that pornography is at odds with their ethical values or threatens their self-esteem or sense of attractiveness. The contrasting findings of attitudes to women who act in pornography may reflect these two extremes. Women who criticize an actor's body and character may need to bolster their own sense of self-worth by distancing themselves from pornography actors, defining them as "the other" and thus enabling women to position themselves as more worthy, despite their consumption of pornography. Such distancing may act as a defense against the potential threat of dissonance.

Although women in these studies were found to have varying levels of insight into the experiences of female pornography actors and the consequences or benefits of participating in pornography, they could demonstrate a sophisticated level of engagement through their subjective understanding of the actors and reflections on what motivated them. Holding this insight and simultaneously enjoying pornography could constitute internal conflict. For example, a woman viewing pornography while aroused may be unsure if the woman acting in pornography was genuinely enjoying the sexual experience, which may conflict with her empathic or ethical concern for the actor's well-being. A preference for what women described as "realistic" pornography might be interpreted as an attempt to avoid this conflict. This recalls Coleridge's (1992) "willing suspension of disbelief," which enables fantasy to be briefly accepted as reality to facilitate immersion in a work of fiction. Where that fiction is pornography, a woman's suspension of disbelief can overcome conflict with her values. In this case, the "fiction" is not the sexual act itself but the degree to which the behavior can be interpreted as scripted; "realistic" pornography seems to be that which most convincingly persuades viewers of the actors' pleasure. A stated preference for realistic pornography may thus refer both to a woman's preferred content for arousal and the ease with which she can suspend disbelief.

Nevertheless, this "real" person is not physically present, and women may be ambivalent about classifying a partner's consumption of pornography as infidelity. On the other hand, these actors offer a real sexual experience and have

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the power to arouse and give pleasure to women and men. When a partner in a relationship is sexually aroused by an actor engaged in behavior that may or may not be acknowledged as scripted, it has the potential to provoke feelings of infidelity. Although there is no physical interaction with the actor while viewing a recorded sex act, it could be experienced as directing sexual attention and excitement away from the relationship. Pornography thus plays an equivocal role in relationship dynamics.

Individual or mutual consumption of pornography can introduce new sexual practices into a relationship. For women in a relationship, pornography can play a valued role as an opportunity for intimacy, sexual exploration, mutual pleasure, and shared sexual communication. At the other extreme, pornography can introduce unwanted sexual behavior. Some reports of women's perceptions of the effects of pornography could be interpreted as sexual objectification. This was most apparent in women's accounts of having their bodies used by their sexual partners to reenact what the men had observed in pornography. Between distress and pleasure was the possibility of ignoring a partner's use or requesting the partner to abstain from using pornography.

There were challenges to overcome in integrating the results of these 21 studies (reported in 22 articles) in a cohesive and conceptually sound manner. The articles in this review, when they defined the term *pornography*, presented varied definitions; when they did not define it, they presented variations in the content referred to as pornography. (Attwood [2005] reported a similar finding.) This diversity constitutes a potential limitation in synthesising the authors' representation of experiences and may account for some variation in results. We suggest that future research would benefit from the expectation that *pornography* will be defined and that any material used as the basis of research should be clearly described.

The research we reviewed was published over 16 years, from 1999 to 2015. Given the changes in technology during this time, notable differences are likely in the means by which women encountered pornography and what they encountered. Seeing a pornographic image in a magazine and viewing pornography online are not the same experience. Technological change has contributed to what has been described as the "pornification" of culture (Paasonen, Nikunen, & Saarenmaa, 2007). Sexualized music videos and fashion and the increasing popularity of women's work on the intimate body, such as female genital cosmetic surgery (Dobson, McDonald, Kirkman, Souter, & Fisher, 2017), have also been attributed to the wide distribution of pornography on the Internet and social media (Howarth, Sommer, & Jordan, 2010).

The context within which pornography is experienced encompasses not only technological change but also the cultural variations entailed in different eras, countries, and populations. The reviewed research was conducted in nine countries. While some researchers described the cultural context of their study and made culturally specific observations (Ramlagun, 2012; Rothman et al., 2015; Wang & Davidson, 2006) fewer researchers (particularly those from higher-income countries) reflected on the influence of cultural context on women's experiences of pornography. Cultural norms were not a focus of analysis in any of the articles reviewed; nor were they comprehensively incorporated into the results, which meant that assessing the differences that cultural context might have made to the results was possible only through speculation. We judged speculation not to be compatible with the rigor of a systematic review. We recommend that future researchers reflect on and report relevant aspects of cultural context and suggest ways in which culture may have influenced women's experiences.

Women and adolescents who participated in the reviewed studies reported discernibly different relationships to pornography. Their use of pornography appeared to interact with their life stage and level of sexual development. Deliberate adolescent engagement with pornography reported in the reviewed studies was for practical information about sex and bodies and reassurance about confusing sexual feelings. Adult women also used pornography to increase their sexual knowledge but tended to engage with and reflect on it with the more mature understanding that comes from experience of their own sexuality and of adult relationships. The reviewed studies dealt separately with adolescents and adults. Although one study included women up to age 89 (Shaw, 1999) and another included women up to age 65 (Eck, 2003), none reflected on the experiences of postmenopausal women or those of older age. Further research is necessary to understand the role of pornography in the construction of identity during the trajectory from adolescence to adulthood, and specifically among older women.

The diversity of the participants in the reviewed research cannot be understood solely as a limitation; it reflects the heterogeneity of women and their experiences. It was possible to identify clear themes that comprehended the results of all the research reviewed. This confers face validity on our analysis. We argue that the number of articles available to review and the face validity of the conclusions allow us to be confident that this synthesis of results is valid and informative.

Our review revealed contradictions among women's sexual practice, their negotiation of pornography in relationships, and their value judgments of pornography and the actors who perform in it. These can be understood as arising from interactions between public expectations and private desires, which have ramifications for the self and for intimate relationships. Relationships are enacted within larger social systems in which expectations are constructed and circulated about how sex and pornography "should" function. These are almost invariably gendered: expectations differ for women and for men. A woman and her partners are each likely to bring their own constructs and expectations to the relationship, based on personal experience and discourses from family and relevant communities. Women are expected to be both sexually available and the moral

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arbiters of society (Summers, 1975/2016), expected both to enjoy sexual pleasure and to eschew it. Furthermore, sexual activity within relationships is uncomfortably situated in the liminal space between private acts and the public interest afforded a fundamental human activity. Commerce, including through pornography, adds weight to the public realm of private sex. It is not surprising that some women are revealed as feeling conflicted about the role of pornography in their lives.

This systematic review of research that used qualitative methods to explore women's experiences of pornography has identified meaningful themes from which pornography's association with a woman's sense of self and her psychosexual development can be inferred. Women's diverse positioning in relation to each theme warrants further in-depth research on women's reflections of the role of pornography in their lives and their sense of identity as sexual beings. Women can seek pornography for use as a means of arousal or education, or encounter it in the context of their relationships, in their social environment, or accidentally. Women's internalized social messages, values, experiences in intimate relationships, and previous pornography use contribute to the lens through which they experience and find meaning in pornography. The diverse results reviewed and the paradoxical experiences described by many women in their interactions with pornography have implications for researchers, health practitioners, and sex educators: They would be wise to challenge their personal biases, to avoid making assumptions about women's experiences, and to ask each woman about what pornography means to her.

Research that attempts to understand women's perspectives on pornography has begun only recently; relatively little research has accumulated and it has, on the whole, been conducted in isolation and without consistent use or definition of the term *pornography*. Now that this systematic review has drawn together the results of all research using qualitative methods (published in English in peer-reviewed journals), researchers can more easily build on existing knowledge.

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Chapter 2

Defining 'Pornography'

This chapter is the following publication:

What does 'Pornography' Mean in the Digital Age?

Revisiting a Definition for Social Science Researchers

Sarah Ashton, Karalyn McDonald, and Maggie Kirkman

Abstract

'Pornography' is a protean term, rendered more complex by the digital age. Social science researchers need not only a useful definition but also awareness of how the term is applied (by researchers and research participants) and clarity about the scope of material to be included. As part of our attempts to understand the meaning of 'pornography', we thematically analysed definitions presented in recent and prominent pornography research publications and scholarly articles dedicated to defining pornography. We concluded that a useful definition has three components: content, the intention of the producer, and contextual judgement. We then identified implications for pornography of new technology: expanded opportunities for access and content, the interaction and immersion enabled by virtual reality, 'pornification' of culture, and challenges to the meaning of consent presented by self-produced content. We argue that pornography should be distinguished from material produced and distributed without participants' consent. We propose that researchers incorporate new technologies into measurement tools and suggest that they acknowledge context and practise reflexivity. We present as a working definition of 'pornography' *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.*

Key words: definition of pornography, pornography, pornography research, digital age, consent

What does 'Pornography' Mean in the Digital Age?
Revisiting a Definition for Social Science Researchers

Referring to 'pornography' in 1950 evoked images of semi-nude women in the newly-published magazine *Playboy* (2017). In more recent years, the term 'pornography' has been used to describe a range of content, including a music video clip of a naked Miley Cyrus straddling a wrecking ball (Sydney Morning Herald 2013); Bill Henson's photographs of naked children, hung in art galleries (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2012); and videos of multiple penetration and forced sexual acts. Not only are the parameters of such a definition nebulous, but encapsulating the scope of the content is impossible in the age of the internet. Typing 'porn' into a Google search revealed more than two billion websites in 0.33 seconds (on 10 May 2017). This content is created more rapidly than researchers can measure or describe.

Viewing 'pornography' is commonplace in the sexual lives of people across the world (Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck, and Wells 2012; Senate Environment and Communications References Committee 2016; Rissel 2017). As use increases, so too does research attempting to understand its effects on consumers' lives. Nevertheless, a consistent definition remains elusive. More recently, some researchers have used the term 'sexually explicit material' or 'sexually explicit internet material' in place of, or interchangeably with, the term 'pornography' (for example, Peter and Valkenburg 2016). This may be implicit acknowledgement of the ambiguity and opacity of 'pornography'. However, we have chosen to retain 'pornography' for the purpose of our discussion rather than to adopt an alternative term because of its long history and widespread use.

Short et al.'s (2012) review of research published from 2001 to 2011 on 'internet pornography' and 'sexually explicit material' revealed that pornography was defined in only 16% of articles, none of which used the same definition. This pattern of inconsistent or absent definitions was echoed in our review of qualitative research investigating women's experiences of pornography (Ashton, McDonald, and Kirkman 2018). The American Psychological Association's *Handbook on*

Sexuality and Psychology cited Diamond's (2009) claim that the definition most commonly used by researchers and courts is 'media basically construed as intended to entertain or arouse erotic desire' (Hald et al. 2014, p. 9).

Deciding on a definition is only part of the challenge; applying it is a complex endeavour. For example, what content can and cannot be deemed pornography? Andrews (2012) and Rea (2001) considered the content and context of art work, explicit phone calls, and intimate photography to illustrate the application of their proposed definitions. However, their useful discussions did not include the diverse platforms and content made possible by new technology. While there are many social, cultural, and other instigators of change in pornography, technology is arguably the most significant contemporary influence. Technological development has revolutionized communication and defined our age. Cheap, portable devices enable the recording and immediate, extensive distribution of sexualized material. Platforms on which this content can be viewed (such as various social media and virtual reality) have been expanded. Technology thus presents new challenges in the application and utilisation of a definition of pornography.

Although there has always been sexually-arousing material, it has been argued that it came to be seen as an identifiable element of culture—as pornography—only in the nineteenth century (Kendrick 1997). Given what this reveals of the inevitable influence of culture on meaning, it could be said that 'pornography' is a protean term. Nevertheless, attempts to define pornography take place in various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education, philosophy, feminism, art, and law, often reflecting diverse positioning within ethical and social discourses concerning pornography use (Dworkin 1981; Cole 1989; Williams 1989; Strossen 1995; Kendrick 1997; Rea 2001; Ciclitira 2002; Manning 2006; Andrews 2012; Maes and Levinson 2015). These debates and discourses have been outlined elsewhere (for example, Hald, Seaman and Linz 2014). Our focus here is on research in the social sciences, where most pornography research is situated.

Researching 'pornography' in the digital age entails a review of past practice. Recently published peer-reviewed papers reveal that researchers list modes of accessing pornography such as

'magazines' and 'DVDs' along with the 'internet' but do not specify different types of online access (for example, Kvalem et al. 2016; Campbell and Kohut 2017). Contemporary consumption may not therefore be accurately measured when, in a growing field of such importance, accurate measurement is vital. Without consistent use and application of a definition of pornography that takes account of the digital age, researchers may not realize or acknowledge the influence (on themselves and research participants) of context, assumed scope, and subjective interpretations of the word. This has profound implications for external and internal validity. In other words, researchers may unknowingly be exploring different phenomena and inaccurately unifying their results under the umbrella of 'pornography'.

It is therefore imperative that we, as researchers, ask: What do we mean in the digital age when we say 'pornography'? This question can be understood by asking three subsidiary questions: (1) How do we define pornography? (2) How do we apply this definition to content? (3) What is the scope of the content to be considered? We addressed these questions first by identifying the common and useful components of existing definitions. After evaluating these components and their application, we considered them in relation to technological changes. We consider these changes not only to reflect on the formation and application of the definition, but also to provide to scholars researching pornography an overview of contemporary pornography in the digital age. We then outlined new content and modes of delivery that might be considered 'pornography'. Before suggesting a candidate for an updated definition of pornography, we reflected on whether any additional components would be necessary. Our aim was to provide a practical resource for pornography researchers in the social sciences that would contribute to investigating the consumption and experience of pornography in the digital age.

Definitions of 'Pornography' and Their Components

Gathering Suitable Publications and Identifying Definitions

We sought recent social science research in pornography, prominent publications in the field, and peer-reviewed papers that were devoted to defining pornography. Our search was for 'pornography' and its variants (such as 'pornographic'). However, when authors used 'sexually explicit material' interchangeably with 'pornography' we included their definitions of 'sexually explicit material'. We planned a task that was manageable yet comprehensive within specified constraints. We recognize that publications identified by others as prominent may not have been captured in our search.

Recent research. To identify recent social science research in pornography, we used the term 'porn*' to search the databases PsychInfo and Ovid Medline. Papers were eligible for inclusion if they were published in peer-reviewed journals from 1 January 2016 to 11 May 2017, in English, and reported research on pornography. Our concern was with non-criminal use of pornography; we thus excluded papers reporting research on criminal behaviour. This exclusion rendered ineligible research on child pornography: we wanted to avoid introducing ethical and theoretical matters beyond the scope of this review. After removing duplicates and reviewing titles and abstracts, the 667 papers from PsychInfo and 67 papers from Ovid Medline had been reduced to 49 eligible papers. Each eligible paper was examined to establish whether 'pornography' was defined for readers or for research participants; 33 (67%) were found not to include a definition of pornography. Sixteen (33%) defined pornography for readers, usually in the introductory section; of these, seven cited another source for a definition and nine proposed their own definitions. Three of the 16 papers did not include research with participants; of the remaining 13, six reported (in the methods section) having defined pornography for their participants. Details and definitions are in Table 1.

Table 1

Definitions in papers reporting pornography social science research published January 2016-May 2017

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Baker (2016)	*'websites that either describe people having sex, show clear images of graphic nudity (with genitals exposed) or people engaging in sex acts, or have video or audio content of people engaging in sex acts (adapted from Braun-Courville and Rojas 2009, 157)'*	Pornography was defined before the focus group; definition not reported. No statement about definition in the survey.
Baltieri et al. (2016)	*'(1) creates or elicits sexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviors; and, (2) contains explicit images or descriptions of sexual acts involving the genitals (e.g., vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, or masturbation)'* [adapted from the definition used in the Pornography Consumption Inventory]	As for the reader
Bradley et al. (2016)	No	No
Brown, Jason et al. (2017)	No	No
Brown, Durtschi et al. (2017)	No	No
Burke (2016)	No	No
Campbell and Kohut (2017)	*'written, pictorial, or audio-visual representations depicting nudity or sexual behaviour'*	Not applicable
Carroll et al. (2017)	*'media used or intended to increase sexual arousal. Such material generally portrays images of nudity and depictions of sexual behaviors'*	No
Chang et al. (2016)	No	No
Covell (2016).	No	Not applicable
DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez (2017)	No	No
de Souza Aranha and Baltieri (2016)	No	Used Pornography Consumption Inventory which includes a definition
Hald and Stulhofer (2016)	No	No
Harper and Hodgins (2016)	No	No
Hofer (2016)	No	No

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Husain and Qureshi (2016)	*'any printed or visual material which contains exhibition of sexual organs or activities and intends to stimulate sexual excitement' 'as explained in different dictionaries'*	No
Kohut, et al. (2016)	No	No
Koletic (2017)	No	Not applicable
Kvalem et al. (2016)	*'Any kind of material aiming at creating or enhancing sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient and, at the same time, (1) containing explicit exposure and/or descriptions of the genitals and (2) clear and explicit sexual acts such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, bondage, etc.'* [Quoting Hald and Malamuth, 2008]	*'material created to create or enhance sexual feelings in the person using it, either by describing or showing the genitals or describing or showing sexual acts, such as oral sex, vaginal intercourse, masturbation etc.'*
Landry et al. (2016)	No	No
Lim et al. (2016)	No	Not applicable
MacInnis and Hodson (2016)	No	No
Martyniuk et al.(2016)	No	No
Mattebo et al. (2016)	No	No
Minarcik et al. (2016)	Indirectly via participants' definition	*'any material depicting two adults consensually engaging in pleasurable, non-violent, non-degrading, sexual interactions'*
Negash et al. (2016).	*'sexually explicit material, and Internet pornography as Web sites containing sexually graphic material'*	No
Newstrom and Harris (2016)	No	No
Perry (2016)	*'visual material (magazines, movies, Internet images) intended to sexually arouse the viewer'*	No
Perry (2017a)	No	No
Perry (2017b)	*'visual material (magazines, movies, Internet images) intended to sexually arouse the viewer'*	No

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Peter and Valkenburg (2016)	*'professionally produced or user-generated pictures or videos (clips) intended to sexually arouse the viewer. These videos and pictures typically depict sexual activities, such as masturbation and oral sex, as well as vaginal and anal penetration, in an unconcealed way, often with a close-up on genitals'*	Not applicable
Pizzol et al. (2016)	No	No
Price et al. (2016)	No	No
Rasmussen (2016)	*'Audiovisual (including written) material that typically intends to arouse the viewer and depicts nudity or sexual activity.'*	Not applicable
Rasmussen and Bierman (2016)	*'professionally produced or user-generated (audio)visual material … that typically intends to arouse the viewer and depicts sexual activities and (aroused) genitals in unconcealed ways, usually with close-ups on oral, anal, and vaginal penetration (2010, p.377)* [quote Peter and Valkenburg]'	No
Rasmussen et al. (2016)	*'any media construed as intended to entertain or arouse erotic desire (Diamond 2009, p. 304)'*	*'(a) pictures and/or videos with naked people portrayed sexually, (b) pictures and/or videos of people engaging in sex or masturbation, and (c) written or audio material describing people engaging in sex or masturbation. Having sex includes vaginal, anal, and oral penetration.'* [adapted from Morgan 2011]
Regnerus et al. (2016)	No	No
Rissel et al. (2017)	*'printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement (Oxford Dictionaries 2016)'*	*'If respondents wanted to clarify what was considered pornography, the scripted interviewer response was … This includes magazines, pictures, cards, films, books, and material on the Internet'*
Shek and Ma (2016)	No	No
Spišák (2016)	No	No
Spišák and Paasonen (2017)	No	No

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Volk et al. (2016)	No	No
Willoughby and Busby (2016)	Not applicable	No
Willoughby et al. (2016)	No	Not applicable
Wilson (2016)	No	Not applicable
Wright et al. (2016a)	*'sexually explicit media intended to arouse the consumer (Hald et al. 2010; Seto et al. 2001)'*	Not applicable
Wright et al. (2016b)	*'media content depicting nudity and explicit sexual acts'*	No
Yang (2016)	No	No
Zhou and Paul (2016)	No	Not applicable

Prominent publications. We identified 13 prominent publications on social science research in pornography through the reference lists of these recent publications and our familiarity with the literature. We considered prominent publications published before 1 January 2016 that included a definition of pornography and searched them for pornography defined for readers and for research participants. These publications and their definitions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Definitions in prominent papers on pornography research

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009)	Indirectly via participants' definition	*'X-rated or pornographic Web sites that either: describe people having sex, show clear pictures of nudity or people having sex'*
Carroll et al. (2008)	*'media used or intended to increase sexual arousal. Such material generally portrays images of nudity and depictions of sexual behaviors'*	Not specified
Hald and Malamuth (2008)	Indirectly via participants' definition	*'any kind of material aiming at creating or enhancing sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient and, at the same time containing explicit exposure and/or descriptions of the*

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
		genitals, and clear and explicit sexual acts, such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, bondage, sadomasochism, rape, urine sex, animal sex, etc'
Hald et al. (2014)	*'sexually explicit materials intended to create sexual arousal in the consumer'*	Not applicable
Hernandez (2011)	*'hardcore and softcore portrayals of explicit sex which may include aggression, violence, or domination'*	Not applicable
Huer (1987)	*'any object mass produced and distributed with the purpose of making it or marking it for profit by appealing to our sexual interest'*	Not applicable
Kasper et al. (2015)	*'highly erotic scenes (to arouse the viewer), and it often portrays very idealized images and sexual activities'*	Not specified
Kraus et al. (2015)	Indirectly via participants' definition	*'any materials designed to cause or enhance sexual arousal or sexual excitement in the viewer. Such materials show clear and explicit sexual acts such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral sex, group sex, etc. Pornography does not include materials such as underwear catalogs (e.g., Victoria's Secret) or materials containing men and women posing naked unless these images portray clear and explicit sexual acts'*
McKee (2010)	*'sexually explicit entertainment'*	*Not applicable*
Owens et al. (2012)	*'Any material that 'predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal' (McManus, 1986, p. 8)'.*	Not applicable

Author (date)	Definition for readers	Definition for participants
Reid et al. (2011)	*'material that (a) creates or elicits sexual feelings or thoughts, and (b) contains explicit images or descriptions of sexual acts involving the genitals (e.g., vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, etc)'*	As for reader
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee (2016)	*'sexually explicit media are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience'* ... *'Sexually explicit' representations include images of female or male nudity or semi-nudity, implied sexual activity, and actual sexual activity'*	Not applicable
Tsitsika et al. (2009)	*'illicit Internet sites portraying sexual behaviors and practices'*	Not specified

Publications defining pornography. We searched for papers devoted to defining pornography using the terms '*defin* AND porn*'* and *'what is pornography?'* in the databases PsychInfo and Ovid Medline, and in Google Scholar. Papers were eligible for inclusion if they were published in peer-reviewed journals from 1 January 1980 to 11 May 2017, in English, with a primary focus on defining pornography. A starting date of 1980 ensured that we captured definitions constructed since the internet became available. We examined the reference list of each eligible paper to identify other suitable publications. Two papers dedicated to defining pornography were identified (Table 3).

Table 3

Definitions or definitional components from papers devoted to defining pornography

Author (date)	Definition or definitional components
Andrews (2012)	No succinct definition provided; excerpts reveal components of a definition: *'rejects any idea that leads to a closed, textual definition'; 'a genre of art within a larger "art circle"'; 'must be defined contextually'; 'just one necessary condition, sex content, and no sufficient conditions. Sex content in porn does not have a specific formal trigger, nor is it informed by particular intentions in the producer or receiver'; 'asks the pragmatic question, "Is it sensible to classify this work as part of that artistic tradition called 'pornography'?"'*
Rea (2001)	*'Part 1: x is used (or treated) as pornography by a person S =DF (i) x is a token of some sort of communicative material (picture, paragraph, phone call, performance, etc.), (ii) S desires to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x, (iii) if S believes that the communicative content of x is intended to foster intimacy between S and the subject(s) of x, that belief is not among S's reasons for attending to x's content, and (iv) if S's desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x were no longer among S's reasons for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to x's content. Part 2: x is pornography =DF it is reasonable to believe that x will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of the audience for which it was produced.'*

Components of Definitions of Pornography

Having identified the definitions in all the eligible publications, we analysed them thematically to ascertain common components using a standard, iterative, qualitative method (Braun and Clarke 2006). Four primary components emerged; each is applicable to pornography research: *Content*, *Intention of the producer*, *Contextual judgement*, and *Perception of the consumer* (Table 4).

Table 4

Components identified in definitions

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
Andrews (2012)	*'sex content'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	*'must be defined contextually'; 'Is it sensible to classify this work as part of that artistic tradition called 'pornography'?'*
Baker (2016)	*'people having sex'* *'people engaging in sexual acts'* *'graphic nudity'* *'genitals exposed'*	*'websites'* *'video'* *'audio'* *'clear images'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Baltieri et al. (2016)	*'genitals'* *'vaginal'* *'anal intercourse'* *'oral sex'* *'masturbation'* *'sexual acts'* *'explicit'*	*'images'* *'descriptions'*	*'creates or elicits sexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviours'*	Not specified	Not specified
Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009)	*'people having sex'* *'nudity'*	*'clear pictures'* *'websites'* *'pictures'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Campbell and Kohut (2017)	*'nudity'* *'sexual behaviours'*	*'written'* *'pictorial'* *'audio-visual'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Carroll et al. (2008)	*'nudity'* *'sexual behaviour'*	*'media'* *'images'*	*'intended to increase sexual arousal'*		

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
Carroll et al. (2017)	*'nudity'* *'sexual behaviours'*	*'media'* *'material'* *'images'* *'depictions'*	*'used or intended to increase sexual arousal'*	Not specified	Not specified
de Souza Aranha and Baltieri (2016)	*'genitals'* *'vaginal intercourse'* *'anal intercourse'* *'oral sex'* *'masturbation'* *'sexual acts'* *'explicit'*	*'exposure'* *'descriptions'*	*'creates or elicits [sexual feelings or thoughts]'*	Not specified	Not specified
Hald and Malamuth (2008)	*'explicit exposure'* *'clear and explicit sexual acts'* *'genitals'* *'vaginal intercourse'* *'anal intercourse'* *'oral sex'* *'masturbation'* *'bondage'* *'sadomasochism'* *'rape'* *'urine sex'* *'animal sex'*	*'material'* *'descriptions'*	*'aiming at creating or enhancing sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient'*	Not specified	Not specified

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
Hald et al. (2010)	*'sexually explicit'*	*'materials'*	*'intended to create sexual arousal in the consumer'*		
Hernandez (2011)	*'hardcore and softcore'* *'explicit sex'* *'may include aggression, violence or dominations'*	*'portrayals'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Huer (1987)	None specified	*'any object mass produced and distributed'*	*'with the purpose of making it or marketing it for profit by appealing to our sexual interest'*	Not specified	Not specified
Husain and Qureshi (2016)	*'sexual organs'* *'sexual activities'*	*'printed material'* *'visual material'*	*'to stimulate sexual excitement'*	Not specified	Not specified
Kasper et al. (2015)	*'highly erotic'* *'idealized'* *'sexual activities'*	*'scenes'* *'images'*	*'to arouse the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Kraus et al. (2015)	'clear and explicit sexual acts' 'vaginal intercourse' 'anal intercourse' 'oral sex' 'group sex'	*'material'* *'images'*	*'any materials designed to cause or enhance sexual arousal or sexual excitement in the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Kvalem et al. (2016)	*'genitals'* *'vaginal intercourse'* *'anal intercourse'* *'oral sex'* *'masturbation'* *'bondage'* *'explicit sexual acts'*	*'material'* *'descriptionns'*	*'creating or enhancing sexual feelings or thoughts in the recipient'*	Not specified	Not specified

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
McKee (2010)	*'sexually'* *'explicit'*	*'entertainment'*			
Minarcik et al. (2016)	*'two adults consensually engaging in pleasurable, non-violent, non-degrading, sexual interactions'*	*'any material'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Negash (2016)	*'sexually'* *'graphic'* *'explicit'*	*'material'* *'Web sites'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Owens et al. (2012)	*'predominantly sexually explicit'*	Not specified	*'intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal'*	Not specified	Not specified
Perry (2016, 2017b)	None specified	*'visual material (magazines, movies, Internet images)'*	*'intended to sexually arouse the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Peter andValkenburg (2016)	*'masturbation'* *'oral sex'* *'vaginal penetration'* *'anal penetration'* *'genitals'* *'sexual activities'*	*'professionally produced or user-generated pictures or videos (clips)'*	*'intended to sexually arouse the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Rasmussen (2016)	*'nudity'* *'sexual activity'*	*'Audiovisual (including written) material'*	*'that typically intends to arouse the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Rasmussen and Bierman (2016)	*'masturbation'* *'oral sex'* *'vaginal penetration'* *'anal penetration'*	*'professionally produced or user-generated pictures or videos (clips)'*	*'intended to sexually arouse the viewer'*	Not specified	Not specified

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
	'genitals'				
	'sexual activities'				
Rasmussen et al. (2016)	*'naked people'*	*'any media'*	*'intended to entertain or arouse erotic desire'*	Not specified	Not specified
	'sexually'	*'pictures'*			
	'people engaging sex or masturbation'	*'videos'*			
	'vaginal, anal and oral penetration'	*'written'*			
		'audio material'			
Rea (2001)	None specified	*'communicative material (picture, paragraph, phone call, performance, etc.)'*	Not specified	*'x is used (or treated) as pornography by a person S'* *'S desires to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x, (iii) if S believes that the communicative content of x is intended to foster intimacy between S and the subject(s) of x, that belief is not among S's reasons for attending to x's content, and (iv) if S's desire to be sexually aroused or gratified by the communicative content of x were no longer among S's reasons for attending to that content, S would have at most a weak desire to attend to x's content'*	*'it is reasonable to believe that x will be used (or treated) as pornography by most of the audience for which it was produced'*
Reid et al. (2011)	*'sexual acts'*	*'material'*	*'creates or elicits sexual feelings or thoughts'*	Not specified	Not specified
	'genitals'	*'images'*			
	'vaginal or anal intercourse'	*'descriptions'*			
	'oral sex'				
	'masturbation'				

Author (date)	Content	Format	Intention of the producer	Perception of the consumer	Contextual judgement
	'explicit'				
Rissel et al. (2017)	*'sexual organs'* *'sexual activity'*	*'printed or visual material'* *'explicit description'* *'magazines'* *'pictures'* *'card'* *'films'* *'books'* *'material on the internet'*	*'intended to stimulate sexual excitement'*	Not specified	Not specified
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee (2016).	*'sexually explicit'* *'female or male nudity or semi-nudity'* *'implied sexual activity'* *'actual sexual activity'*	*'media'* *'images'*	*'primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience'*	Not specified	Not specified
Tsitsika et al. (2009)	*'illicit sexual behaviours and practices'*	*'Internet sites'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
Wright et al. (2016a)	*'sexually explicit'*	*'media'*	*'intended to arouse the consumer'*	Not specified	Not specified
Wright et al.(2016b)	*'nudity'* *'sexually explicit'*	*'media'*	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

Content. The content of pornography included 'genitals', 'clear images of nudity', 'masturbation', 'oral sex', 'anal sex', 'vaginal intercourse', 'genitals', and 'people having sex'. It was described using terms such as 'sexual', 'explicit', 'graphic', 'erotic', and 'pleasurable'. Format was described generally as 'material', 'media', 'entertainment', 'depictions', or 'communication' and more specifically as printed material, pictures, videos, internet material, media, written text, and audio. In one paper, content was specified as being either 'professionally produced' or 'user generated' (Peter and Valkenburg 2016). It is our assessment that the commonly-used term 'sexual material' is the most inclusive descriptor of content and its generic format. We suggest that our third component, Contextual judgement, should be invoked when interpreting 'sexual material'.

Intention of the producer. Not all sexual material in the public sphere is considered pornography (Huer 1987; Rea 2001; Senate Environment and Communications References Committee 2016). In order to distinguish pornography from other sexual material, the intention of the producer should be taken into account. Making a profit will capture the intention of some but not all producers of pornography. For example, Huer's (1987, p. 186) proposed definition, 'any object mass produced and distributed with the purpose of marketing it for profit by appealing to our sexual interests', excludes pornography that is freely available online. The producer's primary intention to arouse the audience is a frequent component of definitions. We contend that it is an essential component because the primary intent to arouse differentiates pornography from other material where the main intention of the producer is, for example, to develop a character or story (such as sex scenes in a film) or to provoke a viewer to reflect on shocking or controversial socio-political events (such as in the visual arts), even though arousal may be a secondary or indirect consequence.

Contextual judgement. This component combines two related aspects of previous definitions: that judgement of what is or is not pornography must include an assessment of what is 'sensible' or 'reasonable', and that context must be taken into account. A 'sensible' determination incorporates context, cultural and historical meaning, and public perception. Incorporating

'sensible' and 'reasonable' into a definition does not necessarily aid the identification of pornography because what constitutes good sense and reasonableness is open to interpretation. Perceptions of pornography have been described as contextual and dynamic (Rea 2001); contextual judgment varies according to culture, politics, and geography (Hunt 1993). While acknowledgment of context is important, it does, of course, introduce a potential lack of definitional consensus (Short et al. 2012). Accordingly, we propose that context must be considered and acknowledged (both in a reflexive process and in analysis) by researchers who employ the definition. We also recommend that iterative research be conducted on what is deemed to be pornography or 'sexual material' within particular contexts and populations; results can be used to refine our proposed working definition.

Perception of the consumer. One of the two earlier papers dedicated to defining pornography argued that the consumer's act of using something as pornography defines it as such (Rea 2001). However, including consumer perception in a definition would mean that any material that sexually aroused a consumer must be identified as pornography and that material that did not sexually arouse all consumers could be excluded from being identified as pornography. Although Rea (2001) added the proviso of reasonable belief that most of the intended audience will assess it as pornography, this does not eliminate the need for subjective assessment. Given the many millions of consumers and their heterogeneous perceptions, including perception in a definition would add complexity rather than clarification. Consumers' definitions of pornography have been found to vary according to gender, religious affiliation, marital status, and use of pornography (Willoughby and Busby 2016). Accordingly, rather than incorporating perception into the definition, we propose that consumer perspectives should be acknowledged and discussed in reports of research on pornography.

At this point, we concluded that pornography has most commonly been defined (explicitly or implicitly) as *Material deemed sexual, given the context, that has the primary intention of*

sexually arousing the consumer. We set out to assess whether this definition needs to be refined for the digital age.

Defining Pornography for the Digital Age

The significance of the internet in changing the consumption of pornography has been recognized (Short et al. 2012). Our contribution is to consider the effects of technological change on the definitional components included so far—content, the intention of the producer, and contextual judgement—and to identify additional components that are necessitated by technological change.

Content

Recent technological change has transformed access to content, the nature of content, and consumers' experience of content. As we illustrate the ways in which a definition of pornography must adapt to encompass these changes, we reiterate the need for continuing research on all these dynamic aspects of pornography.

Access to content. The internet is ubiquitous, increasingly fast and affordable, and capable of previously unimaginable volumes of storage. As a result, pornography is widely accessible. This phenomenon has been described as the 'Triple A Engine': the internet offers accessibility, affordability, and anonymity (Cooper 1998). Viewing pornography in cinemas or going to 'adult' shops to select a magazine or DVD are increasingly rare activities. The internet represents the most common contemporary mode of access to pornography; a popular pornography website reported nearly 92 billion videos viewed over the course of 23 billion visits in 2016 (Pornhub 2017). Smartphones, tablets, and other hand-held devices have expanded the physical platforms for access to pornography, which now fits in a pocket and can be carried to any location. Phone access accounts for 61% of the traffic to Pornhub (2017). The estimated number of 2.3 billion smartphones all over the world is rapidly increasing (Baer 2016; Statistica 2017).

Pornography has in the past been officially classified (such as R-restricted, X, XXX) according to the permitted audience; the rating determined how, where, and to whom pornography

could be sold or shown (e.g. Australian Classification Board; British Board of Film Classification).

These ratings and the enforcement they require are irrelevant to the online world of pornography (although official ratings still apply to pornography distributed in tangible formats). While some websites require consumers to state that they are over 18 years old, there is no practical means of authentication or enforcement. Encrypted websites make it more challenging for the government to intercept and decipher the content. Any government's attempt to control and dictate the content of pornography is impractical and potentially futile: there are billions of websites continually expanded by a stream of additions. Although governments can block Internet Protocol (IP) addresses registered in their jurisdictions, website owners can easily relocate the website's server to a country with less restrictive legislation.

Increased use of the internet and hand-held devices has also enabled the growth of new online platforms from which pornography can be accessed, including social networking (such as Instagram), blogs, interest-focused websites (such as Reddit, 4chan), virtual reality websites (for example, VRPorn), games (for example, Second Life), producer-specific pornography sites, 'tube' sites containing content from many producers (such as Pornhub), and smartphone applications (such as Snapchat). These online platforms transmit a plethora of online formats, such as picture images, GIFs (graphic interchange format, usually a brief clip on a continuous loop), full-length videos or clips, virtual-reality full-length videos or clips, digitally constructed videos and images, illustrated videos and images, text, and audio recordings. New formats are frequently created; no list can be exhaustive.

Nature of content. While there are many influences on change in content, technology has clearly enabled these changes. Increased internet speed and the development of new recording and viewing devices have improved digital quality and facilitated both more detailed content and expansion of available genres. For example, improvements in camera sensors and cheaper, wider lenses allow more realistic (higher resolution) content and reduce reliance on studio lighting during production. Lowering the cost while improving the quality of production contributes to greater

volume. Another example is the small body-worn device such as the GoPro (Carucci 2017). These allow recording of high quality images and videos from a participant in the action, such as the increasingly common use of 'head cams' by police (Harris 2010). This has aided in the production of the genre POV (point of view), also known as gonzo pornography, where the pornography is filmed from the perspective of an actor (usually male) (Hardy 2008; Tibbals 2014).

The plethora of online platforms and formats allows and encourages the consumption of shorter clips which can be viewed in quick succession and easy sharing of images or videos among internet users. Consumers no longer need to watch an entire video or story; they can select segments according to interest or preference, such as 'cum shot' or 'blow job'. This capability, together with developments in capture devices, may explain the increased supply of more novel and 'extreme' content, probably through a combination of consumer demand and producer expectations of generating or accelerating customer demand. Pornhub (2017) has identified a demand for more novel, fantasy-driven content such as pornography involving clowns, Pokémon, politicians, and super heroes.

Experience of content. Technological developments mean that pornography is no longer restricted to static presentations of images or text to a passive audience; it is interactive and immersive. The consumer's ability to interact with pornography has the potential to alter consumption in ways beyond that envisaged by the producer. New kinds of experiences enabled by virtual reality technology and online games present further challenges in determining the best components of a definition of pornography. We discuss technology-enabled sexual interaction and games with pornographic content, potentially mistaken for or identified as pornography, to illustrate the boundaries of our definition.

Technology-enabled sexual interaction. Massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) support the interaction of large numbers of players and can allow sexual interaction between real-world people in an anonymous virtual space. For example, the game site Second Life (http://secondlife.com) provides computer-generated environments populated by avatars. These

animated characters are controlled by an estimated 230,000 (and growing) users around the world (Brophy 2010). An avatar's features, including clothing, texture of hair and skin, and genitalia, can be chosen and modified by the player. For a player's avatar to have sex with another player's avatar in Second Life, each player must buy genitalia and sex positions and find a place to have sex. The sexual imagery produced on screen is created by the intentions of the players.

Another form of sexual interaction is enabled by lost-cost web camera technology characterized by the advent of 'camgirl' websites where a person (typically a woman) engages in sexual behaviour in front of a camera. The action is broadcast as it occurs, to one or millions of customers (Emmett 2001; White 2003). A camgirl website allows viewers to log on to a chat room and communicate with the performer by text message. Audience members can pay ('tip') to request specific sexual acts from the performer. The broadcast images may look similar to pre-recorded videos, but these 'live' performances rely on interaction between the viewer and the performer.

We suggest that, while the visual representation of these experiences could be described as 'pornographic', when technology facilitates interactions between two people using virtual space, it is not pornography but is better described as a sexual encounter or, if money is exchanged, sex work. (If the activity is recorded and later distributed with participants' consent, this could be deemed pornography.)

Games with 'pornographic' content. Games (involving interaction with a user interface to generate visual feedback) that include highly explicit, violent, sexual content have attracted public controversy and have occasionally been labelled pornography. A notorious example is Grand Theft Auto (Wingfield, 2008; Rodenberg, 2013; Taylor, 2014) where players can control what they view by selecting a sexual service from a drop-down menu on the screen: $50 for a blow job, $70 for a 'half-and-half' (half the time in oral sex, the other half in penis-vagina penetration), or $100 for 'everything'. According to one commentator, there is really no need to pay nor to care about the sex worker:

When you're done you leave her there, run the car forward next to her, then reverse, backing over her. You can get out of the car and beat her. She'll let you. Once she's dead, you can grab your money back from the ground. (Rodenberg 2013, unpaginated)

The game does indeed produce interactive sexualized imagery that may sexually arouse the viewer, but arousal is a by-product, not the primary intention. Having sex can be part of a game character's narrative, along with violent activities, including stealing cars. We argue that the primary intentions—entertainment, reward, and quest completion—distinguish a game with so-called 'pornographic' content from pornography.

Pornography games. Unlike MMOG games such as Second Life, online pornography games are one-sided and do not include interactions with another real-world person. The primary intention of the game is sexual arousal. When using a pornography game, a player must choose the right phrases and behaviour to advance the sexual scenario and alter the outcome of what they consume (Brophy 2010). When a single consumer interacts with a product clearly intended for sexual arousal, without intervention by another person during the digitally-depicted sexual activity, it qualifies as pornography.

Interaction and the capacity to construct a sexual experience in digital format have also allowed consumers to engage in sexual violence against digitally-constructed characters, as in the three games we have named. For example, in Drug Rape Girl, the objective of the game is to rape an anime girl. Given the malleability of, interaction with, and immersion in these experiences, the consumer is not a passive observer but an active participant in violent sexual acts, albeit simulated. The social and personal implications of such experiences are important areas for research and reflection.

Virtual reality pornography. Virtual reality technology has allowed the development of pornography that simulates the first-person perspective of a sexual encounter. Using virtual reality goggles, a consumer can access pornography on a website and then experience the content in three dimensions as if it were occurring in front of them. Enabled by stereoscopic 360-degree video

recording, the consumer can view the content from different angles (Virtual Reality Reporter 2017). Some virtual reality technology allows the consumer to attach masturbatory aids, designed to mimic the sensation of the sexual experience (Rice Digital 2016). An early commentator, philosopher Matthew Brophy (2010), noted the ways in which virtual reality could optimize the experience of pornography: veridically (the experience is life-like), through immersion (the consumer becomes integral to the pornography), interactively (the consumer's decisions and actions determine the course of events), and through unboundedness (any pornography is available, no matter how particular, bizarre, or extreme). It offers a horizon of dream-like computer-generated environments and sexual experiences, free of real-word risks and realities (Brophy 2010). In April 2016, Pornhub (2017) gave away 10,000 virtual reality glasses and launched a new virtual reality category, increasing from 30 to 1800 videos in the subsequent year. We consider this to be a new form of interactive, immersive pornography.

Judgement and Perception

Increased access to pornography, changes in content, and widespread consumption of pornography have developed in parallel with what has been called the 'pornification' of culture (Paasonen et al. 2007): Sexual titillation has permeated advertisements, movies, and fashion. Pornification has been proposed as contributing to the popularity of genital cosmetic modification, such as removal of pubic hair and labioplasty (aesthetic surgery on women's labia) (Dobson, McDonald, Kirkman, Souter, and Fisher 2017). Paasonen et al. (2007) specifically referred to pornification in 'Western society'; our experience and discussion derive from Australia and similar cultures.

It is possible that pornification has modified consumers' perceptions of what qualifies as pornography. For example, there have been successful campaigns to remove sexualized content from public spaces, including a Calvin Klein 'gang rape' billboard, sexualized videos on display at an aquatic centre, and *Zoo Weekly* and similar magazines on sale by a supermarket chain (Collective Shout no date). These Australian examples suggest that at least some members of the public may

consider that sexualized advertisements, video clips, and provocative magazines qualify as pornography and that such public displays of pornography are harmful. It is also likely, however, that other members of the public may tolerate, accept, or enjoy the pornification of everyday life and, as a result, will be less likely to perceive sexualized content as pornography. We reiterate that it is important to conduct research in various places over time, as public perceptions of pornography change under the cultural influence of familiar, unforeseen, and unforeseeable phenomena.

Despite the claim that Western culture is pornified, and despite the arguments of those who may label sexualized advertisements and video clips as pornography, we argue that these claims do not fit our definition. The primary intention of the producers is not to arouse the consumer but to sell a product or promote a musician.

Producer Intention: Consent

Changes in modes of production, delivery, and access to sexual material blur the lines of consent. Pornography production used to require costly, bulky video cameras; these have been overtaken by smartphones, mobile devices, affordable computers, and inexpensive miniature cameras. Anyone with a smartphone can make, produce, and distribute sexual material. The ease of production and distribution has introduced problems of consent that need to be considered in any definition of pornography. Familiar examples are sexting and revenge porn.

'Sexting'—sending nude, sexual photographs (or 'selfies') using a mobile device—is part of contemporary relationship communication (Drouin and Landgraff 2012; Dobson and Ringrose 2016; Bates 2017). It is also possible to send sexual video recordings, enabled by mobile phone technology. In these examples, technology is contributing to sexual interaction among people with no intention to distribute the material beyond those involved in the sexual act.

The increasingly familiar practice of sexting by children under the age of 18 (Crofts and Lee 2013) has brought it into the sphere of child pornography; in many countries, the possession or production of sexual or naked images of children is illegal. However, when sexting occurs as part of courtship behaviour between teenagers, legislators in some countries have been petitioned to

decriminalize their behaviour (as was done in Australia in 2014: Witzleb and Crofts 2016). When an adult produces or distributes a sexual image of a child, it remains an offence because children cannot legally give consent. The impossibility of ensuring that material is permanently removed from circulation on the internet means that it is available to be viewed indefinitely, maintaining the victim's experience of abuse (Witzleb and Crofts 2016).

Unlike sexting, which is by definition consensual, 'revenge porn' is the publication of sexual material on a website without the consent of the person depicted (Stroud 2014). Revenge porn usually occurs after a relationship has ended; the vengeful person uses the sexting material that was assumed by the person depicted to be confidential. Revenge porn websites encourage users to submit nude and sexual photographs of their ex-partners for revenge and include the victims' contact details and links to their social media accounts (Citron and Franks 2014). Once images have been shared they have a perpetual life on the internet, with concomitant potential for enduring damage to the victim.

The complexities introduced by mobile technology mean that consent must be part of a definition of pornography that can be used consistently and applied by researchers. Although the word 'pornography' is included in the terms 'revenge pornography' and 'child pornography', we suggest that the inclusion of abusive behaviour (whether against children or adults) in a definition of pornography serves to minimize or even endorse abuse. Our position is consistent with that of the Australian Government's Children's eSafety Commissioner, who stated that the term 'revenge porn' 'can imply fault or blame on behalf of the victim' and called for the use of the alternative terms 'non-consensual sharing of intimate images' or 'non-consensual sharing of private sexual images' and, where appropriate, 'online sexual violation' or 'online sexual abuse'" (Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner 2016, p. 3).

Towards a Working Definition of Pornography For Social Science Researchers

We have attempted to suggest a remedy to the absence and inconsistent use of a definition of pornography in published social science research. We analysed and synthesized essential components of existing definitions and modified the result in relation to the ramifications of the digital age. We acknowledge that a definition of pornography is subject to the varying norms of sexual behaviour and what is identified as pornography across cultures and sub-cultures, and according to time and geography. If a researcher is making a judgement about what is 'sexual', it is the responsibility of the researcher to consider context and to practise reflexivity (reflecting on assumptions and personal experiences that might have influenced their research).

We suggest that social science researchers employing a definition should consider both participants and potential readers. Readers need a clear definition to enable unambiguous understanding of what is being investigated. The provision of a definition to participants will depend on whether researchers require that each participant shares the meaning of the word with the researchers, thus ensuring validity. In these cases, a definition should be given. If researchers seek to understand participants' subjective interpretation of the word 'pornography', it should not be defined in advance.

When social science researchers measure the use of pornography, we recommend that technological developments are incorporated. At the most basic level, it is likely to be useful to include questions about various modes of access and platforms where research participants may be exposed to pornography. It may also be useful to measure the level of realism and violence encountered, as a means of exploring possible mediators of impact on the consumer.

Drawing on existing definitions and the ethical implications of new technologies, we propose a working definition. It will need to evolve with technology to ensure that it remains responsive, useful, and comprehensive:

Pornography: 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.

While our definition contains components that have not changed as result of the digital age, we argue that it is imperative to add consent. This is not because non-consensual production and distribution of pornography is unique to the digital age, but because the increasing social visibility of this phenomenon presents an opportunity to prioritize its prevention. If consent is a component of the definition and it is clear that non-consensual material should not be described as pornography, researchers will avoid the inadvertent appearance of endorsing sexual assault through the connotations of the language used. Including consent in the definition may also change the direction and reflection of research for social science researchers; the dissemination of this research may have ramifications that that extend beyond research in this discipline. It is our hope that discussion of consent will contribute to support for ethical pornography production, and inform legal and health policies that advance initiatives to prevent sexual violence. A definition can be a powerful instigator of social change.

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Chapter 3

An Elaboration of Methods

Having reviewed the literature and developed a working definition of pornography, I set out to collect my own data to help me to understand how young women make sense of pornography. The methodological approaches are detailed within each results paper. Here I provide a detailed explanation of the recruitment process, outlining my considerations and strategy. I then provide a thorough account of my reflexive practice as it pertains to my personal experience and journey throughout my research.

While the specific method of analysis varies in each paper, all modes of analysis assume the social construction of meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). Considering individual psychological experience as a cultural construction (Crossley, 2003), in Chapter 4 I utilise thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) informed by narrative theory (Bruner, 1986) to identify meaning in women's accounts. In Chapters 5 and 6, I utilise discourse analysis (Ussher & Perz, 2014) to understand the shared social assumptions that interacts with and influences individual experience (Harré, 2002).

I have appended several documents related to my procedure. The letter notifying of ethics approval is in Appendix A. The script for screening participants is in Appendix B. The explanatory statement is in Appendix C, the consent form is in Appendix D, and the summary of results form is in Appendix E. I am preparing a report summarising the results for the participants.

I do not name any organisations or people involved in the recruitment process to avoid the potential for identifying participants.

Recruitment

I hoped to recruit young women with diverse experiences; accordingly, I developed a broad and varied recruitment strategy. To appeal to young women, I first considered places that they might frequent and where they may be likely to notice a research advertisement. I then considered what might attract their attention and designed a study logo. Using this logo I developed a recruitment advertisement (Appendix F) that could be shared in digital and printed format. I set up a study-specific website, Facebook page, and Twitter account, and posted the advertisement on these accounts. I asked other account holders to share the advertisement. I contacted the following types of organisations around Australia and requested that they share the advertisement both digitally (via email and social media) and physically (through placing advertisements in publicly visible locations such as noticeboards and toilets): Community centres, multicultural centres, bars,

restaurants, sexual health clinics, women's health organisations, family planning centres, education institutions, and online organisations that claimed interest in promoting sexual health, women's safety, and feminism. I handed out advertisements at a sexual product exhibition. I also approached public figures who have spoken about pornography and requested that they share my advertisement on their social media accounts, inviting them to participate if they wished to do so.

As I received offers of participation, I reviewed the recruitment strategies to determine the methods that were most useful. I also considered the diversity of the volunteers and altered the recruitment strategy accordingly. For example, I found that, when organisations or people shared the advertisement on Facebook, I received more offers for participation through this method; so after initially posting physical advertisements, I focused efforts on digital posting. Approximately halfway through recruitment I also found that I received offers for participation from a higher number of women with university education. I thus attempted to target organisations that would likely attract non-university-educated women and altered my screening process to exclude additional women with a university education (Appendix B). I also considered diversity in opinions expressed about pornography. Many of the initial participants expressed open-minded and positive attitudes towards pornography. In order to seek diversity, I approached organisations I thought might attract the attention of women who were opposed to pornography.

Reflexive practice

My reflexive practice evolved as I integrated cumulative reflection on my research, my professional practice as a psychologist, and my personal experiences. I maintained a diary throughout my candidature recording my thoughts and reflections to assist with my reflexive practice. I also continued to review existing research in the relevant areas (pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships), and this knowledge integrated into my understanding and analysis of each topic. This deepened understanding allowed me to identify further meaning and complexity within women's accounts.

Each stage of interviewing and analysis informed the next. After each interview, I debriefed with my supervisors and reflected on my personal reactions and the meanings in women's accounts. Making these reactions conscious aided me in monitoring their influence on my analysis and interview process. I considered how my assumptions may have influenced the questions I asked or my responses, and how in turn this might have shaped the way that the women responded. Transcribing the interviews presented another opportunity to review my responses and the meanings in women's accounts, one that did not rely so heavily on my memory and my information processing as the interview occurred. As I transcribed the interviews, I was able to consider my tone and questions, and refine my approach for subsequent interviews. For example, when I began interviewing I would ask in response to a woman's account, 'How did that make you feel?' (the

habituated response of a psychologist). I realised this limited the woman's response to the emotional aspect of her experience. While this was important, my aim was to search for meaning, extending beyond the emotional experience. Accordingly, I adjusted my response to, 'What did that mean to you?' Similarly, I was able to listen closely to the pauses, tone, and content of women's accounts. For example, when listening to an interview I noticed that, before providing an explanation, one woman began her response with 'I don't know'. This preface occurred before most of her statements. Noticing the repeated use of this phrase added to the overall meaning conveyed: her experience was conflicting and difficult to reconcile. I noticed that further explanation was provided if I remained silent after the 'I don't know' response, and this was a strategy I utilised in future interviews.

In order to expand my reflexive practice, I conducted an interview with myself using the same interview guide in order to reflect on the aspects of my experience that might be shaping my responses and analysis. It was at this stage that I reflected more deeply on my work with sexual offenders and how this was shaping my assumption that women's experiences with pornography would ultimately result in negative outcomes. I altered my focus on questions and analysis to consider how pornography might contribute positively to women's lives. I realised that I had not asked as thoroughly about experiences that had aided women in their pursuit of pleasure and intimacy, and their understanding of consent. I redirected my focus by searching for meaning in women's accounts that might contradict my views.

I also used painting and artistic expression as part of my reflexive practice. As has been my practice over the years, I used painting to express my experience. While conducting the interviews and during analysis, I used this visual conceptualisation to explore ideas and emotional reactions that occurred in conjunction with my research. This form of non-verbal expression allowed me to understand more about my own responses and provided another framework to build my understanding.

At the time when my own experience of sexual assault occurred, I was conducting analysis on aspects of women's experience that related to consent. I considered pausing my research. However, after careful consideration I decided to use my experience to expand my research practice. I was, however, particularly cognisant of monitoring how my experience might impact on my analysis. I informed my supervisors that the assault had occurred and I engaged in counselling to assist reflection and build awareness of any projection or identification that might be occurring. I also took care to monitor my own wellbeing during this period to ensure my analysis of women's accounts would not cause further harm to myself. Without assuming that my understanding would reflect the experiences of the women I interviewed, I also used aspects of my reflection on my own experience to enhance my understanding and analysis. I was able to consider components of

consent that had not been as obvious to me prior to my assault, such as aspects of relationship dynamics that may inadvertently present complications in navigating sexual encounters and communicating. As a result, I more carefully considered the relationship context described in women's accounts of consent and pornography.

Ethical practice

Pornography and sexuality are sensitive topics. Depending on the participant's history, discussion of such topics has the potential to promote recollection of uncomfortable or emotionally painful experiences. In particular, the potential that participants may disclose experiences sexual trauma was highlighted as a concern. I outline here the precautions I took to minimise this risk, and my assessment of the ethical nature of this research given my observations.

I designed my interview guide with these risks in mind and considered what actions I would take should distress arise. I specified in my interview preamble to participants that they had control over what they shared and should in no way feel pressured to speak about anything they were not comfortable sharing. This was a reiterated in the consent form, at the start of the interview, and prefaced sensitive or difficult questions I asked during the interview. All of my responses during the interview were aimed at contributing to the comfort of the participant and I utilised some of my psychological skills such as mirroring, reflective listening, and affirming comments to achieve this. I specified in the explanatory statement that participants could contact Life Line or their General Practitioner if they became discussed during or following the interview. I reiterated this verbally at the end of the interview.

While I was able to apply some of my psychological skills in the interviews, I did not disclose my practice as psychologist to the participants. I felt this could change the participant's perspective of the interview and research experience and potentially encourage disclosure of distressing information with the expectation of psychological support (that I could not ethically provide in my role as a researcher). My skills did allow me to assess any harm caused to participants during the interview; this I can reflect on here.

While participants shared what appeared to be traumatic experiences and displayed expected emotional responses during the interview, universally, the experience was observed and reported as cathartic and positive. Most woman explained that they had never been able to share their stories with anyone and considered the interview as an anonymous, safe space to speak about these experiences. Furthermore, many of the women expressed satisfaction that sharing their distressing experiences through the research may contribute to helping other women. No woman reported overt distress at the end of the interview. Accordingly, it is my assessment as a

researcher and a psychologist that the interviews appeared to make positive contributions to these women's lives and did not cause harm.

Chapter 4
Additional Results

The women's interviews were frank and revealing, and provided rich data to address my research aim. I recorded 1432 minutes of interviews that I transcribed into 432 pages of data. Initial categorisation of data revealed three matters of importance to the participants: pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships. The results and discussion of each subject area are detailed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. In addition to what I learnt about these three topics, there was rich material on other matters. The scope of the topics discussed was more than I could manage in the course of my candidature. I have detailed plans for further analysis in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 8). Here I provide the details of the demographic data collected from each participant and their reported pornography use.

Participant characteristics

I collected demographic, interview, and recruitment information according to the interview guide (Appendix G). The length of the interview, mode of interview, and source of recruitment were recorded. A record of this information is presented in Table 1. Summaries of these characteristics as they pertain to pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships are provided in each results paper.

There did not appear to be any meaningful difference in the data derived from the modes of interview. Accordingly, this was not considered for further in analysis within each results paper.

The focus of my research was on women who have sex with men. This criterion did not exclude participants who had sex with women. The demographic record identified four women who reported having sex with men and women, and one woman who was in a relationship with a woman.

Table 1

Participant characteristics

Demographic category	Count
Age	
18–21	1
22–25	11
26–30	15
Location	
NSW	2
ACT	3
WA	3
OLD	4
VIC	15
Education	
Year 10	1
Year 12	1
Diploma/certificate	7
Bachelor	15
Master	3
Occupation	
Student	6
Public servant	3
Administration	2
Unemployed	1
Other	15 (travel agent, clerk, designer, educator, lawyer, project coordinator, assistant, advocate, health professional)
Country of Birth	
Australia	21
Canada	2
United Kingdom	2
New Zealand	1
Pakistan	1
Relationship status	
Committed, with a man, live together	9
Committed, with a man, don't live together	7
Single, has sex with males	4
Single, has sex with males and females	4
Single, no sex	2
Committed, with a woman, live together	1
Recruitment	
Facebook	16
Sexual health clinic	4
Email	3
Family planning	2
Purposive	1
Friend	1
Mode of interview	
Phone	21
Face to face	4
Skype	2

Participants' stated pornography use

Women were asked about their pornography use; the questions asked are specified in the interview guide (Appendix G). A complete record of their responses is presented in Table 2. A summary of these data relevant to pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships is in each paper.

Table 2 presents the women's patterns of pornography use. Although these patterns are not relevant to the topics explored during my candidature, they are worthy of exploration in the future. For example, out of the women who watched pornography themselves, no woman paid for pornography. Observing the responses to specific preferences for pornography content, it is interesting to note that most women did not indicate a preference regarding the physical attributes of the pornography actors.

Table 2

Participants' stated pornography use

Interview number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19*	20*	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	Total
Frequency of use																												
Never/not currently		1							1	1													1	1	1		1	7
1 month – 1 year			1			1																						2
Monthly														1		1		1			1					1		5
Fortnightly				1				1			1	1					1			1		1						7
Weekly					1										1				1									3
Biweekly	1						1						1															3
Duration of use																												
< 30 mins	1				1			1			1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1				1		14
> 30 mins			1	1		1	1					1									1							6
Content viewed																												
Free	1		1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1				1		20
Paid																												0
Featuring																												
Solo males															1							1						2
Transsexual	1		1																			1						3
Males & males													1		1						1	1						4
Objects	1		1	1			1				1	1				1	1					1						9
Solo females	1		1	1	1						1	1		1	1	1						1						10
Females & females	1		1	1							1	1	1	1	1	1	1					1				1		12
2+ people	1		1		1	1	1				1	1	1			1	1		1			1				1		13
Males & females	1		1	1	1	1	1				1	1	1	1	1			1			1	1	1	1		1		17
Sexual acts																												
Anal penetration	1			1			1						1		1	1		1				1				1		9
Object penetration	1			1							1		1		1	1		1			1	1				1		10
Solo masturbation			1	1							1	1		1	1	1					1	1				1		10
Fellatio	1			1			1	1			1	1		1	1			1	1		1	1				1		13
Vaginal penetration	1			1	1			1			1		1	1	1	1	1	1				1				1		13
Mutual masturbation	1			1		1		1			1	1	1	1	1		1	1			1	1				1		14
Cunnilingus	1	1	1	1	1		1				1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1		1	1				1		17
Selects genres based on:																												
Bodily function																												0
Other fetish																												0
Hair type			1																									1
Body features			1																									1
Race			1																									1
Age	1		1																									2
Comp generated	1														1													2
Reality (amateur)					1											1						1						3
Other								1							1			1				1						4
Bondage/BDSM	1			1			1										1		1									5

* Only consumed written pornography

Chapter 5

Pornography and Pleasure

This chapter is the following publication:

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (Submitted, 2018). Pornography and women's sexual pleasure: Accounts from young women in Australia.

Pornography and Women's Sexual Pleasure: Accounts from Young Women in Australia

Sarah Ashton, Karalyn McDonald, and Maggie Kirkman

Abstract

Understanding how young women experience pornography is a modern imperative in promoting sexual health. There has been, until now, no Australian research exploring what pornography means to women in relation to sexual pleasure. We conducted in-depth interviews with 27 women from around Australia. A thematic analysis of their accounts, supported by narrative theory, revealed that pornography both enhanced and interfered with pleasure. Women described pornography's contributions to the enhancement of pleasure through solo pleasure, shared viewing with partners, discovering new sexual preferences, and reassurance about body appearance. 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. It was evident in women's accounts that pornography plays complex, dynamic roles in the production of pleasure, acting in the domains of physiology, psychology, relationships, ethics, society, and culture.

Introduction

Pornography offers omnipresent, private, easily accessible, visually detailed, stimulating depictions of sexual activity; it is becoming the preferred form of sexual information for young women (Ashton et al., 2018). Unlike other media content, it is likely to be accompanied or followed by the experience of sexual arousal. Research has often focused on the potential harms of pornography, particularly the ways in which it condones or encourages violent or disrespectful behaviour (Short, 2012), usually directed at women. There has been little discussion of the potential for sexual pleasure associated with pornography. Historically, culturally, and in pornography research, women's sexual pleasure has received much less attention than men's (Jolly et al., 2013a). According to the World Health Organization (2017, unpaginated), "understanding sexuality and experiencing sexual pleasure in the context of a respectful relationship is a human right". Given the ubiquity of pornography, it is vital to understand the ramifications of pornography for women's sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure, in itself, is enigmatic. This paper is an attempt to comprehend sexual pleasure and pornography from the perspective of young women who have sex with men, as a means to support women's health and wellbeing.

Sexual Pleasure

Sexual pleasure as a concept is often used without definition or applied only to limited sexual experience, most often to reaching orgasm. The factors that influence and play a role in women's experience of pleasure, however, are complex and multifaceted, occurring in physiological, psychological, relational, and cultural domains (Nagoski, 2015). Each aspect (and their interaction) must be considered in attempting to understand sexual pleasure.

Physiologically, distribution of vulvar nerve endings is not only extensive but varies among women (Foldes & Buisson, 2009). The physical differences in pleasure that women report could, in part, be attributed to differences in the engorgement and shape of the clitoris and its contact with internal and external vulvar structures (Foldes & Buisson, 2009).

A woman's psychological state also influences her experience of pleasure (Graham et al., 2004). Psychological stress (Laan & van Lunsen, 2016), negative mood (Graham et al., 2004), apprehension about vaginal lubrication (Fahs, 2017), concern about appearance, and a low assessment of self-worth (Brassard et al., 2015) are among the conditions found to reduce pleasure. Researchers have also described women's ability to suspend cognitive engagement with reality (Goldey et al., 2016: p. 2147) as conducive to sexual pleasure.

Sexual pleasure within a relationship can be distinguished from solo pleasure (Goldey et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2004). Women in focus groups indicated (with differences according to sexual orientation) that partnered sexual pleasure was associated with trust, closeness, partner's pleasure, and feeling desired; solitary pleasure was associated with autonomy and compensation for being without or having an unavailable partner (Goldey et al., 2016). Women who assessed attachment to their partner as secure were more likely than those not securely attached to report being sexually satisfied (Brassard et al., 2015; Laan & van Lunsen, 2016). Young women and men tend to experience gendered expectations that men's pleasure is paramount and that women are positioned as the means through which men achieve sexual pleasure (Brown, Schmidt, & Robertson, 2018).

Women—and their partners, friends, and family—are positioned within cultural discourses that construct what it is to be female (Nosek et al., 2011). Women's experience of pleasure is shaped by denial or fear of their sexuality, symptomatic of the gendered distribution of power (Jolly et al., 2013b). Discourses of the clitoris exemplify women's subordinate position (Laqueur, 1990). Pleasure experienced from clitoral stimulation, rather than from penis-vagina penetration, has been identified as "threatening" or dismissed as "immature" (Freud, 1905; Horrocks, 1997, p. 102). It has been argued that the stigmatisation of pleasure from clitoral stimulation and the lack of research both serve to defend the nuclear family, which is of economic, social, and emotional benefit to men (Firestone, 1970; Jolly et al., 2013b). Women who express sexual desire or pursue sexual pleasure have been subject to castigation and imputations of poor character and values (Attwood, 2007). The discourse of a virtuous, nurturing, respectable woman is that she is sexually naive or submits to

penetrative sex in marriage. This narrow positioning limits and denies women's right to sexual pleasure beyond these parameters.

The sex-positive movement, in response, has advocated (among other things) for women's freedom to seek and express sexual pleasure, especially through orgasms, and to do so without conventional restrictions (Fahs, 2014). So-called 'sexual dysfunction' (Davis, Guay, Shifren, & Mazer, 2004) is the medicalised reification of the logical extreme of sex positivism, in which the diversity of women's sexual desire and experiences is dismissed and women who do not seek, have, or enjoy orgasms are pathologised (Canner, 2008; Fahs, 2014). There is evidence that women's orgasms can be experienced or assessed as a masculine achievement rather than a source of female pleasure (Chadwick & Anders, 2017; Fahs, 2014). Critics of the sex positive movement and women's 'sexual dysfunction' have argued that women's freedom *not* to have an orgasm is restricted by assuming that women need orgasms to be liberated or to have pleasure in a sexual relationship (Bell & McClelland, 2018). These perspectives on women's sexual pleasure are reflected in pornography.

Pornography

We define pornography as "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., Accepted 2018). Women experience pornography intentionally and unintentionally, directly, or indirectly through use by their peers and partners, and by being part of a culture where pornography consumption is prevalent (Ashton et al., 2018). The widespread cultural absorption of pornography has been described as the pornification of culture (Paasonen et al., 2007), demanding "porno-chic" of women (Evans, 2010).

Feminists have long argued that pornography contributes to the devaluation of women and the maintenance of men's power (Dworkin, 1981); research with women has confirmed this position (Ciclitira, 2004). More recently, it has been posited that consumerist culture works with

postfeminism to construct sexual pleasure as a goal of feminine achievement, consistent not only with sex positivism but also with neoliberal entitlement and choice, in which consumption of pornography plays a part (Gurevich et al, 2017). In a pornified culture, women are said to claim agency and sexual rights through taking ownership of their own sexual objectification (also referred to as self-objectification: Gill, 2007). In this discursive construction, pornography is an anchor of cultural practice, contributing to women's performance of empowered pleasure (Gurevich et al., 2017).

Instead of condemning pornography, the postfeminist and sex-positive movements have encouraged the production of pornography designed to be more ethical and feminist (Bell & McClelland, 2018; Taormino, 2013). Its producers claim to prioritise actors' wellbeing, including their consent, and to represent diverse bodies and sexual acts (Fritz & Paul, 2017; Taormino, 2013). This contrasts with non-feminist pornography which tends to represent only a narrow range of bodies, sexual dynamics, and sexual acts, and commonly includes non-consensual violence (Fritz & Paul, 2017; Klassen & Peter, 2015; Purcell, 2014).

Our review of the limited literature reporting qualitative research on women's experience of pornography revealed that pornography's role in their lives is complex, nuanced, and often paradoxical (Ashton et al., 2018). Sexual pleasure was reported in only two papers; women were found to be influenced by their perception of the emotional labour of the pornography actors, resulting in concern for the actors and uncertainty about their own pleasure associated with pornography (Ciclitira, 2004; Parvez, 2006). An investigation of what the mainstreaming of pornography meant to young Canadian women found that pornography was seen as a template of sexual possibilities and a ridiculous recapitulation of performance, at once rejected and an unavoidable reference point (Gurevich et al., 2017). More recent research found that women reported (in group discussions) that they practised agency in consuming pornography to avoid encountering material that could impede their sexual pleasure (Chadwick et al., 2018).

Existing research provides an important foundation for beginning to understand the relationship between pornography and women's sexual pleasure, as well as the cultural discourses within which these experiences are interpreted. However, more evidence is needed of how women themselves understand sexual pleasure in the context of pornography. The aim of this research was to increase our knowledge by consulting young women who have sex with men. We chose "young" as those most likely to have encountered pornography at its intersection with the digital age. We specified "women who have or intend to have sex with men" for two main reasons: to emphasise practice rather than to impose or assume an identity, and because we were interested in gendered discourses. We hoped to attract anyone who identified as a woman, without expecting only cisgender volunteers.

Method

The research reported here is a component of an investigation of what pornography means to young women in Australia. The project was approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (CF16/1229-2016000655).

Participants and Recruitment

Women aged 18-30 years were purposively recruited to ensure diverse backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes to pornography. We limited recruitment to Australian residents to ensure a consistent legislative background and likely access or potential exposure to pornography. The researchers are resident in Australia and understand the social and political context. A desire to conduct interviews in person where possible, without research funding for travel, also set practical limitations on recruitment. A flyer calling for volunteers was headed "Young women & pornography", followed by "We want to hear your story". (The flyer is appended.) The flyer was distributed via Facebook, Twitter, women's health groups, sexual health clinics, and notices in

public buildings. We sought to recruit about 25 women because experience suggested that would yield sufficient data to achieve the research aims.

Procedure

Screening questions, to assess eligibility, were asked of each woman who inquired about the research; these established her age and that she had had or intended to have sex with men. We did not ask volunteers whether they were cisgender. After the initial period of recruitment, women were also asked about their level of education in order to ensure diversity. The reason for the questions was explained. An information and consent package was sent to eligible women. Volunteers could return signed consent forms before the interview or, if they preferred, give (recorded) oral consent at the beginning of the interview. Women could choose to be interviewed face-to-face, by telephone, or on Skype.

Before each interview, women were reminded that they could share as much or as little as they liked. The interviewer (the first author) then said, "*As you know, we are interested in speaking with women about pornography. Can you tell me what you thought when you saw the advertisement? Is there a story you wanted to tell?*" The interviewer pursued topics of importance to each woman, while being alert to opportunities to ask about matters such as use of or exposure to pornography, unwanted sexual practice, and sexual pleasure. (The interview guide is appended.) At the end of the interview, women supplied brief demographic details, chose a pseudonym, and were invited to communicate anything else they wanted to say by email or in a subsequent interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were uploaded onto NVivo (2015) to assist with data management.

Analysis

After repeated reading of transcripts and validation against audio recordings, transcripts were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They were searched for the words "pleasure",

"orgasm", and "masturbate" and more subtle accounts of sexual pleasure. As themes were identified in each transcript, a hierarchy of themes was developed and revised. All transcripts were re-read to ensure that themes were accurate and comprehensive. Drawing on narrative theory (Kirkman, 2002), specifically Bruner's (1986) narrative mode of thought, transcripts were reassessed to identify how women's accounts as a whole associated sexual pleasure with pornography. Discussion within the research team continued until consensus on the results and interpretation was reached.

Reflexive Statement

The authors are cisgender women and feminists, aged from early thirties to early seventies. We were alert to our potential biases and reflected on our responses to the interviews in discussions within the team and in formal meetings with trusted colleagues. The interviewer took care to ensure the safety and comfort of each woman and framed questions and interactions using the woman's vocabulary, which could vary (but not systematically) according to education, identity, and cultural background. The introduction to the interview was designed to ensure that the women had a chance to speak before the interviewer used her own language about sex, sexuality, or pornography. At all times we strove to respect the women's accounts and to understand sexual pleasure and pornography from each woman's perspective.

Results

Interviews were conducted with 27 women from September 2016 to June 2017; each lasted about one hour (range 37–86 minutes). Most (20) interviews were conducted by phone; the remainder were in person. Facebook was the most common recruitment source (14 women). Women were aged 18–30 years (mean 25) and came from all over Australia: Victoria (14), Queensland (4), Australian Capital Territory (3), New South Wales (2), and Western Australia (2). All had completed secondary education and 19 had university degrees. The six women who referred

to cultural origins other than "Australia" named Canada, Macedonia, Pakistan, New Zealand, and United Kingdom. One woman identified as Muslim and five as Christian; the remainder did not mention a faith affiliation. About half (14) of the women said they were in an intimate relationship. Pornography use varied: four used at least once a week, five about twice a month, seven about once a month, three reported occasional use, and eight women reported no intentional use. Most women referred to "viewing" pornography, while eight (also) "read" it. Eight women spontaneously used the word "pleasure" and a further six women alluded to sexual pleasure without being prompted to do so. The interviewer raised the topic with the remaining 13 women.

It was apparent from all accounts that women's construction of pleasure in relation to pornography had changed over time and according to their circumstances. Some women described changes in meaning associated with different life stages. Others had not discussed pornography in any detail before the interview and, unsurprisingly, tended to modify their assessments as they reflected on the topic. Women represented pornography as both enhancing and impeding sexual pleasure. For clarity, we present our results organised around this binary, emphasising that it applies to women's constructions of pornography and pleasure, not to the women themselves: the women are not sorted into two groups.

Pornography Enhances Pleasure

Some women described pornography as enhancing solo and partnered pleasure. Sexual images could directly provoke physical arousal through voyeurism or taking the perspective of an actor, or indirectly moderate women's expectations or experience of pleasure. Women said they found it liberating to see diverse bodies represented in pornography, encouraging them to accept their own appearance. They and their sexual partners could use pornography to learn about and practise new sexual activities and to enhance shared pleasure. Women also said that pornography contributed to their private sexual fantasies, which they differentiated from their preferences for sexual practice. Women who found that pornography enhanced their pleasure tended to describe

drawing on other sources of information about sex and pleasure, including formal education and solo or partner experimentation, either before or after their initial use of pornography.

Solo pleasure. Almost half of the women reported using pornography as a masturbation aid; the visual stimulation heightened their pleasure. They described the physical changes, such as increased vaginal lubrication, accompanying arousal:

I get wetter when I am watching porn than I do when I am just trying to picture images in my head or think of something that I like, so I think my body gets more excited. (Bridget)

When viewing pornography, women could sometimes identify with a female character (and thus experience similar sensations) or derive pleasure as an observer. For example, Lola described her arousal with and without watching pornography:

Generally, … watching porn is more voyeuristic, whereas if I am left to my own devices … to masturbate, ... I can generally imagine myself; there is a real disconnect. *[I: So if you are masturbating without porn, then you imagine something happening to you?]* Yes.

Shared viewing. Some women reported that shared viewing of pornography contributed to pleasure with partners. Lou described watching "threesome" pornography with her partner as a "really positive experience", Samantha characterised viewing pornography as part of a relationship as "a tool for sexual exploration and closeness", and Jennifer found it to be "a turn-on" that took their sex "to another level".

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.

New sexual preferences. According to some women, pornography allowed them to reflect emotionally and cognitively on sexual acts. Such acts could remain fantasies or women could explore them within their sexual relationships. Describing the direct effect of pornography on real-life sexual acts, Bridget said that it had influenced her preference for urination and watching men ejaculate as part of sex with a partner. Although she was sexually aroused by watching pornography featuring urination and ejaculation, she experienced them differently when enacting these fantasies with a partner:

> I have done water sports with partners. … It is actually a different experience to watching the porn and, like, masturbating on my own. With partners, it feels like it is more of a closeness thing. So it's something I do when I genuinely care about someone, whereas when I watch the porn it's not; it's just to have an orgasm. … With ejaculation, it's—I think a lot of my focus on sex goes towards that. … I prefer to have them ejaculate like inside me. And I like, I do like to watch them do it when they can't ejaculate inside me.

> A few women distinguished their preferences in pornography from their preferences for actual sexual behaviour. While imagined sexual acts may be arousing, these women described practical implications that militated against enacting them in their relationships. Eve discussed her fantasy of a threesome with two men:

> I am a lot more aroused by the idea of it and it might be something I will maybe explore one day, but … the actual logistics of it and the actual thought of it being me: Nah, I'm not really into that. Like I am in theory, but not in my own practice.

> Rochelle also enjoyed viewing threesomes in pornography but dismissed it as "just a fantasy", saying she "wouldn't introduce anyone else into the bedroom". Similarly, Lola described

the "disconnect" between her enjoyment of anal sex and "forced blow jobs" in pornography and her distaste for these activities in real life. Lola could not explain this disconnect.

Jennifer said she had begun to view bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism (BDSM) pornography with her partner and sometimes on her own, describing her choice of pornography as different when she was single. Jennifer thought her pornography preferences arose from emotional needs and whether they are met by her partners:

> When I am single, I am not really that sexually active, so I guess I'm like craving something a bit more romantic, … whereas when I'm in a relationship I already get that.

Body appearance. Pornography was also represented as enhancing women's confidence and acceptance of their bodies, which heightened their experience of pleasure. Chloe and Rochelle were among the women who said that feeling unattractive or uncomfortable about their bodies reduced their capacity for pleasure. However, diverse bodies in pornography could be reassuring:

> I think porn has made me less self-conscious. … There is all like different categories, … like with larger people. … I used to weigh a lot more; … I would be thinking in my head, 'What are they thinking about me?' My mind would be running off, and now I can just like … concentrate on the job. … I find it a lot easier to come now. (Rochelle)

Pornography Impedes Sexual Pleasure

Some women, including those who described pornography as enhancing their pleasure, gave accounts of pornography impeding pleasure. In particular, it was characterised as misrepresenting female pleasure and women's bodies and as prioritising male pleasure. Women's pleasure could also be disrupted by concern for the wellbeing and fair treatment of the actors. When they reflected on experiencing pleasure with a partner, all women identified intimacy as a necessary precursor to

pleasure; this, too, was vulnerable to adverse effects of pornography, especially when women interpreted their partner's use of pornography as "addiction".

Misrepresentation. When explaining what they like to see in pornography, Alissa, Bonnie, Claire, Jennifer, Joan, and Rachel said they preferred content that was "realistic", which they related to bodies, sexual acts, stories, and expressions of enjoyment. Some women identified realism in the representation of diverse bodies and sexual practices; others thought pornography was realistic when it was similar to their own bodies and experiences. Women who referred to "feminist pornography" in relation to realism expressed dislike of "inaccurate" or "artificial" representations of bodies and sex, finding them as neither arousing nor interesting. In particular, pornography's representation of women's bodies and its tendency to prioritise male pleasure were reported as interfering with women's experience of both solo and partnered pleasure.

Misrepresenting female pleasure. Charlotte, Chloe, Joan, and Samantha said that pornography inaccurately depicted how they experienced pleasure and how they believed most women experience it. They described it as difficult to relate to the content, as in Joan's example of reading pornography:

> They go into descriptions of, I don't know, fucking really hard or something along those lines which, yeah, there is, for me at least, not a whole lot of pleasure without clitoral stimulation. So, just the idea of a hard penis banging really hard is definitely not very appealing.

Women criticised depictions female actors' rapid arousal, easy orgasm, and lurid vocalisations during sex to indicate pleasure. When pornography was a woman's initiation into sexual information, it was described as establishing expectations of how pleasure should be experienced and demonstrated. If sex with a partner failed to fulfil women's expectations, they

often felt disappointed or considered their experience abnormal. Jennifer was concerned about pornography's adverse effect on young people:

You know sometimes how porn isn't so realistic? You know, the girl is wet all of a sudden, aroused and ready to go within seconds, or the guy has a huge penis or things like that. So I think that might influence, ah, teenagers or whatever as they are slowly exploring their sexual 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. Samantha reported deriving more pleasure from clitoral stimulation during masturbation than through penetrative sex and concluded that she must be "defective". She dealt with these perceived failures by "faking" orgasm during penetrative sex to feel "normal". It was only years later, in longer-term relationships where she felt "more safe", that Samantha began to understand how to experience her own pleasure with penetrative sex.

Chloe said that watching pornography led her to believe she had to be "noisy" to experience pleasure:

In porn videos, no one is ever quiet; they are always really, really loud. So now I think … if you are being quiet you are not actually enjoying yourself.

Charlotte had inferred from pornography that women are always ready for sex and that pleasure means orgasm. This was not true of her current sexual relationship:

I would have expected there to be always pleasure, as in always going to be an orgasm and obviously it is very different to that. Sometimes I won't orgasm and sometimes he won't orgasm. Sometimes he can't get it up and sometimes I just can't get wet. … There is always the image in pornography that blokes will come, and pretty much on demand, and that the woman is always willing.

Implicit in these accounts is women's tendency to assume responsibility for their own sexual pleasure. If they were not quickly aroused, experiencing pleasure from penetrative sex with their partners, or making sufficient noise, they were likely to consider themselves flawed. It appeared that, when women experienced sustained, emotionally supportive sexual relationships, they were enabled to explore new sex acts, thereby increasing their understanding of bodies and sex and adjusting their perception of 'normal'.

Prioritising male pleasure. Four women assessed pornography as constructed around male pleasure. Elizabeth found pornography's depiction of sex to be "all about the man, the man, the man; … the woman doesn't really get a say". Chloe said that women's pleasure features only if it "fits the mould: … really quick" and is considered "secondary" to male pleasure. Such assessments informed women's narrative identities as sexual beings and their expectations of sexual performance. It was common for women to give accounts of focusing on their partner's pleasure during sex; their own pleasure was secondary. Anna, for example, described learning from pornography how to "perform" sex to please a man, saying that this reduced her own potential for pleasure.

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". Elizabeth was also accustomed to sexual partners who were "focusing on their pleasure" when she did not "know my body as well". It was only after she began a relationship with a partner who was interested in her sexual pleasure that Elizabeth realised that "sex actually feels good".

According to Elizabeth and Megan, their partners' consumption of pornography provoked requests for sexual acts that would please the men. These requests did not support the women's or mutual pleasure. Women generally felt that pornography's focus on male pleasure meant less pleasure for women in real life. Megan found that, when her partner began to consume

pornography, he wanted her to perform different sexual acts. She attempted to accede, to please him, by maintaining a "state of denial" and trying to "convince" herself that this was what she also wanted. Ultimately, however, Megan "just felt like an object". Similarly, Elizabeth spoke about her early sexual experiences with a partner who watched pornography. She felt that their sex was "all about him" and that pornography had influenced his preference for "aggressive" sex where he would "hold my face down". He "degraded me so much", both physically and verbally, telling her she was "terrible at sex things". Elizabeth said that she never enjoyed these sexual experiences but believed at the time that they reflected the reality of sex and pleasure.

Comparing bodies. While some women said that the varied bodies in pornography enhanced their confidence, more women identified the bodies typically presented in pornography as "fake" or imposing unrealistic expectations of beauty, body size (slim), breast "perkiness" and (large) size, and genital appearance (no or topiaried pubic hair, invisible labia minora). Women's comments implied that they perceived bodies in pornography as defined by sexual attractiveness and that they saw this as part of a culture that sets idealised standards for women's appearance. These women described comparing their bodies to pornography actors and feeling inadequate or anxious. Underscoring this sense of failing to achieve an acceptable body was the assumption that their male partners would measure them against the actors, whose bodies they found to be more arousing.

Women, for example Bridget, could experience these thoughts and feelings as distractions from pleasure during sex with a partner, with her inner voice saying:

'This woman is clearly slimmer than me, or has better breasts than me', or whatever, and I would always feel really awkward being naked in front of a screen with another women who I thought was infinitely better looking. … I was self-conscious … if I was on top when we were having sex: Was my stomach too big? Were my breasts—how did they look? Did they look funny? Were they hanging down? And just, I suppose, the whole experience wasn't as pleasurable.

In contrast, Bridget discussed having sex with another partner, whose body type was similar to hers, who did not talk about pornography and with whom she did not watch pornography. Bridget found the sex to be "infinitely better" because she was not worried about how he perceived her body.

Concern for actors. Nearly all the women said they had reflected on the experiences of pornography actors. Women expressed concern about the actors being misrepresented in production and that they may be displaying scripted behaviour, without genuine emotions or arousal. They also discussed the possibility that actors might not be consensually engaged in sexual acts. Some women could not be aroused by pornography if they suspected that an actor was not experiencing pleasure:

> If I thought that someone was genuinely being abused, or it seemed dodgy and you are like, 'That girl is not 18!' or whatever, I would close every window. I would not even think about watching it. … What can be such a turn-on then becomes like, well, it is quite degrading. It's also because you're not in the moment any more, and that would be true if you were having sex. (Eve)

A few women described seeking solutions to this concern and its implications. Anna, for example, endeavoured to suppress awareness of the people behind the fantasy. She cited a Louis Theroux documentary about pornography actors, from which she concluded that "maybe 5 times or 6 times out of 10 they might not want to do that job". To achieve arousal, Anna said "you just don't think about it". She likened it to watching a movie where "you are invested in the story". However, her repression was temporary. "Obviously, outside of the rolling camera and stuff, that's when they are a real person and you think, 'That's a hard thing to have to do'." Explaining why she continued watching pornography despite concern for the actors, Chloe identified tensions between her thoughts and her physical experiences. "You know it's wrong in your brain, but your body can still be like, 'Yeah, I am enjoying this'." She justified her apparent ethical breach by explaining that, if

actors were "paid reasonably and fairly", she would "feel a bit better about it", thus mitigating the conflict.

Some women sought what they perceived to be "ethical" pornography, or alternatively paid or considered paying for pornography from websites promoting consensual production. This overcame their concerns for the actors' wellbeing which improved their own experience of pleasure. Bridget, for example, had heard about "some of these porn stars' lives", leaving her "shocked" about "how bad their lives can be". Her solution was to select content that she believed the actors themselves had uploaded. Bridget used this as an indication that they were "willingly engaging" and "genuinely aroused by what they are doing", which gave her permission to watch for her own pleasure. Eve had attempted to resolve the disruption of her pleasure caused by concern for the actors by joining an "ethical site". She "love[d] reading about sites run by feminists or gay women" because "they are trying to change the paradigm". However, she admitted she was yet to "put my money where my mouth is", having "never paid for porn". Other women were unable to find a solution to this dilemma. Tess said she had no evidence of the actors' conditions or experiences or the possibility of harm and therefore this lack of information remained a barrier to deriving pleasure from pornography.

Lola dismissed the rhetoric around female actors' exploitation as inaccurate and demeaning, preferring to construct the actors as sexually autonomous. She reported regular consumption of pornography without limiting her own pleasure:

> The big sort of rhetoric I see around it is that women are just used as a means to an end, and they [critics] take away the women's autonomy within the porn industry. So they look at it as if they are being forced into it, or they are being exploited, or they are just being used as a means to an end. Whereas, again, they have consented to it. It's their chosen profession. Don't take away their sexual autonomy for that.

Disrupting relationships. All women said or implied that intimacy was the paramount condition for partnered pleasure. When pornography was experienced as interfering with intimacy, it was perceived as threatening the relationship or betraying it. Pornography that was detrimental to the relationship, whether consumed by the women or their partners, was described by women as reducing their pleasure. It was typically associated with accounts of "pornography-addicted" partners, underscored by a belief that sexual pleasure belongs within relationships, associated with values antithetical to pornography. Women's accounts of relationships disrupted by pornography were usually part of a broader relationship narrative characterised by a lack respect and trust.

"Pornography-addicted" partner. Bridget and Megan spoke about relationships with men whom they believed were "addicted" to pornography. Both women specified emotional connection as a necessary precursor to their sexual pleasure and experienced their partner's "addiction" as disrupting that connection. Bridget felt that her partner had come to derive pleasure from pornography rather than from their relationship:

> I like to see the other person, um, feeling pleasure themselves, and it stopped. I didn't feel as connected to him as I wanted to. I felt like it was something we couldn't share, at a certain level. It felt physical and not, really, very emotional.

> As his "addiction" progressed, Megan's partner left her feeling like "an object" when they had sex; she said that she was the "only one putting any emotion into it". Megan's sense of exclusion was epitomised by her recollection that "he preferred that I faced away from him, as well, in most positions".

Pleasure is for relationships. Some women revealed their belief that pleasure should occur within a relationship rather than being pursued singly, including by a woman. Mariam asserted that sex (and presumably pleasure) should not exist outside a relationship. She rejected pornography and

did not use it herself, arguing that pornography depicts sex and women's bodies as existing for entertainment. Pornography was not aligned with her values or her emotions:

> That is my, my moral leaning, that sex is not entertainment. Sex should not be available for you to watch when you want, how you want it; whatever fantasies you like that should be able to come alive. I really think that sex is a private matter that should be between two people in a loving relationship.

Some of these women associated shame with sexual pleasure that was derived singly or without intimacy, while others considered it a form of infidelity. Rachel, who was in a committed relationship, said:

> Because I am in a long-term relationship—and this is going to sound so silly—but I feel like if I watched porn it would almost be like cheating.

Faith and intimacy. The ways in which a few women constructed the experience of pleasure in relation to pornography appeared to be informed by their faith. Molly had come to a new understanding of pornography after hearing it explained by an anti-pornography activist and reconnecting with Christianity. Both events contributed to the value she placed on the importance of marriage and fidelity. With this new-found perspective, Molly reflected on her teenage sexual experiences and concluded that they were shaped by her male partners' consumption of pornography:

> A lot of my sexual experiences as a younger person were feeling used for my body, and feeling used for just a sexual tool, almost, just to get off. … They would ask me to do things and there was not much intimacy. … Now, looking into the research behind porn, you can see where they are getting their scripts from, where they are getting their narrative from.

Elizabeth, who identified as Christian and described herself as a "reformed pornography addict", preferred to experience pleasure through intimate partnered sex:

For me or someone with a Christian worldview, there would be no healthy

consumption [of pornography], because we are told to keep our, keep sex for our

future spouse, the one we are going to be with forever and unconditionally love and

sacrifice. … If you are in a relationship, as well, to me it's [pornography] cheating. It's

looking at another man or woman and imagining you are having sex with them.

Mariam, a married Muslim, experienced the unexpected discovery of her husband's

pornography consumption as infidelity. Her interpretation arose from religious teaching.

In Islam, … we believe … Jesus is a prophet, and one of the things that Jesus said …

[is that] another form of adultery is cheating with the eyes, … because you have

consumed another women's body, maybe not physically but certainly with your

mind. … It is eliciting this sexual reaction … based on a woman that is not his wife.

Her husband's "infidelity" through pornography adversely affected Mariam's sexual pleasure. She

experienced intrusive thoughts during sex and found herself resenting satisfying him because she

believed he had sought satisfaction elsewhere:

I was just thinking about it the whole time. … How could he be enjoying this when the

woman he watched two nights ago … was nothing like me? … It felt wrong having

sex with him because, well, I am rewarding bad behaviour. So for the longest time I

didn't really like it, because I was like, why should he get sex from me if he has done

the wrong thing? Why should I open that part, like that intimate part of me to someone

else who has kind of abused the trust that I gave to them?

Feminism and intimacy. Some women credited feminism with shaping their understanding

of pornography and what to expect from a relationship. Tess's introduction to feminist theory, for

example, was formative in her construction of pornography, influencing her experience of pleasure.

Tess described herself as having had an "addiction" to pornography; looking at abusive or violent

pornography gave her a "rush feeling" that she had tried to replicate with a male partner. Once she began to read "old school" feminist theory, Tess reconsidered her relationship with pornography:

> I think that was one of the biggest kind of themes that I got out of, particularly, what I was reading about feminism and porn, and then applying it to what I was watching. It did make me sit back and go, would any of this be okay outside of a sexual context? And I definitely realised it was that, sort of thing, in no other circumstance of life would I see this acceptable. It is literally only when it becomes sexualised then it becomes acceptable, and that just didn't seem particularly right.

Tess ceased using pornography and shortly afterward began a relationship with a woman. She limited herself to engaging only in sex arising from emotional connection. Tess came to understand sex with her male partner as emotionally disconnected. The "rush" of pleasure from looking at pornography and replicating the acts with the male partner she reframed as "fetishised" and "disassociated" compared to the pleasure she experienced from emotionally connected sex with her female partner. The latter was congruent with her values.

Discussion

This first Australian investigation of what sexual pleasure means to young women (who have sex with men) in relation to pornography revealed young women's constructions to be complex and nuanced. Women gave accounts of pornography as both enhancing and disrupting their experiences of solo or partnered pleasure in physiological, psychological, relational, and cultural domains. The association between pleasure and pornography was temporally and contextually dynamic. Women reported experiencing pornography both as manufactured communication and as a pervasive cultural influence on sexual behaviour and bodily aesthetics. These results are consistent with and extend the results of our systematic review of qualitative research on women's experiences of pornography (Ashton et al., 2018) and what has been found since by Brown et al. (2018), Gurevich et al. (2017), and Chadwick et al. (2018).

There was evidence of discursive alignment with traditional constructs of gender. Gender roles extend and embody power distribution (Butler, 1990), characterised in these accounts by women's adoption of responsibility for the wellbeing of their relationships and a subservient, 'pleasing' role. Women appeared to subordinate their own pleasure as essential to the maintenance of connection and harmony with their male partners. Pornography provided a template for women to learn how to please a partner or submit to his enactment of sexual behaviour seen in pornography. Women's obligation to prioritise men's pleasure (Brown et al., 2018) entailed denial or diminution of their bodily, emotional, and relational needs and desires. Further, some women were inhibited from the pursuit of personal pleasure by their positioning in a discourse constructing pleasure as derived only from a relationship. This discourse contributes to the construct of the nuclear family as the fundamental social dynamic, which is of economic, social, and emotional benefit to men (Firestone, 1970).

There was also parallel positioning within a postfeminist discourse of women's agency and entitlement, among other things, to sexual pleasure (Gill, 2007; Gurevich et al., 2017). This discourse was evident in women's accounts of using pornography, whether alone or partnered, to increase stimulation or satisfy their sexual interests. Women claimed the pursuit of sexual pleasure as their right and pornography as a vehicle for their liberation from traditional constructs of femininity. This is consistent with the observation that women adopt sexual behaviours, expressions of sexual pleasure, and products designed for men's pleasure as a means of establishing ownership and agency (Levy, 2005). It also suggests that the pursuit of masculine models is necessitated by the sociocultural and psychological limitations on behaviours and products considered "feminine".

Whether women represented themselves as positioned predominantly within a traditionally gendered discourse or a postfeminist discourse, all women gave accounts of themselves or others subordinating their pleasure to men's in at least one domain: social, ethical, relational, or personal. Women encountered pornography and sexual pleasure in all domains and demonstrated different discursive engagement in each. For example, a woman may pursue arousal through viewing

pornography while simultaneously endorsing experiences consistent with self-objectification (Gill, 2007), conceding that her partner is not concerned about her pleasure, and acknowledging that choosing to use pornography perpetuates women's sexual and economic subordination. All women who credited pornography with enhancing their pleasure in one domain also identified its contribution to subordination in another, consistent with the argument that women's experience of pleasure is constrained by a culture that denies or fears their sexuality (Jolly et al., 2013b). The cultural constraint on women's sexual pleasure is pervasive, regardless of their discursive positioning.

The finding that pornography reinforces the subordination of women's pleasure supports the radical feminist position that pornography devalues women and maintains men's power (Dworkin, 1981). At the same time, women's accounts challenged this position by revealing the nuances of women's understanding of their interaction with pornography and the complex and varied relationship they experienced between pornography and pleasure. Discursive variation in each aspect of a woman's experience is evidence both of subordination and of pleasure. This dissonance in meaningful experiences within and among women echoes the results of our systematic review (Ashton et al., 2018), particularly the work of Ciclitira (2004). These findings emphasise the importance of understanding the temporal and contextual changes in women's meaning-making and the role of pornography in women's production of pleasure.

Pornography has privileged access to the private, socially unexamined realms of human sexual experience; the digital age, with its constant introduction of innovative technologies, immeasurably enhances this access and consequential persuasive power (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018). Pornography is ubiquitous, highly accessible, visually descriptive, and interactive. It communicates specific, detailed models of gendered relationships and sexual behaviour. The scope and content of pornography and the association between the content and consumers' sexual selves are unique to pornography's communication of meaning. Given the increasing complexity and sophistication of new technologies (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018), it is inevitable that pornography

will have even more immersive modes for distributing meaning. The significance of pornography to women and their sexual pleasure will need to be frequently reassessed.

In comparison with the discursive influence of other media (Meyer, 2013), pornography remains relatively unexamined (Gurevich et al., 2017). Sex and sexuality tend to persist as socially taboo topics (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011). Pornography, therefore, often escapes the discussion and ethical accountability to which other products are subject. Women's reflections on the ethics behind the production of pornography exemplify this tendency to segregate sexual behaviour from the ethical structure of life as a whole. The women in this research identified their tendency to dismiss or ignore the wellbeing of pornography actors as a by-product of the invisibility and low priority of pornography consumption in their lives.

These results have implications for psychological practice. Practitioners could benefit from considering the complex meanings associated with pornography and the discursive contradictions within which young women who have sex with men must make sense of their sexual pleasure, or even accept their right to sexual pleasure. Rather than making assumptions about these matters, practitioners could be encouraged to work with women to understand sexual pleasure and pornography from each woman's perspective and, based on this understanding, to develop beneficial therapeutic strategies.

Our participants volunteered as young women who have or intend to have sex with men, and we sought diverse characteristics and experiences within these criteria. Knowledge of women's sexual pleasure needs to be accumulated through research with women whose identities, sexual experiences, and ages go beyond these criteria.

Our research was conducted with young women who lived in Australia, where there are few formal restrictions on access to pornography and, in theory, gender equality in relation to sexuality. In these matters and in the pervasive gendered discourses running counter to them, we think that Australia has a similar cultural environment to the UK and Canada, with perhaps fewer overt restrictions than are found in parts of the US. It would be valuable (if challenging) to seek evidence

of women's sexual pleasure in relation to pornography in countries with more formally restrictive and gendered cultures.

What we have learnt from these women's accounts provides an opportunity for a nuanced discussion and an ethical critique of pornography. The accounts reveal the adverse and beneficial consequences of the ubiquity and accessibility of such stimulating, visually detailed content. It is evident that pornography influences women's sexual experiences, thus shaping their sense of self, psychological state, relationships, and wellbeing. Understanding the role of pornography in young women's lives increases our knowledge of the complexity of sexual pleasure as a social product. We can use what we have learnt about the role of pornography in the production of young women's sexual pleasure to contribute to emancipating their pleasure from its subordination to men's pleasure and the restrictions generated by fear, shame, and repression.

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Chapter 6

Pornography and Consent

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The Meaning of Consent in Young Women's Accounts of Pornography

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Abstract

The concept of consent to sexual activity and the role of pornography are challenging topics in themselves; their intersection in their lives of young women presents further complexity and requires investigation. Research on this topic has not thus far been reported, although it has implications for women's health, wellbeing, and safety. To contribute to understanding, we conducted in-depth interviews about pornography with 27 young women living in Australia. Analysis of the accounts as they concerned consent yielded four main discourses: *Women are agents*, *Consent is assumed, Women are responsible for their own safety,* and *Education is the answer*. Associated discourses were also identified: *Knowledge is power, Sexual expression is power*, *Men's pleasure is more important than consent*, and *Gendered violence is normal.* It was evident that women make sense of pornography by reference to (often contradictory) feminist, gender, and violence normalisation discourses. Pornography arises from and contributes to sociocultural values; it has the potential both to perpetuate and to challenge discourses that promote men's sexual power over women and deny women the capacity to give meaningful consent.

Key words: *Australia, consent, pornography, qualitative research, women*

Introduction

Pornography and consent to sexual activity are each theoretically and experientially complex, contextual, and nuanced phenomena (Ashton et al., Under review B; Reynolds, 2004). As it evolves in the digital age, pornography offers increasingly accessible, visually stimulating depictions of sexual activities (Ashton et al., Under review B). There has been debate about the influence of

pornography consumption on consent-related behaviour and sexual violence (Powell, 2010) and the nature of consent among those engaged in producing pornography (Taormino, 2013). Given what is known about the ramifications of sexual acts without consent (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009; Romito & Beltramini, 2015) and the relevance of pornography to women's lives (Ashton et al., 2018), it is essential to understand how women experience and make sense of 'consent' in relation to their experiences of pornography.

Consent

For the purpose of our discussion, we define sexual consent as *unequivocal and voluntary agreement to a sexual act* (United Nations, 2009). Capability to give consent may be constrained by contextual factors including power imbalance between participants in sexual acts. For example, immature neurological development (youth, intellectual disability), intoxication, and incomplete consciousness are legally recognised as inhibiting a person's ability to consent to a sexual act (Access Economics, 2014).

Defining sexual consent and applying this definition to relationships have presented challenges and prompted debate (Powell, 2010). Using linguistic criteria to navigate the internal experience of each participant in the encounter is inherently problematic and ambiguous (Calder, 2004). Consent as part of a sexual encounter requires all parties to recognise verbal and non-verbal cues during an emotional and physical experience that is informed by the relationship, the context, and temporal changes (Reynolds, 2004). Subjective interpretation is inevitable and will be influenced by the interpreter's psychological state and discursive engagement with sex and relationships. Interpretation of cues is a process rather than an event, recurring with each new act, and raising questions about the demarcation of sexual acts.

Pornography

We define pornography as *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., Accepted 2018). The notable contribution of this reassessed definition is its incorporation of consent. This addition was prompted by our review of contextual factors relevant to the understanding of pornography in the digital age, in which ignoring or violating consent in the production and distribution of pornography have been increasingly enabled. Producing pornography used to require costly, bulky video cameras; these have been overtaken by smartphones, mobile devices, affordable computers, and inexpensive miniature cameras. Anyone with a smartphone can make, produce, and distribute sexual material. This has led to the advent of 'revenge porn' (the publication of sexual material on a website without the consent of the person depicted: Stroud, 2014) and sexting (Bates, 2017), which predominantly affect women. These new social behaviours, and others facilitated by technological developments, challenge the understanding of consent to the production and distribution of pornography.

Pornography is increasingly a part of social meaning-making in sex, relationships, and culture; women experience pornography in emotional, relational, social, and ethical realms (Ashton et al., Under review). Our systematic review of research that had used qualitative methods revealed that women had ethical concerns about whether pornography actors gave informed consent (Ashton et al., 2018). There is evidence from epidemiological research that exposure to violent or degrading pornography is associated with past victimisation for female (but not male) high school students (Romito & Beltramini, 2015). The intersections between pornography and consent appear to be important to women; we need to learn from women what these intersections mean.

Gender and Sexual Violence Discourses

Sexual negotiations occur within social and cultural contexts influenced by gendered discourses about sex (Powell, 2010). The dynamic interplay of various combinations of gender and

sexual identification complicates these negotiations (Corteen, 2004). Rather than attempting the mammoth task of trying to understand it all at once, we began with women who have sex with men. There is evidence that gender influences perceptions of consent: men accept as consensual a greater variety of sexual scenarios than women (Humphreys, 2007). This difference could be understood as a reflection of a social context that tends to prioritise the sexual needs of men (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012).

The primacy of men's sexual needs is maintained by gendered discourses including those that normalise sexual violence. When young women were interviewed about their experiences of sexual consent they revealed discourses that supported the gendered imbalance of power, especially by placing the onus on women both to take responsibility for establishing consent and to comply with men's needs (Burkett and Hamilton, 2012). Positioning in contemporary 'raunch' culture is a further influence on discursive constructions of gendered expectations (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2007; Levy, 2005), as are discourses that promote violence, such as that men have a right to sex and that women are sexually passive (see de Visser et al., 2003; Gavey, 2005).

Feminism

Feminists have debated the meaning of consent for decades. At one extreme, radical feminists such as MacKinnon (1989) and Dworkin (1981) have argued that patriarchal power inevitably renders heterosexual sex an act of rape. In contrast, postfeminists have maintained that women are agents who can make decisions about sex and consent, free from gendered restrictions (Kamen, 2000; Lumby, 1997). The radical feminist position is built on the theory of structural determinism, in which linguistic or social systems determine behaviour, if not personhood (McKinnon, 1989). The postfeminist position is supported by claims that women have autonomy and agency (e.g. Faludi, 1991; Sommers, 1994). Other feminist positions are found between these two extremes (e.g. Friedan, 1963; Gill, 2007).

Pornography is constructed in similarly diverse ways by feminists. Dworkin (1981) characterised pornography as perpetuating in its consumers the misogynistic violence it depicted and Morgan (1977, p.169) claimed 'porn is theory, rape is practice'. Postfeminists, on the other hand, have argued that women who choose to have sex on camera are asserting ownership of their bodies and their sexuality (Dodson, 2013; Taormino, 2013). Over the last two decades, a direct expression of the postfeminist perspective has been the feminist porn movement, which has asserted its aims of challenging normative sexual power relations and protecting the wellbeing of all participants, especially women, in the production of pornography (Taormino, 2013). Feminist debates about and characterisations of pornography have been found to influence women's reflections on pornography (Ciclitira, 2004; Gurevich et al., 2017).

Aim

Given these diverse perspectives, we sought to learn how young women in Australia make sense of consent and pornography. Our aim, in prioritising women's reflections, was to contribute to understanding the ways in which experiences of pornography shape the meaning of consent, and to use this knowledge to inform policy and practice for women's benefit.

Method

The research reported here is part of an investigation of what pornography means to young women in Australia. The project was approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee (CF16/1229-2016000655).

Recruitment

Women aged 18-30 years were purposively recruited to ensure diverse backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes to pornography. Invitations to volunteer were distributed via Facebook, Twitter, women's health groups, sexual health clinics, notices in public buildings, and widely

dispersed flyers. Experience suggested that about 25 women would yield sufficient data to achieve the research aims.

Procedure

Screening questions, to assess eligibility, were asked of each woman who inquired about the research; these established her age and that she had had or intended to have sex with men. After the initial period of recruitment, women were also asked about their level of education so that preference could be given to women who were not university educated. The reason for the questions was explained. An information and consent package was sent to eligible women who, if they decided to proceed, could choose to return a signed consent form or give (recorded) oral consent at the beginning of the interview. Women were offered a choice of face-to-face, telephone, or Skype interviews.

Before each interview, women were reminded that they could share as much or as little as they liked. The interviewer (the first author) then said, '*As you know, we are interested in speaking with women about pornography. Can you tell me what you thought when you saw the advertisement? Is there a story you wanted to tell?*' The interviewer pursued topics of importance to each woman. At the end of the interview, women supplied brief demographic information, chose a pseudonym, and were invited to communicate anything else they wanted to say by email or in a subsequent interview. Interviews were audio recorded, with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were uploaded onto NVivo (2015) to assist with data management.

Analysis

In a two-stage process, we first applied thematic analysis (using the iterative method described by Braun & Clarke, 2006) then analysed the data discursively (Ussher & Perz, 2014). We accept Parker's (1990, p.5) definition of discourse: a system of statements which construct an object.

After all transcripts had been read several times to ensure familiarity with each woman's account, transcripts were searched for the words 'consent', 'force', and 'pressure' as explicit references to the topic of interest. Surrounding text was examined to ensure that the full context was

understood. Transcripts were then read to reveal implicit or indirect allusions to any aspect of consent. We included in the analysis any association between consent and pornography that was meaningful to the women, even when (as in the case of non-consensual photo production and sharing) it fell outside our definition of pornography. As we identified themes, we organised and reorganised them into a hierarchical pattern that best made sense of the data.

Using the thematic hierarchy as a means of organising our data, we then re-read the transcripts for evidence of discourses relevant to consent and of positioning within them. We looked for references to individual and shared awareness of boundaries and preferences, power distribution, discussion, non-verbal communication, and emotional responses to sexual encounters. We took account of women's social context and their broader dialectical engagement, as constructed in women's accounts. At each stage of analysis, discussion within the research team resolved any differences of opinion.

Reflexive Statement

The authors are female and feminist, aged 30-70. We remained alert to our biases, debriefed after each interview, and engaged in frequent reflexive discussions within the team and with expert colleagues. We took care to reflect on the potential influence of personal experience on any feelings aroused by the data. We maintained focus on the women's construction of meaning and events and endeavoured at all times to understand the experiences from their perspectives.

Results

During September 2016 to June 2017, we interviewed 27 women for about an hour each (range 37–90 minutes). They were aged 18–30 years (mean 25). Facebook was the most popular source of recruitment (n=14) and telephone the usual medium for the interview (n=20). They came from across Australia: Victoria (14), Queensland (4), Australian Capital Territory (3), New South Wales (2), and Western Australia (2). All participants had completed high school and 19 had university degrees.

About half (14) of the women said they were in committed sexual relationships. Five women identified as Christian and one as Muslim; the remainder did not mention faith affiliation. Most women (21) did not state a cultural background or described themselves as Australian; six women gave their origins as Pakistan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, or Macedonia.

Women's stated pornography use varied in frequency: never (8 women), monthly (7), fortnightly (5), once a week or more (4), and less than monthly (3). The word 'consent' was used by 16 women, 9 of whom used it spontaneously and 7 after the interviewer had introduced the term. All nine women who used the word spontaneously did so in relation to pornography actors, education, or theory, rather than to personal experience. The remaining 11 women gave accounts in which experiences of consent or non-consent were implicit. Eleven women identified as feminist and a further five drew on feminism in their accounts.

We identified four central discourses encapsulating women's constructions of pornography and consent (two of which were supported by associated discourses): *Women are agents (Knowledge is power, Sexual expression is power)*, *Consent is assumed (Men's pleasure is more important than consent, Gendered violence is normal)*, *Women are responsible for their own safety,* and *Education is the answer*. Each of these is described below.

Women are Agents

A dominant discourse, whether women positioned themselves within it or in opposition, was that women, including those who act in pornography, are agents who exercise awareness, control, and capacity in their sexual lives. Women's sexual agency is built on two sources of power: knowledge and sexual expression. When discussing their own experiences, women drew on the power of knowledge; the power of sexual expression influenced women's construction of pornography actors.

Knowledge is power. Pornography was constructed by some women as a source of knowledge that contributed to their emancipation and capacity to navigate consent. Whether they viewed pornography alone or with partners, women said it informed them about sexual acts and enabled discussion with sexual partners about preferences. By implication, viewing pornography assisted in establishing consent processes with partners and increased women's sense of agency.

For example, Claire said that pornography taught her about bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism (BDSM), emboldening her to participate in BDSM events and practices. Consent is integral to BDSM and Claire learnt how to negotiate with new sexual partners and the consequences of not obtaining consent:

> I tell them … what I am into before I have sex. … If they're not comfortable with that, that's fine; we will just have sex. … If someone is interested in it, we can try a few things. ... We establish stop points and code words to use if we're not comfortable. … I'm not going to pressure them into anything because … it does hurt people if you pressure them into something they're not OK with. (Claire)

Jennifer, who was in a long-distance relationship, exchanged pornography clips with her partner to explore and expand their preferences. It seemed that what she learnt from the clips facilitated her capacity to give and withhold consent before and during their sexual encounters. When her partner sent a clip of an activity she did not like, Jennifer reported saying, 'No, that's a little bit too rough for me, but … thanks for thinking of me'. She recalled him replying, 'OK, sure; I'll keep that in mind'.

Sexual expression is power. The agency of women who act in pornography was a contentious matter among these women, who often drew on public debate to justify their positions. Some women

saw the actors as seizing power through uninhibited sexual expression while others saw them as victims of the patriarchy and commercial interests.

Nine women constructed female pornography actors as sexual agents seeking financial gain and sexual pleasure.

> The women who do it are liberated. It might look like they're not, but I'd say they're making the choice to do something. They're getting paid extremely well for really little work and they're in control of their lives by doing so. … They enjoy sex and they get to have it and they get paid for it. (Charlotte)

Six women unequivocally affirmed the autonomy of women in pornography. Joan, for example, said that the actors 'are fully consenting and are given a lot of choice'. According to Sarah, women who act in pornography 'have chosen that, and are happy to do that, and it fulfils' them. She saw it as 'a legitimate occupation' and the actors as 'very strong, beautiful women'. Their problems arose from social attitudes: 'I think they probably suffer, the same as sex workers, with a lot of stigma and discrimination'.

Some women argued that to deny agency to the actors robbed them of power and unjustifiably rendered them victims. Lola said, 'It's their chosen profession. Don't take away their sexual autonomy'. Sam saw agency in choosing objectification, where the actor is 'an active participant seeking out their pleasure and their desire':

> If a woman wants to be an object or wants to be a passive player in pornography and that's what they enjoy and that's what they get desire from, there should be a safe space for that. (Sam)

Asserting pornography actors' agency did not necessarily entail respect. Chloe, Lou, and Svetlana positioned themselves as separate and, to varied extents, morally superior. Svetlana said that, while she accepted their choice to make money in pornography, she did not respect the actors but 'feels a bit sorry for them'. She pointed out that her opinion had not prevented her from consuming pornography. Chloe also distanced herself from the actors:

They have chosen to do that and, whether or not I'd do it or whether or not I agree with it, um, I don't want to judge them. … They can do what they want. (Chloe)

Lou's distance was expressed in admiration for what the actors did that she could not, finding 'pretty incredible' their evident 'comfort' in 'your own skin' when they are not only naked but 'naked in awkward positions and so your body changes shape in ways that you can't control'. Her acknowledged feelings about the actors were ambivalent and she evidently found it difficult to maintain a clear position on the agency and power of the actors:

I actually feel really sorry for them. I don't judge them. I feel like a whole bunch of life circumstances have probably brought them to this position but, deep down in my gut, no matter how many documentaries I've seen about porn stars … saying, 'I've chosen this, and this is my decision, and I feel really empowered', I don't believe it. … I think it's a necessary way for some of these women to make money, to make a living, to pay their bills and all of that. And maybe to some extent they do enjoy it, but I kind of feel like, maybe, I don't know if that is real, if that's a real enjoyment for what they do, and maybe they wouldn't enjoy doing something else where they felt respected. (Lou)

Eight women rejected the construction of pornography actors as agents, asserting that they are victims of the industry. They represented female actors as lacking adequate awareness of their position and capacity for consent. Although these women acknowledged that pornography may show women consenting to a sex act, they said that this did not imply (as often seemed to be assumed) consent for all subsequent acts: a full consent process requires discussion of each new sexual act. The eight women saw the actors' need for money as hindering their power and limiting their choices. According to these women, pornography producers prioritised financial gain over facilitating informed consent by their actors. Eve said she was 'sure there are incredible amounts of people that are in porn that are being exploited'. Alyssa and Anna expressed similar opinions:

Some of the big production stuff, I think that there might be the ability to sort of really influence and coerce young women. Maybe getting them involved in stuff that they are quite—maybe they haven't given informed consent. (Alyssa)

The Louis Theroux [documentary] on pornography … does make you think that not all are having a great time. … Maybe five times or six times out of ten they might not want to do that job. (Anna)

Julia focused on unprotected sex which, 'even if it seems completely consensual,' is often not. She reflected on 'inserting' when 'there is no condom on the guy' and asked, 'How is that ethical? How is that person being protected?'

Charlotte and Claire described their attitudes, personal responsibility, and internal conflict when reflecting on the lack of consent in pornography. Charlotte claimed that non-consensual production 'should be stopped, obviously' but wondered 'how do you determine whether it is really non-consensual or not?' She concluded 'it would be really hard to regulate' and said she 'wouldn't even know where to start'. Claire had 'signed petitions for females to be treated correctly in pornography' and had gone on 'strike' by not watching content she identified as non-consensual. However, she also revealed that, on occasion, 'I will watch it because I'm either interested or I'm turned on'.

Some women identified economic support for 'feminist porn' as a solution to women's exploitation. They positioned feminist pornography as the antithesis of pornography directed by men for male audiences. These women adduced ethical and social beliefs in endorsing the value of feminist porn in not exploiting women, although financial constraints were said to limit their consistent support of the genre. Kate was one of the women who found this problematic. Eve attempted to resolve the internal conflict by positioning herself as a selective consumer of overtly consensual content as well as a clever consumer who is alert to a bargain. Jennifer contextualised the reluctance to pay for pornography by saying that 'everything is free these days. … Why would I pay for porn if I don't even pay for my music?'

Consent is Assumed

It was evident in some women's accounts that, when sex was driven by male partners, consent was not considered or discussed by women or men; women's consent was taken for granted. Women normalised the subversion of their preferences even when their partners' unwelcome violent behaviour was involved. Two discourses contributed to the construction of consent in these circumstances: *Men's pleasure is more important than consent* and *Gendered violence is normal*.

Men's pleasure is more important than consent. Anna, Jessica, Kate, and Molly identified themselves as the 'pleaser' in their relationships with men, prioritising their male partners' pleasure over their own. This minimised the potential for consent. Pornography had set a standard for how these women 'should' act; consent was not modelled as part of sexual encounters.

Anna's acceptance of her responsibility to please entailed acquiescing to her partner's pornography-informed preferences: 'Boys watch a lot of porn, they expect a certain things. … I want to oblige, I want to have a good time, therefore I say yes to things'. She had reservations: 'sometimes I am a bit too compromising' which is 'not healthy'. Anna volunteered that she 'should be having sex and doing sexual things for my pleasure'. However, she downplayed the significance of her (limited) resistance by minimising her distress ('I'm not really, like, crying into my bed or anything') and emphasising the obligations of relationships: 'when there's two people in the situation, you have to be compromising'. Anna did not indicate how her partner compromised.

Molly located the origins of her pleasing role in 'cultural messages' that women are 'sex objects'. Because of what 'boys … see in pornography', Molly's partners 'want me to perform those acts on them' which made her feel 'used for just a sexual tool, almost, just to get off'. Her internal dialogue revealed the tension of resistance and compliance: 'I don't really want to do this, but everyone's doing it and if I don't do it, then I'll be the prude and this is just what's normal'.

Jessica justified prioritising men's pleasure by asserting the need to protect her husband's self-efficacy:

Generally you try not to dissuade your husband because you don't want to make him feel like he's inadequate or something, but at the same time, if it starts to get uncomfortable, you have to say something and it makes it awkward. (Jessica)

A cultural expectation was evident that men would persist in demanding sex and that anything short of robust objection from a woman could be taken as consent. Women attributed this to the influence of pornography, in which they were portrayed as always ready for sex. Joan, for example, described how her partner's consumption of pornography led to demands that approached assault but eventuated in her acquiescence:

I've had, probably had sex numerous times when I haven't actually felt like it, just because my partner does, to a degree that I wouldn't call rape but I would call not fun. … I think there's an expectation that, if you just persist, you can get what you want, and one of my boyfriends … reached over and grabbed my boob or something like that. Complete non-response from me was seen as willingness to keep going when, a lot of the time, … I really felt like sleeping. … Once you get going, [it] can be fun, but at the same time you shouldn't be expected to continue if you haven't shown any sort enthusiasm. (Joan)

Gendered violence is normal. Joan was one of nine women who described sexual violence they attributed to their partners' pornography use. Partners initiated sexual behaviour they had seen in pornography without discussion, apparently assuming consent, exemplified by Alyssa's account of being choked:

We were just sort of like fooling around. … I can't remember, like, what sort the positioning was; like he was sort of grabbing my shoulders and stuff, and it progressed to wanting to grab me around the neck. … I didn't feel any fear, or I didn't think that he

was trying to strangle me. ... I think I'd sort of pulled his hand away and said, 'Nah, I'm not into that'. … Afterwards I actually said to him—I must've felt very comfortable—I was like, 'Do you watch a lot of porn?' I sort of said it in a joking way and he got kind of defensive and he was like, 'Ah, yeah'. (Alyssa)

Most accounts referred to events when women were younger and included reflection on their lack of experience to justify their acceptance of the behaviour. Chloe, for example, also disclosed being choked without consent or discussion, which she found 'quite scary'. She thought that pornography had normalised such behaviour, with choking seen 'even in quite vanilla kind of porn'. Chloe took responsibility for the experience 'because that was with someone I didn't really know that well' and 'I was a bit younger anyway, so I wasn't as confident'. In other words, it was Chloe's reticence that caused the non-consensual act rather than her partner's failure to seek consent. Chloe said that, with experience, she had come to think that her partners 'can't just assume' that they can 'do that to you without asking'.

Kate also blamed herself (young, inexperienced) for being the victim of forced sex when she was 15 years old. Because of pornography, boys 'had been desensitised' and expected girls to endure 'pushing your head down and basically making you do some head, or pulling hair and just punching you around a bit'. As a result, she and her friends 'sort of thought that's what you do; that's how you have sex'.

Pornography was identified as normalising sexual violence beyond the intimate setting. Megan, for example, who thought that pornography had 'unconscious' influence, recounted experiencing sexual harassment at work. She was bribed to discourage reporting, although she also implies that women can be paid to what men want:

These blokes are blue-collar workers, … you know, old-school mentality. Probably are still, like, 'Women are not superior'. And they have literally learnt that, even for me, that if you put enough money on the table, you can treat a woman however you want. It cost them a lot of money, but. (Megan)

It is not only men who perpetrate socially normalised, non-consensual sexual violence. Kate was outraged when a boy falsely distributed the claim that she had had sex with him. As revenge, she circulated, without his consent, a photograph of his penis:

> I sent it to some friends and it got around pretty quickly, um, and he ended up with a pretty nasty nickname from it. I'm not proud of that at all, and knowing what I know now I'm like, 'Wow! I could've got into some serious fucking trouble for that'. … Usually you hear about the guys doing it to girls. (Kate)

Women are Responsible for Their Own Safety

Women positioned themselves as responsible for preventing sexual violence. To ensure their safety, women should avoid provoking men's sexual interest through sexualised dress, must not distribute identifiable sexual images that could be re-distributed, and inhibit their arousal to fantasies of non-consensual scenarios. Jessica, for example, used her friend's sexualised presentation of herself on social media to illustrate her belief that pornography encourages women to wear sexualised attire and that women who want to stay safe should resist:

> So is [my friend] causing these sleazy men to come onto her? Um [pause]. Her attitude certainly invites them. … I'm not really victim-blaming here, but I'd say how she dresses definitely attracts men who have negative attitudes towards women. (Jessica)

Describing herself as 'not victim-blaming' while actively doing so reveals Jessica's positioning within the dominant discourse of women's responsibility for men's behaviour.

Although our definition of pornography excludes sexualised images sent without consent, they featured in women's accounts and illustrate the complex ramifications of advances in digital technology. Bonnie, for example, saw herself as responsible when a boy she liked shared with other boys at school a sexualised photograph of herself that she had sent to him, 'because I'd sent it in the first place'. Rachel received unwanted 'dick picks' after participating in online dating, making her feel like 'the kind of person that gave out vibes that I was just up for it'. Alyssa wanted to exchange

sexualised images but protected herself by excluding her head from photographs. She warned teenagers against sending 'a sext to your boyfriend of a whole grand total of two weeks', because 'cultural norms of male teenagers dictate that he's probably going to … share it with his friends'. Alyssa was explicit that sharing is not the fault of the girl who sent the image, but said, 'It's reality, … so as a defensive mechanism you shouldn't do it'.

Women's responsibility for safety extended to policing their arousal. Non-consensual sex featured in some women's fantasies or preferred pornography. Consistently, women's accounts of sexual assault fantasies were equivocal. Chloe said, 'You know it's wrong in your brain, but your body can still be like, yeah, I'm enjoying this'. Sometimes they implied that their arousal could encourage assault in reality and that they should therefore repress or not provide opportunity for arousal of this kind. Sarah exemplified the tension:

> I feel like … I'm some weirdo who wants to be raped or something. Like, what's wrong with me? But, like, the higher thinking part of my brain knows that it's not true and it's just a sexual fantasy. I feel guilty because, like, I've been a very strong woman all my life and I think, god, what's wrong with you? … I guess I feel disgusting or sick or something. … I know that's not true but I can feel it. (Sarah)

One solution women described was to seek pornography incorporating ethical concern for the actors, which women sometimes called feminist porn. Even if non-consent is depicted, women reasoned, the actors had consented, enjoyed the experience, and were 'paid reasonably and fairly' (Chloe). For example, Eve said:

> If I thought that someone was genuinely being abused, or it seemed dodgy and you're like, 'That girl is not 18!' or whatever, I would close every window. I would not even think about watching it. … What can be such a turn-on then becomes like, well, it's quite degrading. It's also because you're not in the moment any more, and that would be true if you were having sex. (Eve)

Tess reported having felt aroused by fantasies of non-consensual sex during years of relationships with men. After forming a relationship with a woman, engaging with feminist theory, and reflecting on the implications, Tess decided no longer to permit such arousal: 'I don't think there's an ethical way to get off to violence'.

Education is the Answer

When women considered a response to sexual violence, they proposed education. Some women specified sex education in schools, others implied information of unspecified types and sources. Pornography itself was frequently identified as a source of information and education, even if it was predominantly unhelpful. People turn to pornography to 'fill the gaps', Chloe asserted, because 'there isn't any education about pleasure' in conventional sex education, which is 'all about mechanics'. According to Elizabeth, 'Porn is the sex educator of our generation'. Kate thought that 'more comprehensive sexual education would've helped a lot'. Her school sex education had 'no real focus on talking about what a healthy relationship looks like'. As a result, 'We didn't understand coercion'.

Pornography is not a helpful source of education because, Molly said, it teaches that a 'man can do whatever he likes to a woman' and that she should 'do what he wants'; women must 'pretend to like it because otherwise there's something wrong with [them]'. Underpinning the advocacy for education was the belief that, if consent and pornography were better understood, problematic sexual behaviour would be mitigated. Molly thought young women 'need education on the harms':

> They need another narrative saying, 'Hey, I'm standing up to that boy who has asked me to give him oral sex because he drove me home from the party. I don't want it'. And other people who are standing up against the culture and showing that it can be done, they need stories of, like, hope. (Molly)

Molly revealed not only her belief that education enables women to challenge the perceived obligation to please men despite their own preferences, but also her positioning within the discourse that women are responsible for their safety.

Discussion

As far as we know, this is the first reported investigation of the meaning of consent in women's accounts of pornography. We have built on Burkett and Hamilton (2012) report of women's discussion of consent and the existing qualitative research on women's experience of pornography outlined in our review (Ashton et al., 2018). We found that, when women attempted to make sense of their own experiences and those of women who act in pornography, they revealed discourses of women's agency, victimisation, subjugation, and responsibility. It was evident that women drew on (often contradictory) feminist, gender, and violence normalisation discourses.

When women were constructed as agents, it could be understood as consistent with postfeminist commentary around consent and pornography, in which women's emancipation from gendered power imbalances is assumed; they are free to make autonomous decisions about sex and consent (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Dodson, 2013). Acting in pornography or using pornography for sexual pleasure is thus an exercise of agency (Dodson, 2013; Taormino, 2013). Some of the women who spoke to us used pornography as a means of getting to know their sexual preferences and facilitating consent discussions. However, women tended not to position themselves consistently in the agentive discourse, revealing at the very least sympathy for radical feminist perspectives on pornography and consent. This was particularly the case when they reflected on women in the pornography industry, who were often seen as exploited or victimised, echoing feminists such as Morgan (1977) and Dworkin (1981) who found in the industry power imbalance, lack of agency, and experience of harm. These competing discourses are indicative of the complexity and confusion confronted by women as they attempt to manage their own sexuality, their sexual relationships, and a pornified culture.

It was notable in these women's accounts that, whatever their position on agency, the patriarchy is not dead. There was evidence of the continuing power of social discourses that maintain men's power (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2007; Levy, 2005) and normalise sexual violence against women (de Visser et al., 2003; Gavey, 2005). The assumption of women's consent to violent sexual behaviour, women's submissive role as a pleaser of men, and women's responsibility for their own safety constitute evidence of gendered power discourses, distributed and reinforced in pornography. Our results are consistent with those of Burkett and Hampton (2012) from Australia. Despite young women's claim of or desire for sexual agency, women's sexual encounters with men tended to reveal male dominance and control, which women ascribed predominantly to pornography.

Pornography is evidently constructed as influential. Women identified it as having normalised the failure to seek or discuss women's consent, their increasing experience of unwanted sexual violence such as choking and rough sex, the expectation that women are always ready for sex, and that men's pleasure is paramount. While it could be argued that these results support the claim that 'porn is theory, rape is practice' (Morgan, 1977), we argue that pornography is not the source but rather a vehicle through which social discourses underpinning the subjugation of women and sexual violence are disseminated. We do this not to exempt makers and distributors of pornography from responsibility, but to maintain focus on systemic social problems.

Accordingly, we suggest both pornography-specific and social policy agendas. Given that pornography could be considered entrenched, one useful approach would be to consider prioritising consent in pornography's production and content. We recognise in pornography violent, immersive content and potential harm to actors (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018). At the same time, feminist pornography seeks to avoid harming women directly or indirectly; its value as a means of promoting consent practices could be increased. However, strategies targeting entrenched gender biases and violence discourses also need to be challenged more broadly (Flood, 2015). While changing social norms is a prodigious task (as generations of feminist activism attests), concentrating on individual agency and responsibility to mitigate sexual violence is problematic and futile. Social programs entail

committed political action and government policy, adequate research funding, effective campaign development, and vigilance in shaping media portrayals of sex, gender, and violence. Instigators of social change are increasingly being heard around the world; we endorse continuation and prioritisation.

Our results reveal that consent in the context of pornography extends beyond linguistic exchange, individual psychological states, and the navigation of intimate encounters; processes of consent are predicated on and interact with powerful social and cultural discourses. Sexual violence is one of the most harmful social phenomena and has become a matter of public concern in Australia (Morrison, et al. 2007) as elsewhere. It is the leading cause of life-long trauma (Wasco, 2003), threatens women's safety and prosperity (Vos et al., 2006), and costs billions in corrective and health services and lost work (Access Economics, 2004; Morrison, et al. 2007). We need to understand and address this social problem with more nuanced consideration of the reality of women's experience. In the digital age, pornography is uniquely powerful in the construction of consent and yet the intimate experiences in the lives of women are largely unspoken and unexamined. It is our hope that this research contributes to encouraging recognition and discussion of pornography and women's sexual lives so that we can continue our social evolution towards safety and pleasure.

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Chapter 7

Pornography and Sexual Relationships

This chapter is the following publication:

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (Submitted, 2018). Pornography and sexual relationships: Discursive challenges for young women.

Pornography and Sexual Relationships: Discursive Challenges for Young Women

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Abstract

Pornography offers omnipresent, stimulating, easily accessible sexual content; it is an increasing contributor to social meaning-making in women's sexual lives, including their relationships. Previous research has tended to focus on adverse outcomes without considering how women might experience pornography's interaction with intimacy and relationships. To expand understanding of women's experiences and reflections, we conducted in-depth interviews about pornography with 27 young women living in Australia. Analysis of their accounts revealed that young women are perplexed by the interaction of pornography with relationships and attempt to make sense of what it means by considering intimacy, fidelity, and sexual freedom. Seven associated (often contradictory) discourses were identified: *Pornography mediates intimacy, Men are the gatekeepers of intimacy, Women need to objectify themselves to compete with pornography, Religions equate pornography with infidelity, Using pornography is not infidelity, Men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment,* and *Sexual freedom is paramount.* Women's accounts prioritised the needs of men, the needs of the relationships, and the ideal of sexual freedom; no discourses prioritised women's needs. This clarification of the discourses confronting women can be used as a tool for providing clinical support when it is requested.

Pornography represents a unique intersection of technology and sex. It is a powerful influence on women's lives (Ashton et al., 2018), especially in the digital age, with instantaneous access and easy distribution (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018). Pornography offers highly stimulating, accessible sexual content. Smartphone technology ensures that pornography is an omnipresent source of sexual stimulation (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018). This pervasive contemporary phenomenon has implications for young women's sexual relationships (by which we mean more than sexual encounters). Such relationships constitute important life experiences (Sbarra & Coan, 2018). Benign relationships are associated with good psychological and physical health (e.g., Freak-Poli et al., 2017; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2007; Idler et al., 2012). Adverse relationship experiences, including physical, emotional, and sexual violence and abuse, contribute to poor health (Coker et al., 2000; Mazza et al., 1996). It is vital to understand how women construct the roles played by pornography in their experiences of sexual relationships, in order to consider the potential impact on their health and wellbeing.

We define pornography as "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., Accepted 2018). Research has tended to link pornography use with adverse effects on relationships (Campbell & Kohut, 2017). Campbell and Kohut's (2017) review found that most of this research is correlational and that researchers assumed from the outset, as their aims specified, that relationships would inevitably be harmed by pornography consumption. This expectation made it unlikely that any other outcome would be identified. The use of pornography has thus been associated with reduced relationship satisfaction (Minarcik, Wetterneck, & Short, 2016), weakened commitment (Lambert, Negash, Stillman, Olmstead, & Fincham, 2012), and separation (Perry & Davis, 2017). Authors of the review also noted researchers' tendency to design research based on the gendered assumption that women do not use pornography (examples include Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Sun et al., 2015; Szymanski et al., 2015).

Our systematic review of research using qualitative methods to investigate women's experiences of pornography identified relationships as one theme in the results (Ashton et al., 2018). Specifically, pornography was represented as causing emotional distance in relationships, particularly when women compared their bodies unfavourably to the bodies of pornography actors; women described negotiating with male partners about the men's use; some women assessed it as "normal" for their partner to watch pornography; some women were uncomfortable with what they saw as their need to accept their partners' use; and other women wanted to prohibit their partners' use. Women also revealed their own use of pornography to enhance excitement and inspire new sexual activities as part of relationships.

The two studies we have identified that investigated the role of pornography in relationships had only participants whose partners' use was problematic (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Zitzman & Butler, 2009). Bergner and Bridges (2002) analysed letters they received from women about their partners' frequent use of pornography. Women found the discovery of their partners' use to be traumatic, describing it as infidelity that made them feel less desirable and that caused intimacy to be lost from the relationship. Zitzman and Butler's (2009) participants were women who identified as Christian and had sought couples' counselling for their husbands' pornography use. These women were reported as conceptualising their husbands' use of pornography as disrupting attachment and a betrayal of trust that violated spiritual standards.

We contend that women's experiences of pornography in sexual relationships cannot be understood without taking account of the discursive context. (After Parker [1992], we understand a discourse to be a system of statements that construct an object.) In briefly discussing influential discourses, we consider, in particular, the contributions of Hollway (1984), postfeminism, neoliberalism, sex-positivism, and technological developments in communication.

Decades ago, in response to the women's movement, Wendy Hollway (1984) provided a valuable summary of the construction of sexual subjectivity in heterosexual relationships, identifying three defining discourses. The discourse of *Male sexual drive* asserted men's entitlement

to sex arising from their assumed biological need; women were positioned in this discourse as having a determined and immutable responsibility to service the drive. The *Have/hold* discourse stemmed from the Christian ideology of monogamy, partnership, and family life, and positioned women as either asexual or sexually dangerous. These are gender-differentiated positions, in which women are not passive but submit to the male sexual drive in order to attract men who will commit to them. The *Permissive* discourse challenged the concept of monogamy and positioned both women and men as free to seek sexual fulfilment, although Hollway pointed out that positioning even in this discourse was fundamentally gender-differentiated.

Since Hollway, the construction of sexuality and relationships has been influenced by postfeminism, neoliberalism, and sex-positivism. From a postfeminist standpoint, gender equality has been achieved, and this is the lens through which sexuality is understood and advocated (Faludi, 1991; Sommers, 1994): women have taken ownership of their sexual expression. (For elaboration, see Gurevich et al., 2017.) Applications of a neoliberal framework to women's sexuality are consistent with postfeminism in that individuals pursue pleasure to meet their own needs, challenging traditional relationship norms (Gill, 2003). Women can take the role of sexual pursuer and engage in relationships without commitment, "having sex like men" (Gerhard, 2005). The sex-positive movement prioritised the promotion of diversity in sexual expression and relationships (Fahs, 2014). The resulting increased visibility of open relationships and polyamory has challenged traditional relationship and intimacy practices (Barker, 2005; Kirkman, Dickson-Swift, & Fox, 2015; Klesse, 2006). Although postfeminism, neoliberalism, and sex-positivism arose from different sources with different emphases, as their names indicate, their combined influence has been most noticeable in their shared focus on women, gender, and sex.

Technological developments have prompted and shaped transformations in sexual relationships and intimacy. They have escalated what has been described as "mediated intimacy" (eg, Attwood et. al., 2017; Gill, 2009), in which communication and connection are mediated not just by language and gesture or static media such as women's magazines (Gill, 2009) but also by

digital platforms enabling exchanges through (for example) text messaging and internet chat. The outcome is a marked increase in casual relationships and uncommitted intimacy. These mediating digital platforms contribute to the widespread distribution of discourses of gender, sex, and relationships, including through pornography (Ashton et al., Accepted 2018). In Australia, as elsewhere, there has been passionate public debate about pornography and about gendered violence, with calls for evidence that might be used in developing processes of mitigation (AIHW, 2018; SECRC, 2016).

We sought to investigate how young women themselves understand what pornography means for and in relationships, without assuming that the meaning would be good or bad. We focused on young women because they are most likely to be engaged with digital communication and initiating sexual relationships. (We do not, of course, assume that older women are invariably excluded from similar experiences.) Because we were interested in gendered discourses, we confined this research to young women who have or intend to have sex with men.

Method

The research reported here is part of an investigation of young women and pornography. It was conducted in Australia because this ensures a similar legislative and policy context within which pornography and women's sexuality are experienced and because we (the researchers) live in Australia. We chose in-depth interviews for data collection as the most appropriate means of understanding participants' perspectives (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). The research was approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (CF16/1229-2016000655).

Recruitment

Women aged 18–30 years who had or intended to have sex with men were purposively recruited to ensure diverse backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes to pornography. A flyer calling for volunteers was distributed via Facebook, Twitter, women's health groups, sexual health clinics,

and notices in public buildings. We sought about 25 women because experience suggested that this would yield sufficient data to achieve the research aims.

Procedure

Screening questions, to assess eligibility, were asked of each woman who inquired about the research; these established her age and sexual relationships with men. After the initial period of recruitment, women were also asked about their level of education in order to ensure diversity. The reason for the questions was explained. An information and consent package was sent to eligible women. Volunteers could return signed consent forms before the interview or, if they preferred, give (recorded) oral consent at the beginning of the interview. Women could choose to be interviewed face-to-face, by telephone, or on Skype.

Before each interview, women were reminded that they could share as much or as little as they liked. The interviewer (the first author) then said, "*As you know, we are interested in speaking with women about pornography. ... Can you tell me what you thought when you saw the advertisement? Is there a story you wanted to tell?"* The interviewer pursued topics of importance to each woman. At the end of the interview, women supplied brief demographic information, chose a pseudonym, and were invited to communicate anything else they wanted to say by email or in a subsequent interview. Interviews were audio recorded, with permission, and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were uploaded onto NVivo (2015) to assist with data management.

Analysis

Our discursive analysis of women's accounts was an iterative process undertaken initially by the first author. At each stage, identification and interpretation were discussed among all authors; any differences were resolved by discussion. We used an approach common in discourse analysis, as described by Potter & Wetherell (1987). After becoming familiar with the accounts as a whole by frequent re-reading of the transcripts, we then searched each transcript for any words likely to be

associated with relationships, including "relationship", "partner", and "husband". Surrounding text was read to assess any links between relationships and pornography. Transcripts were re-read for context and for less overt constructions of relationships. We considered what each woman communicated about her social context and her broader dialectical engagement. We were alert to the influence of the research on the participants, noting whether women raised matters spontaneously or responded to a question or comment from the interviewer.

At each stage, we looked for patterns in the data, sorting and organising to ensure that the final pattern was comprehensive and inclusive. Our initial patterns were thematic and concerned the topics raised and implied in women's accounts. We then grouped and rearranged themes and subthemes around what we discerned as discourses, searching transcripts for women's positioning within them. Once we had agreed on the interpretation, we selected illustrative quotations.

Reflexive Statement

The authors are female and feminist, aged from early thirties to early seventies. We were vigilant in challenging our potential biases in conducting the interviews and interpreting the data. Each interview was discussed by all researchers soon after its conclusion. We took care frequently to reflect on any feelings aroused by women's accounts and the potential for our personal experiences to influence our perspectives. Our goal was to understand the perspective of each woman and her own construction of events.

Results

Twenty-seven women were interviewed from September 2016 to June 2017. Most (14) learned about the research on Facebook. Women were aged from 18 to 30 years (mean 25). All women had completed secondary school; 19 had tertiary qualifications. They lived all over Australia: Victoria (14), Queensland (4), Australian Capital Territory (3), New South Wales (2), and Western Australia (2). The majority of women (21) described themselves as "Australian" or did

not mention a cultural background; other participants gave their origins as Canada, Macedonia, New Zealand, Pakistan, and United Kingdom. Of the six women who mentioned a faith affiliation, one was Muslim and five Christian. Eleven women identified as feminist and a further five drew on feminism in their accounts. Interviews took an average of an hour (range 37–90 minutes) and were conducted by phone (20), in person (5), and on Skype (2). One woman elaborated on her account in an email following the interview. Women were evenly divided between describing themselves as in a relationship (14) and single (13). When asked about their use of pornography, eight women said none, three said less frequently than monthly, seven said once a month, five said fortnightly, and four said once a week or more. Most women referred to "viewing" pornography, while eight (also) referred to "reading" it.

Of all the topics covered during the interviews, pornography's intersection with relationships was the most emotionally evocative. Women conveyed emotion in their facial expressions, tone of voice, and (especially when they spoke of distress) choice of words, such as "devastation" and "insecure". They described finding it "difficult" to make sense of pornography and gave evidence of their attempts to do so. Women's experiences of and interactions with pornography contrasted with other life domains where, in general, their accounts represented them as "confident", "self-aware", and able to express their needs.

Our results reveal that young women attempt to make sense of relationships and pornography by considering intimacy, fidelity, and sexual freedom. The three discourses that relate to intimacy are *Pornography mediates intimacy, Men are the gatekeepers of intimacy,* and *Women need to objectify themselves to compete with pornography*. We identified two discourses pertaining to fidelity—*Religions equate pornography with infidelity* and *Using pornography is not infidelity*— and two to sexual freedom: *Men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment,* and *Sexual freedom is paramount.* Women spoke in different ways about viewing pornography with their partner and about solo use (their own and their partners'). When women used pornography with their partner it was positioned as an extension of their intimate emotional and sexual experiences.

Intimacy

Pornography mediates intimacy. Women described using pornography as an integrated component of sex, inspiring new activities or acting as a shared source of arousal before or during sex: pornography was constructed as mediating sexual intimacy. Alyssa, for example, said that shared viewing with her partner was "a tool of sexual exploration and closeness" and, when Lou watched pornography with her partner, it had "always been a positive experience". Lou said that she and her partner had recently used pornography to learn about more adventurous sexual activities:

We started having threesomes. … Neither of us had done it before and so we watched

some threesome porn together as a, like, how does that work, you know, practically?

Like, it's an extra person.

Samantha used pornography to mediate intimacy in two ways. She described pornography as a "sexual game" with her partner, "mak[ing] him watch it while I suck him off". She and her partner also exchanged clips of pornography they thought would arouse the other.

Kate described the role of pornography in initiating sex with her partner:

We would watch it and then we would start performing foreplay on each other and

then the DVD would play in the background. Neither of us would be watching it.

Jennifer and her partner also showed each other "different sites" before having sex, and Rochelle found that pornography aided her arousal and her partner's:

I've been in a relationship for three years now, and things can get a bit, like, boring, so

we like to keep it fun. … We will watch porn together. … The fantasies, we'll talk

about them, … and it kind of turns both of us on as well.

In opposition to this discourse, Chloe and Bonnie stated that they did not find pornography pleasurable and it did not enhance intimacy in their relationships.

Men are the gatekeepers of intimacy. Women identified emotional intimacy as the most valuable aspect of their relationships and constructed men as controlling intimacy by withholding or redirecting it. In the eyes of some women, sexual desire and sexual intimacy were avenues for and expressions of emotional intimacy. When a partner demonstrated sexual desire for someone outside the relationship, it was perceived as withholding or disrupting intimacy. In this discourse, pornography is positioned as a vehicle for redirecting men's sexual desire and as a tool available to men for exercising their power as gatekeepers. Women responded by attempting to establish boundaries around their partners' use.

Meghan, for example, reported "emotional abuse" in a previous relationship with a man "addicted to pornography" who used pornography as a means of withholding intimacy. According to Meghan, he "would rather have a relationship with his hand and porn" than "console someone and consider feelings". Her ex-partner had disagreed with her assessment that his pornography use adversely affected their sexual relationship, telling her that:

> he'd always watched a lot of porn and felt that it had no bearing on the relationship, … but in many ways I believe that it did, because the intimacy between us was more like porn than it was an affectionate, intimate, nice experience.

Sarah said that her partner's use of pornography increased the time he took to ejaculate, which made their sexual life less pleasurable for her:

> When he is home alone and he masturbates, fifty percent of the time it will be from watching porn. ... If you're going to keep conditioning yourself to only being able to ejaculate from watching an incredibly fantasy-driven movie, then, when you do have sex, you can't compare with that.

Sarah said that she does not resent pornography. "I resent his use of it. I think that he should use it more sparingly". Because her partner took so long to ejaculate, "I'm less likely to want to engage". Sarah was willing to engage in "a quickie … every day" but was "over it" when he took "20 minutes":

He will say, "Are you horny?" and I will just say no, even if I am a little bit. I just

know that it's going to drag on and on and I would rather just not start.

Sarah was disappointed that her partner continued to use pornography at the same rate, despite

discussing it with him as a problem. Her partner thus remained the arbiter of pornography usage and

the gatekeeper of intimacy, successfully resisting Sarah's attempts to have him prioritise their

relationship.

Bridgette, Jessica, and Kate also described trying to restrict their partners' diversion of

intimacy from the relationship to pornography. Bridgette did not think that pornography use was

compatible with a monogamous relationship, telling her partner:

"I've had open relationships in the past and they were terrible", … and it was

something along the lines of, "So I would like neither of us to watch porn". And he

was like, "Yeah, that's fine".

Bridgette subsequently discovered that her partner had continued to use pornography in

secret. Jessica's views against pornography echoed Bridgette's, saying that "looking at other

women" in pornography is "very harmful". While not wanting to prohibit her partner's use of

pornography, Kate wanted to limit his usage to ensure that "it wasn't coming in the way of our time

together". She thought that it would damage their intimacy "if he was ignoring me to watch it", and

would undermine his relationship with her "if he started … asking me to act in certain way or look a

certain way".

Women need to objectify themselves to compete with pornography. It was apparent that

women could feel the need to compete with pornography for their partner's attention and did so

through self-objectification. They focused on embodying attractiveness and sexual desirability,

sometimes modelling themselves on what they saw in pornography. When discussing pornography

use by partners, women positioned within this discourse did not equate pornography with infidelity

because they sought to please men rather than restrain them.

Clarissa described her performance of sexual self-objectification as a means of ensuring the intimacy of her relationship, positioning herself in competition with pornography:

> If he's aroused I feel that, if I don't finish him off, then he's going to use porn to do it. I feel like, for the sake of the relationship, or for him to be attracted to me, I need to sometimes make a bit more effort.

Jessica described as objectification her need to compete with pornography, because pornography led her to wonder, "Is my body enough?" As a result, "You start treating your own body like an object: Is it good enough? Is it going to be enough to satisfy my partner?" She was anxious about failing to please her husband: "You love them and you want to make them happy and they love you too, but their sexual needs might be influenced by what they are seeing on the video".

Bridgette described herself, at 15, performing sexual objectification because she "wanted to be more interesting, I guess, sexually". She bought "lingerie" and became "a bit more dominating" even though she "never ever wanted to do that". Bridgette saw her self-objectification and wanting "to please men" as arising from social expectations:

> The way I developed sexually was, I suppose, I—it was almost like it wasn't, my sexuality wasn't mine. It's like it was society's. It was never mine. It was never something I had any sort of real say in it.

Although the adolescent Bridgette thought that being a sexual object made her powerful, she came to reflect on it as an alien experience: "It was almost detached from me as a person."

Fidelity

Religions equates pornography with infidelity. Women reporting religious affiliation constructed their partner's use of pornography as infidelity, positioning themselves within discourses distributing religious teaching on marriage and relationships: sexual expression is legitimate only in marriage. By definition, use of pornography constitutes infidelity. When they described feelings of betrayal and jealousy upon discovering that their partners used pornography,

women referred those feelings to the violation of religious expectations that justified their emotional responses. This is exemplified by Mariam, a married woman who identified as Muslim:

> Jesus said … another form of adultery is cheating with the eyes, … looking at a woman with lust. … If he's looking at these things and he's consuming it, … he is creating an imprint on his brain. … You have consumed another woman's body, maybe not physically but certainly with your mind. And I don't know if he masturbated or anything like that; I've never asked. But I mean, it's eliciting this sexual reaction based on a woman that is not his wife, and for me it felt like cheating.

Mariam used the authority of religious teaching to frame her emotional response.

Elle, who described herself as having been "addicted" to pornography, positioned pornography in relation to religion. "Because the Bible says no", Elle said, she put her use of pornography "in a basket, … because it does hinder, I guess, it puts strain on things, especially if I was still doing that in a relationship". Elizabeth's views of pornography and fidelity in a relationship were similarly informed by religion:

> For me or someone with a Christian world view, there would be no healthy consumption because, you know, we're told to keep our, keep sex for our future spouse, the one we're going to be with forever and unconditionally love and sacrifice for. … [Pornography] is looking at another man or woman and imagining you're having sex with them. I wouldn't be cool with that, if my partner was doing that.

Using pornography is not infidelity. In contrast to the religion-informed construction of infidelity, other women positioned themselves in a discourse that dismissed use of pornography as threatening their relationships. They did not identify it as a tool used by men to give or withhold intimacy. These women depicted their relationships as satisfying and pornography as irrelevant. According to Samantha, her partner's pornography use "is the same as him looking at pictures of motorbikes; it doesn't mean anything".

[It] doesn't mean he's going to buy that bike or leave me for a bike or, if it's porn,

leave me for a porn star. It's a way for him to relax and turn off from the world.

Chloe assessed pornography as no more than a masturbation aid. Her partner's use was not infidelity because he was "not actually having sex with another person". Chloe characterised "masturbation and sex with somebody else" as "very different". Similarly, Svetlana described her shocked friends asking, "Do you let your boyfriend watch porn?" and replying, "I don't care. He can do whatever he wants".

Sexual Freedom

Men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment. An important—and at times discernibly dominant—discourse was that men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment. Women positioned in this discourse accepted the reality of an irresistible male sex drive. Inevitably, women's desires and emotions are overwhelmed by the priority given to men's sexual needs. Using pornography despite being in a committed sexual relationship, and regardless of the woman's attitude to pornography, was identified in this discourse as an expression of men's sexual rights.

Meghan, who had been in a long-term relationship with a man she described as "addicted to pornography," said, "You can't stop him from watching it". Her comments indicate her perception of the inherent uncontrollability of her partner's pornography consumption.

Jennifer "just assume[d] that most guys watch porn on a fairly regular basis". She gave an account of being "offended" when she "caught" her new partner "watching porn, a few months ago, in the middle the night". She said, "He could kind of get it with me, so why was he watching something online?" Her partner's right to sexual fulfilment was implicit in his reported response to her objection:

We talked about it, and he was like, "Look, it's the middle of the night. I can't sleep. I

thought maybe this would help me fall asleep. I didn't want to wake you up".

Jennifer's initial emotional response (being offended) appeared to have been negated or minimised through her partner's claim of his sexual rights, coupled with his apparent concern for her welfare.

The right to sexual fulfilment, however, was not completely unrestricted. While Bridgette positioned herself within this discourse, she identified "pornography addiction" as beyond the bounds of acceptable masculine sexual behaviour:

> [I] talked to my best friend about it and she was like, "I don't understand what the problem is. You know boys watch porn, and that's how it is". And I said, "But it's not that; it's something different. It's the *lying* behind it. He had it so close to his chest! And my ex-partner, he never said to me, you know, "I'm a boy. I just want to watch porn". … It was always, yes, we are both aware this is quite a serious problem.

As this anecdote illustrates, Bridgette accepted that men had a right to sexual fulfilment, including through pornography. If that had been what her partner was engaged in, she expected that pornography would be an open topic between them and that he would claim his right. Because his use of pornography was secretive, however, Bridgette (and, according to her, her partner) constructed it as problematic, beyond what was "normal" and permissible.

Sexual freedom is paramount. In this discourse, sexual freedom is not restricted to men but is a universal right to be upheld in relationships, claimed equally by women. Pornography serves as a vehicle for enhancing individual and shared sexual experiences, and intimacy is a by-product of pornography use rather than a central aim.

Sam, for example, said that she considered pornography to be "a vehicle for self-expression, I suppose, and for examining likes and desires". When pornography is thus constructed as a component of the right to sexual fulfilment, banning its use would be, as Julia said, an act of "shaming". She situated it in a broader understanding of restrictive sexuality: "People are already taught to shame their bodies. What's the sense in shaming your partner?"

Alyssa also found her partner's pornography use to be "completely natural", and went on to criticise the gendered social perception of pornography use:

> Women [are] mostly saying, "Oh, my male partner! Like why, why does he feel the need to do that? If your partner feels the need to do that, something shady is going on." … The other side is, the guy would be impressed if … [his] girlfriend is watching this: "That's so hot!" Like again, it's that sort of double standard that we have around sex and expression, between men and women.

Alyssa thus endorsed gendered equality in the right to sexual fulfilment and using pornography as a means to achieve it.

Bonnie exemplified the discourse of the right to sexual freedom in stating that pornography is part of her partner's pursuit of sexual fulfilment

> Knowing yourself and your body and what you like first is really important, and then, when you go to be with someone else, it promotes better sexual understanding of yourself, and then it makes you a better partner, I guess. … I am very encouraging of my partner to masturbate and have alone time. I guess that would usually involves pornography. So yeah, I don't mind.

Being sexually fulfilled as an individual, according to Bonnie, enhances the sexual relationship.

Discussion

This research exploring women's construction of the contribution of pornography to their sexual relationships is the first to be reported from Australia. It extends previous international research (Ashton et al., 2018; Campbell & Kohut, 2017) by revealing the challenging discursive environment within which women (and men) must make their lives. It explains the complexity and contradiction found in the meanings attributed to pornography by young women (Ashton et al., 2018, Ashton et al., Under Review A, Ashton et al., Under Review B). In sexual relationships there is a confluence of (among other things) the sexuality of the persons involved, social constructions

of gender, and social constructions of gender relations. The addition of pornography amplifies the complexity, especially given the taboos surrounding discussion of pornography and of women's sexual expression. We found that women's accounts prioritised the needs of men, the needs of the relationships, and the ideal of sexual freedom. It is notable that no discourses emerged that prioritised the needs women. The discourses we have identified help us to understand young women's confusion and suggest an approach to providing clinical support when it is requested.

The dominant discourses prioritised men's needs in relation to pornography: *Men are the gate keepers of intimacy*, *Women need to objectify themselves to compete with pornography,* and *Men have an inherent right to sexual fulfilment.* In each of these, women's emotional, sexual, and relational needs are disregarded. Four decades after Hollway (1984) identified the *Male sexual drive* discourse, we have found that it continues to be distributed. Men's assumed biological need entitles them to expect women to service their right to sexual fulfilment. Having to compete with pornography through sexual self-objectification places the onus on women to conduct the labour to achieve intimacy, which men have the power to thwart. This is consistent with traditional gender-role theory in which women are responsible for managing the emotional labour in relationships (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Horne & Johnson, 2018). Although willing self-objectification might be understood as an expression of women's ownership of their sexual desires, a component of postfeminism (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Dobson, 2015), women's accounts did not reveal ownership but rather the obligation to please their male partners.

Although the discourse that *Religion equates pornography with infidelity* might appear to protect women from the challenges presented by pornography, it disallows any benefits available to women from using pornography and subjects them to a higher, paternalistic, authority. It is consistent with Hollway's (1984) *Have/hold* discourse that distributes Christian ideals of monogamy. Religious constraints on sexual expression tend, in practice, to restrict women's expression of their sexual needs more than men's.

The discourses *Sexual freedom is paramount* and *Pornography mediates intimacy* could be considered consistent with sex-positive approaches to relationships (Fahs, 2014). The first discourse prioritises the right to sexual expression for women as well as men and the second constructs pornography as a tool for sexual exploration (by individuals and within relationships) rather than infidelity or a detraction from relationship intimacy. The implied challenges to traditional relationship structure and practice can be read as liberating for women and emphatically sex-positive. However, in the context of competing discourses, as was evident in these women's accounts, the needs of the relationship and the male partner tended to be prioritised. Women appeared to be sexually free to satisfy what they understood to be men's needs, and the use of pornography was justified predominantly to service the valued intimacy of the relationship. The inherent paradox can be understood as contributing to the contradictory emotional and sexual experiences conveyed in women's accounts.

Having to negotiate these discourses, especially to prioritise men's needs, has implications for women's health and wellbeing. For example, women who engage in self-objectification are at risk of eating disorders, depressed mood, anxiety about their appearance, and reduced sexual pleasure (Tiggemann, 2011). In our research, the conflict among women's sense of self, the demands of their relationships, and their experience of pornography resulted in confusion, distress, and what could be described as relationship anxiety. Women's focus on their partners' needs entailed disconnection from their own emotional needs and limitation of their claim to sexual pleasure. The quality of women's relationships, particularly in relation to intimacy, fidelity, and sexual expression, could be adversely affected, not necessarily by the use of pornography but by the unresolved competing discursive demands.

These results may be useful to practitioners (psychologists, counsellors, social workers, general practitioners, psychiatrists) in supporting the health and wellbeing of young women. When a woman consults a practitioner about her experience of pornography, it is likely to be prompted by distress or concern. The contradictions inherent in these competing discourses could, at least in part,

explain this distress. If the practitioner identifies these discourses and invites the woman to reflect on them, there could be an opportunity to assist her to make sense of her concerns and to normalise her confusion. In the absence of dominant discourses prioritising women's needs, practitioners could assist women who consult them to clarify and articulate their own experiences, preferences, and needs.

The proliferation of pornography presents a seemingly new and unfamiliar addition to relationships. At the same time, the use of pornography magnifies the existing challenges and pleasures of gendered intimacies. Individuals bring to sexual relationships their own, often already contradictory, experiences and expectations that need to be reconciled with those of their partners. Pornography adds another complex thread to this melange, with its baggage of being at once socially condemned and personally enticing, accepted (if at all) only as a masculine activity. We suggest that the steps taken here to identify and define some of the confusion contributing to young women's difficulties in negotiating the meaning of pornography to their relationships can be used to contribute to women's health and wellbeing.

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Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusions

Through this research I have sought to understand how young women make sense of their experience of pornography. Building on the themes identified in the systematic review of existing research, the effects of technological change, and my proposed definition, I have conducted the first Australian research to explore the nuances and complexities of this phenomenon. While the results chapters present the many layers and complexities of women's experiences, the central finding of this research can be summarised in the following way: the dominant discourses do not prioritise the needs of women, and instead maintain focus on those of men. While these discourses were dominant, each woman had to negotiate and was positioned within multiple, often contradictory, discourses. Some of the discursive positioning was in line with sex-positive and feminist ideologies. This demonstrates emerging challenges to dominant discourses.

This primary finding and women's multiple discursive positioning have been illustrated through the analysis of pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships. Women's prioritisation of needs occurred during the process of navigating the boundaries of sexual experiences. The women explored the boundaries of pleasure, and articulated the delineation between what did and did not feel good. Negotiation of consensual boundaries required all parties to recognise verbal and non-verbal cues during an emotional and physical experience to communicate what a woman was willing to experience or not, and what made her feel safe or not. Within their sexual relationships, women described the process of establishing boundaries to promote intimacy, define fidelity, and prioritise or inhibit sexual freedom (depending on what was considered conducive to the 'ideal' relationship). The intersection with pornography further challenged and confounded the process of navigation. A source of digital, sexual stimulation external to the individual and the relationship, pornography was experienced and constructed by the women as both aiding and inhibiting the process of boundary navigation in each domain. Through this navigation, women prioritised the needs of their partners, the needs of their relationships, the ethics of pornography production, religious ideology, and the ideal of sexual freedom, before or instead of prioritising their own needs.

The discourses that do not prioritise women's needs do not originate in pornography. Pornography is a vehicle for discursive distribution, and women's experiences illustrate pornography's role in reinforcing this prioritisation. While the continually evolving, immersive nature of pornography presents a seemingly new and unfamiliar addition to pleasure, consent, and sexual relationships, the findings of this research suggest that experiences of pornography are an iteration of existing societal and intimacy challenges. Discourses that do not prioritise women's needs are reinforced

by silence. This research challenges this silence through providing a framework for facilitating acknowledgement and understanding of the needs and intimate experiences of young women.

My learning

This research has expanded my perspective on and understanding of women's experiences of pornography. To illustrate my learning as a researcher, I have selected some of the findings that challenged my initial assumptions. I outline my reflections and discuss the implications for my professional agenda.

My work as a psychologist with sexual offenders and my review of correlational research led me to expect associations between pornography and negative outcomes for women. Challenging of my assumption of a causal relationship began through my familiarisation with and utilisation of qualitative methods. This methodological approach then led me to focus on understanding women's experiences, without (deliberately) making assumptions about an outcome. The realisation that pornography is a vehicle for discourses further expanded my understanding of the nature of this relationship. The women's accounts of positive experiences broadened my perspective on the role that pornography could play in women's lives. They described pornography contributing to individual or shared pleasure, directly provoking physical arousal through voyeurism or taking the perspective of an actor, and introducing new sexual activities to enhance shared pleasure. Pornography contributed to the women's understanding of what they would consent to and mediated emotional intimacy in their relationships. The private and anonymous nature of pornography allowed them and their partners to have these experiences without fear of judgement and within a comfortable space. These discoveries alerted me to the importance of normalising and accepting the diversity of women's sexual expression, pleasure, and relationship practices, which can include pornography.

While I initially assumed a direct relationship between consuming pornography and sexual violence, I learnt that issues of sexual consent in relation to pornography are threefold: consent in the production and distribution of pornography; the consent practices that are experienced and depicted in pornography; and the influence of the content on the consent practices of consumers. The issues of consent as they relate to production and distribution were highlighted when I reviewed the technological changes afforded by smartphone technology. Most notably, an epidemic of 'revenge porn' has resulted in violation of women's safety and privacy, and is associated with devastating psychological effects (Bates, 2017). Issues of consent that arise during the production and distribution of pornography were emphasised to me when the women considered the experience of the actors. They consistently stated their preference to consume pornography (independently and within relationships) that depicts consensual, enjoyable sexual experiences. Some women described viewing pornography that featured a discussion about

consent prior to sex. However, most women said they could not be sure if the pornography they viewed was a true representation of safety, wellbeing, and consent. The influence of the content on consent practices became evident to me when the women described the influence of their partner's pornography consumption on his behaviour and preferences during shared sexual experiences. None of the women used the word 'consent', or the lack thereof, to describe their experience, despite it being evident in their accounts. They described their sexual partners viewing pornography, then enacting what they had seen with the expectation that it would be accepted without discussion and enjoyed. While the women's accounts revealed experiences (and violations) of consent on these levels, ultimately, my research identifies pornography as a vehicle through which discourses that normalise sexual violence (and the lack of consent) are distributed. This learning has alerted me to the continued and escalating importance of addressing the social problem of gendered violence, and the value of including pornography in future discussions of consent.

My research has made me more aware of the important role researchers and health practitioners can play in challenging the discourses of pornography, women's sexuality, and consent. While my participation in supervision, conferences, and professional networking was part of this learning, there was a salient experience I will share for illustration: the attitudes and comments that arose when I presented some of my results at my university. The quotations I selected from the women's accounts provoked discomfort and even shock in a few colleagues. I received feedback that I should 'tone down' my findings, so as not to discomfit the audience and cause reputational damage to the university. I also received comments in support of my research and the value of the findings to public health academia. The diversity of responses illustrates that academics are not immune to the same broader social discourses identified within my research, in particular those that reinforce anxiety and shame when discussing women's sexual experiences. The comments in support illustrate the existence of alternative constructions and the utility of presenting my results in order to reinforce these constructions within academia.

My personal learning has also been supported by a recently published critique of academic sex research, which found that researchers do not discuss sexual pleasure (Jones, 2018). This experience gave context and possible explanation for my earlier observations that my undergraduate psychology education lacked sexuality curricula. I have concluded that it is essential for both health practitioners and academic scholars to set the standard for public discussion and to reflect on their own positions within social discourses that do not prioritise the needs of women and stigmatise discussion of women's sexual experiences. This learning reinforces my goal of increasing the visibility of pornography and women's sexual experiences within health research settings so that the next generation of health practitioners can respond to the impetus of change required more broadly.

Responding to key implications

There are four key implications of my research: challenging the construction of pornography as inevitably problematic; acknowledging women's sexual experiences; improving consent practices; and integrating the findings into health services. As a practising psychologist and a researcher, I outline in the next section how I have responded to these implications during my candidature. I also indicate what plans I have formed as a result of what I have learnt.

Challenging the construction of pornography as inevitably problematic

These findings present a nuanced understanding that challenges existing public discussion and construction of pornography as inevitably problematic. This construction denies that pornography can be used in benign, even advantageous, ways. Those who advocate the banning of pornography (e.g. Dworkin, 1981) are promoting a futile task. A more useful response involves: a) supporting ethics and safety within pornography production; b) supporting the production of pornography content that depicts pleasure, consent, and relationship practices in a manner that, if mimicked, would be likely to encourage the health and wellbeing of consumers (this is an agenda of ethical and feminist pornography: Taormino, 2013); and c) acknowledging pornography's omnipresence in the lives of young people and supporting them to navigate their experiences and understand their needs.

I will have an opportunity to implement some of my ideas through consultation with a private company that is evaluating a government-funded campaign on the harms of pornography to children. When providing feedback on survey design, I will suggest strategies for sensitive and nuanced enquiry about the potential outcomes of pornography. Through this feedback, I hope to recommend that young people be encouraged to speak about their experiences without the assumption of negative outcomes. I will explain that this assumption and lack of discussion can lead to the stigmatisation of sexual experiences and reinforce shame and invisibility.

In addition to scholarly publications, I also plan to disseminate my findings through public forums and publications for the general reader. I will disseminate to health practitioners through presentations at health conferences and publications in the newsletters of health organisations.

Acknowledging women's sexual experiences

While the central finding relates to the de-prioritisation of women's needs, 'priority' in the context of sexual needs reinforces the gendered construction of sexuality. Therefore I do not propose that women's needs are now prioritised; I propose that women's and men's sexual experiences should be equally acknowledged. Challenging discourses that do not recognise women's needs requires the visibility of multiple and varied representations of sexual practices, relationship dynamics, and

pleasure. Disseminating my research findings will serve directly as a discursive challenge through their overt representation of women's sexual experiences. I will further encourage acknowledgement of women's sexual experiences through justifying the function and purpose of making my research findings visible within my scholarly and psychological communications. The avenues for communication include providing evidence-based recommendations to government-funded health agencies, and providing training to psychologists, health practitioners, and scholars.

I attended a one-day symposium called the *Pleasure Agenda,* run by Family Planning Victoria, where I was able to informally discuss with educators, sexual health practitioners, writers, and fellow academics how public and private strategies can enhance the visibility and priority of pleasure in the context of health and social services. I was able to contribute my pornography-specific findings to the discussion. Family Planning Victoria stated that it intended to disseminate strategies for promoting the importance of sexual pleasure to collaborating organisations.

Improving consent practices/responding to sexual violence

Discourses that do not recognise women's needs contribute to the circumstances around non-consensual experiences. Challenging social constructions of men's entitlement to sex, the normalisation of sexual violence, and women's responsibility for their safety is necessary in order to improve consent practices, generally and as they relate to pornography. Improving knowledge and understanding of consent practices through public discussion, and critiquing representation of sexual practices within the media contribute to this process.

During my candidature I had the opportunity to publicly respond to a depiction of sexual violence within the media. I published an article in *The Conversation* commenting on the movie *Fifty Shades Darker* (Appendix H). At the time, this movie was publicly visible and a widely viewed depiction of a woman's sexual relationship entailing purportedly "consensual" sexual violence and submission. I commented on the use of a fairytale narrative that normalises non-consensual sexual encounters and asserted that this is not only harmful in the context of the social construction of consent, but also robs women of the opportunity to freely construct and enact their sexual expression. This article was viewed more than 32,000 times and was republished by *The Age*, *Canberra Times* and other news organisations. The comments section was closed down after the discussion resulted in abusive comments such as: 'sit bitch, you have probably never had a good fuck in your life'. Responses such as this so exquisitely illustrate the need for publicly visible critiques of representations of sexual practice and demonstrate the utility of publishing in more broadly read outlets.

With this utility in mind, I also plan to publish a version of my findings in *The Conversation*. I intend to write about my proposed definition of pornography, which requires consideration of consent for

production, and my results articulating women's construction of consent within experiences of pornography. Following this, I will also seek out media opportunities in relation to my research in order to instigate public discussion.

I also conducted a workshop on sexual assault for members of a kink community. (A kink community shares alternative sexual practices. I will not name the community for confidentiality reasons.) A member of this community contacted me (as a psychologist) and requested that I provide information about sexual assault including the prevalence and impact, and how to proactively support victim/survivors and prevent future occurrence. In particular, I emphasised that consent processes need to compensate for the inherent power differential between men and women, and other factors such as age and experience. In total, 60 people attended and this sparked informative discussion about how a community can support consent processes and manage incidents where non-consent is reported. It was evident to me that many more such discussions need to occur broadly across society, and that workshops could provide a supportive environment for these discussions to occur. I plan to offer further workshops to this community and to others.

I will also support change though providing psychological treatment to those for whom consent has been violated and to those who have violated consent. I plan to seek out professional and personal opportunities to advocate for women's safety.

Integrating findings into health services

In addition to dissemination through academia, health services can be a powerful and important avenue for promoting social change and supporting individuals. To promote safety, health, and wellbeing, and discussion about the experiences of pornography in the lives of women (and men), the findings from this research need to be integrated into sexual health services, psychological services, and health services more broadly. Practitioners need to be informed both that pornography is important to talk about, and how to ask about it. Practitioners need to support women to understand their sexual needs and boundaries. I aim to promote the integration of my finding through: raising awareness in health communities; developing practitioner resources; and integrating this into my own practice.

I have been invited to speak at the Society of Australian Sexologists to share the results of my research next year with an audience of sex therapists, medical practitioners, sex educators, and sex researchers. This will provide a platform for networking and disseminating my research findings to relevant practitioners and for my practitioner resources in future. I plan to seek out similar opportunities within other health practitioner communities.

I plan to translate my findings into resources for psychologists as part of my postdoctoral research. I will include information about pornography and summarise my findings. I will develop a guide that includes questions psychologists could ask that may assist women to describe their experiences of pornography and to articulate their sexual needs and boundaries. I will present guidelines specifying how psychologists could challenge normalised violence and the societal failure to prioritise women's needs. I plan to include case studies that provide examples of women's experiences that a psychologist could share in order to normalise a client's experiences.

Future research

I have gathered rich data and would like to continue to conduct analyses in further areas of experience that are apparently meaningful, particularly pornography and women's perceptions of their bodies (specifically their vulvas and breasts) and women's pornography content preferences. Future research could explore this conflict between women's expressed concern for actors' wellbeing and their lack of willingness to support 'ethical' or 'feminist' pornography through payment for pornography. To follow from my paper that defined pornography, I will also use the data to explore how women define pornography for themselves.

I am part of a research team that intends to conduct similar research to understand how men who have or intend to have sex with women make sense of their experiences of pornography, as well as with women who do not intend to have sex with men and men who do not intend to have sex with women. Exploring the experiences of people who have varied gender or sexuality identities, sexual practices, and relationship practices is imperative. Older and younger age groups and people living in different localities would also contribute to our understanding. Based on these findings, we plan to design a survey to gather large-scale quantitative data to understand pornography consumption in Australia.

It is my hope that the definition presented in the published paper that forms Chapter 1 will be used by other social science and public health researchers and, in doing so, a consistent body of research can be built.

Concluding my journey

My journey has involved a collision between my learning and development as a researcher, my professional practice as a psychologist, and my personal experience as a woman. The intersection of these experiences during my candidature has encouraged a rich reflexive practice, and opportunities to integrate intellectual, emotional, and experiential understanding into my research and professional practice. Seeking to understand women's experiences of pornography has revealed to me that this experience is not inevitably problematic but, rather, that the discourses in which they are positioned influence the landscape of women's experiences. This journey and my

enriched perspective have fuelled my passion, and focused and direction of my career. I dedicate my future to advocating and working towards gender equality and safety in the realm of sexual expression.

Through this thesis, I have found hope in response to sexual violence. To provide apt, conceptual bookends to my journey, I began with a quote justifying sexual violence from a young man, and I end with a quote from the inspirational academic and activist Angelia Davis:

> I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change, I'm changing the things I cannot accept.

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Appendix A

Approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

MONASH University

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the project below was considered by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Committee was satisfied that the proposal meets the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and has granted approval.

Project Number:	CF16/1229 - 2016000655
Project Title:	Young women's experiences of pornography: A narrative approach to understanding the construction of sexual self-identify
Chief Investigator:	Dr Karalyn McDonald
Approved:	**From:** 14 June 2016 **To:** 14 June 2021

Terms of approval - *Failure to comply with the terms below is in breach of your approval and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.*

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation.
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must include your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Require the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

Professor Nip Thomson
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Dr Maggie Kirkman, Ms Sarah Ashton

Appendix B
Screening Questions

SCREENING QUESTIONS

Thank you for your interest in the Young Women and Pornography Study. This research will involve interviewing women to understand their experiences with pornography. We have permission from our ethics committee to speak to women between the ages of 18 and 30. Does this include you?

Yes – Continue

No – *Thank you very much for your interest in the study. At this stage we are limiting our research to women aged between 18 and 30.*

For the initial research we are talking to women who have sex with men or plan to in the future. We hope there will be another study for women who don't have sex with men and do not plan to. Which study is more appropriate for you?

Women who have or intend to have sex with men – *Would you like me to send you through more information about the study to help you decide if you would like to volunteer?*

Women who have not, and do not intend to have sex with men – *Would you like to leave your contact details so that researchers can let you know if the future research is going ahead?*

[If criteria are met, send through Explanatory statement and Consent Form]

SCREENING QUESTIONS – Amended for education level

Thank you for your interest in the Young Women and Pornography Study. This research will involve interviewing women to understand their experiences with pornography.

We are wanting to interview women from a range of backgrounds. At this stage, we would only like to interview women who are not university educated. Could you indicate if you are eligible?

Not university educated – Continue

University educated – *Thank you very much for your interest in the study. At this stage we are just interviewing women who are not university educated. Would you like to leave your contact details so we can invite you to participate in future research?*

We have permission from our ethics committee to speak to women between the ages of 18 and 30. Does this include you?

Yes – Continue

No – *Thank you very much for your interest in the study. At this stage we are limiting our research to women aged between 18 and 30.*

For the initial research we are talking to women who have sex with men or plan to in the future. We hope there will be another study for women who don't have sex with men and do not plan to. Which study is more appropriate for you?

Women who have or intend to have sex with men – *Would you like me to send you through more information about the study to help you decide if you would like to volunteer?*

Women who have not, and do not intend to have sex with men – *Would you like to leave your contact details so that researchers can let you know if the future research is going ahead?*

[If criteria are met, send through Explanatory statement and Consent Form]

Young Women & Pornography

Explanatory Statement

Researchers:	Dr Karalyn McDonald	Dr Maggie Kirkman	Sarah Ashton
	Jean Hailes Research Unit School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine **Monash University**		
	E:YWAP.research@monash.edu	P:03 9903 8911	

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this Explanatory Statement before deciding whether or not to participate.

What does this research involve?

- You will be asked to talk about your thoughts and experiences on pornography
- You can say as much or as little as you like. We expect the interviews to last about 30 to 60 minutes
- Volunteers will be interviewed by Sarah Ashton who is conducting this research for her PhD. Sarah is a young woman who has experience discussing sensitive topics
- With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that we accurately capture what you say

You were chosen for this research because:

- You are a woman aged from 18 to 30 years
- You have sex with men or intend to in the future
- You have expressed an interest in speaking about pornography
- You can speak English

Consenting to participate in the project and withdrawing from research

- You can consent by signing the consent form. You can send it to us or give it to us at the time of the interview. If you are being interviewed on phone or skype you can tell Sarah before the interview that you consent and your consent will be audio recorded.
- You can withdraw from the research up to two weeks following your interview and your recording of the interview can be deleted.

Possible benefits and risks to participants

- We can't promise that you will personally benefit from this research. The information you provide will contribute to research and knowledge that we hope will help other young women around Australia.
- It is possible that talking about pornography could bring up upsetting thoughts or memories. If this happens, you can take a break or stop the interview.

Confidentiality

- We will change or remove any details in your interview transcript (including your name) that could identify you.
- When we write or publish the results, we will make sure that no person who participated in the research can be identified

Storage of data

- Your recording will be stored in a secure password-protected file on the Monash University system, accessible only to Sarah, Dr Karalyn McDonald and Dr Maggie Kirkman. Original audio recording and original transcripts will be deleted in accordance with Monash policy. This is usually about 5 years after the research ends.

Results

- If you would like a summary of the results, please give us with your contact details and we can send them to you. It will take a long time to analyse all the interviews; results are unlikely to be available before the beginning of 2018.

Thank you for your interest.

Complaints

Should you have any concerns or complaints about the project you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Monash University Human Research Ethics (MUHREC):

Executive Officer
Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Room 111, Building 3e
Research Office
Monash University VIC 3800
Tel: +61 3 9905 2052   Email: muhrec@monash.edu   Fax: +61 3 9905 3831

Further support

If the interview brings up any upsetting thoughts or memories and you would like further support you might like to consult with your GP or a psychologist. You can contact Life Line on 13 11 14.

Young Women & Pornography

CONSENT FORM - PARTICIPANT COPY

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and hereby consent to participate in this project.

Signing this consent form is evidence that I:

- Understand the explanatory statement
- Consent to take part in the research project, as outlined in the explanatory statement
- Consent to participate in the audio-recorded interview
- Consent to the use of de-identified material derived from my interview in presentations and publications as described in the explanatory statement.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time up to two weeks after my interview has taken place.

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

For the researcher:

I have given an oral explanation of the research project and its procedures and risk and I believe that the participant understood that explanation.

Name of Researcher _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Jean Hailes
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

MONASH University

Young Women & Pornography

CONSENT FORM – RESEARCHER COPY

I have been asked to take part in the Monash University project specified above. I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement and hereby consent to participate in this project.

Signing this consent form is evidence that I:

- Understand the explanatory statement
- Consent to take part in the research project, as outlined in the explanatory statement
- Consent to participate in the audio-recorded interview
- Consent to the use of de-identified material derived from my interview in presentations and publications as described in the explanatory statement.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time up to two weeks after my interview has taken place.

Name of Participant _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

For the researcher:

I have given an oral explanation of the research project and its procedures and risk and I believe that the participant understood that explanation.

Name of Researcher _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Young Women & Pornography

SUMMARY OF RESULTS REQUEST

Would you like to receive a summary of the results of this study?

Once the result of this study are analysed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you.

To receive a copy, please provide us with the following information:

Name:_____

Email Address:_____

Research Contact Details:

E:YWAP.research@monash.edu   P:03 9903 8911

YOUNG WOMEN

&

PORNOGRAPHY

We want to hear your story
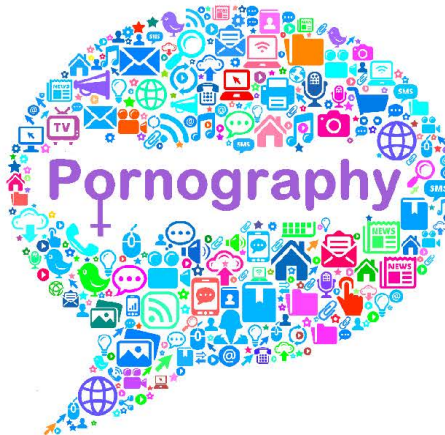
Pornography

If you are a woman aged from 18 to 30
we would like to invite you to be interviewed
about your reflections on pornography

The interviews are for research
being conducted by Dr Karalyn McDonald, Dr Maggie Kirkman and Sarah Ashton
at the Jean Hailes Research Unit
School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine
Monash University

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO VOLUNTEER

Please contact Sarah Ashton: YWAP.Research@monash.edu or 03 9903 8911

Jean Hailes
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

MONASH University

Appendix G
Interview Guide

Thank for meeting
(If on phone) Is it still convenient to talk?
Consent process:
- Ensure participant has read and understood explanatory statement
- Any questions?
- Written or oral consent

Advised that I will be taking notes to I can come back to important points

Introduction:
Before we begin I'd like to remind you that we can have a break or stop at any time. You don't need to talk about anything you don't want to. As you know we are interested your reflections on pornography. There are lots of different words that people use when speaking about sex and body parts. Please use words you feel comfortable with. Can you tell me what prompted you to volunteer? Was there a story you wanted to tell?

Potential topics to pursue:

Definition:
What do you think about when you hear the word pornography?

Their definition   •Media involved eg. Internet or magazine   •Content it includes

Exposure:
Can you tell me about your experience with pornography?
- First experience
- Role it plays in life currently –current use, attitudes, exposure
- Sexual communication online, telephone, skype, virtual sex or second life
- Self-production - naked or sexual photos
- Exposure to pornography through friendship group or partners
- Opinions and practices of friendship group
- Opinions about women in pornography
- Exposure through culture, media

Influence on sexual practices:
Some women say that pornography has influenced sexual practices. What are your thoughts or experience with that?

Likes   • Dislikes   •Sexual behaviour engaged in   •Fantasies

Influence on intimate relationships:
Some women feel that pornography influences their intimate relationships. Can you tell me about your experience?

Sexual practices with current/previous partner   •Pornography use with partner   • Pornography use before/during sex

Unwanted sexual practice:
Women sometimes report unwanted or unpleasant sexual experiences that might have occurred because of pornography. Have you or anyone you know had such experiences?

Unpleasant/unwanted experiences   • Revenge porn

Sexual pleasure:
Sexual pleasure is difficult to define as everyone has different experiences and opinions. What does sexual pleasure mean to you? Does pornography play a part in this?

•Experience of pleasure (physical/psychological)   •Influence of pornography   •"Faking it"   •Performing

Sexual identity:
How has pornography influenced:
• Attraction (to men or women or other)   •Role of sex in life   •Words to describe sexual identity
• Difference between attraction, fantasy and sexual behaviour

Advice & Conclusion:
What advice would you give to girls or women about pornography?
What would you like to say you haven't had a chance to say so far?

Thank for participation
Demographics
Request for Results

[TO BE COMPLETED BY INTERVIEWER]

Could I please now ask you are few demographic questions? These questions will be asked to describe our sample. We will not use this information in a way that you could be identified.

- Ensure each person knows that this information is being noted
- Complete informally during the interview when possible
- Ensure complete at the end of the interview

Choice of pseudonym: _____ Date of Interview:_____ Interviewer:_____

How did they find out about the interview_____

1. Age_____ years

2. State of residence _____

3. Sex
   ☐Female
   ☐Male
   ☐Other _____

4. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
   ☐Yes   ☐No

5. Country of birth_____

6. Highest level of education you have completed
   ☐Primary school
   ☐Partially completed secondary school (less that Year 12)
   ☐Completed secondary school
   ☐Trade/apprenticeship
   ☐University degree
   ☐Higher University degree (eg. Masters or PhD)

7. Occupation_____

8. Relationship status

In a relationship	In multiple relationships	Not in a relationship
☐ Male ☐Female ☐Committed ☐Uncommitted ☐Long term ☐Short term ☐Live together ☐Live separately ☐Just sexual in nature	Number:_____ ☐ Male ☐Female ☐Committed ☐Uncommitted ☐Long term ☐Short term ☐Live together ☐Live separately ☐Just sexual in nature	☐Do not have sex with anyone Casual sex with: ☐ Male ☐Female

Pornography Use:

9. Cost:

☐ Paid	☐Free

10. Frequency and duration:

☐Multiple times a day ☐Daily ☐Multiple times a week ☐Weekly ☐Multiple times a month ☐Monthly ☐Multiple times per year ☐Yearly ☐Never	☐>30 mins ☐<30 mins ☐<1hour ☐2 hours +

11. Content of pornography viewed

Featuring:	Sexual Acts:	Specific Genres:
☐Males ☐Females ☐Males and Females ☐Males and Males ☐Females and Females ☐More than two people ☐Transsexual ☐Objects	☐Solo masturbation ☐Mutual masturbation ☐Cunnilingus ☐Fellatio ☐Vaginal penetration ☐Anal penetration ☐Object penetration	☐Age ☐Hair type ☐Body features ☐Race ☐Bondage/BDSM ☐Bodily function ☐Other fetish ☐Reality (amateur) ☐Computer generated ☐Other

Appendix H

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (2017, 9 February). Fifty Shades Darker: An abusive fairy tale that robs women of sexual freedom. *The Conversation*. http://theconversation.com/fifty-shades-darker-an-abusive-fairy-tale-that-robs-women-of-sexual-freedom-72724

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Fifty Shades Darker: an abusive fairy tale that robs women of sexual freedom

February 9, 2017 5.03pm AEDT

Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) and Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson) in Fifty Shades Darker. Universal Pictures

Email
Twitter   41
Facebook   995
LinkedIn
Print

At the end of Fifty Shades of Grey, the first in E L James' trilogy of novels now adapted as films, protagonist Anastasia ends her abusive relationship with the dominating businessman Christian Grey. She had attempted to understand his dark side, by "allowing" him to beat her. Traumatised, Anastasia vowed never to see him again.

The sequel, Fifty Shades Darker, opens in Australia this week. The movie is targeted at women. One of us attended a "girls' night out" premiere. As they arrived, attendees were given beauty products and vaginal wipes.

Equipped to transform themselves into sexually desirable conquests, the audience was there to witness Anastasia's tokenistic resistance to Mr Grey's domination and demands. The film attempts to persuade us that claiming a male fantasy as our own, is, in fact, empowering — and the perfect way to get the guy.

After the first movie, there was debate about its romanticisation of an abusive relationship. The sequel confirms that this wasn't a misconception. As researchers, we are interested in the representation of women's sexuality in media and how this influences women's sexual health. Films such as Fifty Shades Darker, seen by millions of men and women around Australia, have the power to influence our perceptions of women's sexual agency.

In the sequel, Anastasia agrees to see Mr Grey again because he pledges that "having" Anastasia is more important than fulfilling his controlling sexual fantasies. He promises to communicate and to reveal more of his traumatic past.

Authors

Sarah Ashton
PhD Candidate, Monash University

Karalyn McDonald
Research fellow, Monash University

Maggie Kirkman
Senior Research Fellow, Jean Hailes Research Unit, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University

Mr Grey asks Anastasia to move into his apartment and to marry him at a time when they are dealing with a sexually harassing boss, she is being stalked and threatened by his former (now traumatised) "sub" (submissive partner), and they have a run-in with Mr Grey's former abuser — not to mention Mr Grey enduring a freak helicopter crash. Not at a time when life is calm and he is demonstrating what a new man he is.
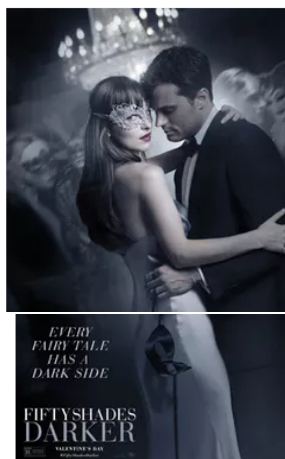
Is this the dream? A self-identified sadistic, controlling man wants us to believe he's been transformed by the love of a young woman and her supposed assertion of agency through small expressions of her limits. The proof, we are asked to accept, is in the fairy tale ending: flowers, fireworks, and a diamond ring.

In reality, women stay in abusive relationships because they are physically, financially, or psychologically restricted or threatened. They endure the torment because they want to believe the man (or woman) will change.

The fairy tale ending to this film is presented to women as evidence that the sadistic man who stalks her, controls her and disrespects her requests for independence will change through the power of her love.

In the first film, Mr Grey initiates and directs all sexual interactions with a passive Anastasia who appears to enjoy it all. In Fifty Shades Darker we are encouraged to believe that Anastasia has developed maturity and power when she tells Mr Grey she wants to be "kissed": her euphemism for oral sex.

Later, she asks to be "spanked". After she accepts his marriage proposal, Anastasia initiates a return to the "red room", a room filled with tools for "punishment" and sexual pleasure, the scene of her earlier trauma. The sex at this point looks a whole lot like what Mr Grey enjoys.

When women "choose" the male fantasy they are not creating their own. They are robbing themselves of the chance to explore and to express their needs and desires, to reveal and understand their own preferences and aversions.

Enjoying sex is not just about pleasing the sexual partner; it entails knowing your own body, understanding your emotional experiences, and having the freedom to express your needs.

Women's acceptance of the male fantasy parallels our emerging research findings. At the Jean Hailes Research Unit in the School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, we are investigating young women's (aged 18-30) experiences of and reflections on pornography.

Our early analysis (unpublished) indicates that, in women's eyes, most pornography depicts men initiating and directing sexual activity, women accepting it without attempts to direct or modify it, and women enjoying any sexual practices men initiate. Sound familiar?

Women have told us that viewing and enacting this "script" has led them to suppress their own needs, thus limiting their sexual pleasure. They spoke about mimicking porn actors to please men. Men might not have asked them to do this but women often took for granted that it was expected of them.

Some women felt that saying "no" to a sexual practice or to a request from a male partner was not an available option. If they contemplated refusal, it was expected or found to be extremely uncomfortable.

In a world where the US president, a man accused of serial sexual harassment, has signed away women's reproductive rights, we need to be concerned about how women can claim agency over their bodies and lives.

When it comes to relationships and sexual pleasure, let's be real about what empowerment means: education, the right to say no, freedom of expression, the opportunity to explore, and choice.

For these crucial goals, Fifty Shades Darker is not an aspirational story for women. Mr Grey is no Romeo. He is the antithesis of a desirable role model for men.

Film   Film review   Sexual abuse   Sexism   Sex abuse   Review

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