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Nomos

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## EDITORIAL

### **Media representations of sexuality in an era of pornification**

Editorial to the Special Issue

### **Mediendarstellungen von Sexualität im Zeitalter der Pornografisierung**

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## EDITORIAL

### Media representations of sexuality in an era of pornification Editorial to the Special Issue

### Mediendarstellungen von Sexualität im Zeitalter der Pornografisierung Editorial zum Sonderheft

*Nicola Döring, Nicole Krämer, Dan J. Miller, Thorsten Quandt & Gerhard Vowe*

**Abstract:** As a result of digitalization, sexually explicit media content is now produced and distributed in much greater quantity and variety in private, public, and commercial contexts. Increased normalization of pornography, greater sexualization of media content, and the public debates associated with these developments are indicative of a trend towards pornification. At the same time, interdisciplinary pornography research has been evolving in recent decades, with communication science making important contributions to this area. However, in contrast to gaming research, pornography research is institutionalized to a much lesser extent. There is a “Game Studies” division within the International Communication Association (ICA), but no equivalent “Porn Studies” division. And to our knowledge, this Special Issue is the first Special Issue of an ICA-associated journal dedicated to pornography. The five empirical articles in this issue deal with different aspects of pornification, namely press coverage of OnlyFans.com, non-commercial production and distribution of pornographic images among gay, bisexual, and queer men, different preferences for pornographic content when viewed alone or in a partnership, computer-generated rough sex pornography, and an intervention to promote pornography literacy. This Special Issue aims to encourage communication science to devote more attention to sexually explicit communication and to help close existing gaps in research.

**Keywords:** Sexually explicit media content, media representations of sexuality, erotica, pornography, pornification, pornographization, media content analysis, pornography literacy.

**Zusammenfassung:** Sexuell explizite Medieninhalte werden im Zuge der Digitalisierung heute in deutlich größerer Menge und Vielfalt in privaten, öffentlichen und kommerziellen Kontexten produziert und verbreitet. Die zunehmende Normalisierung von Pornografie, die stärkere Sexualisierung von Medieninhalten und die diesbezüglichen öffentlichen Debatten lassen sich als Trend zur Pornografisierung beschreiben. Zeitgleich entwickelt sich in den letzten Dekaden eine interdisziplinäre Pornografieforschung, zu der auch die Kommunikationswissenschaft wichtige Beiträge leistet. Doch institutionalisiert ist die Pornografieforschung im Unterschied zur Gaming-Forschung innerhalb der Kommunikationswis-

senschaft in deutlich geringerem Maße. Es gibt innerhalb der International Communication Association (ICA) eine Division “Game Studies”, aber keine Division “Porn Studies”. Und das vorliegende Schwerpunktheft ist unseres Wissens das erste Special Issue einer ICA-assoziierten Fachzeitschrift, das sich der Pornografie widmet. Die fünf empirischen Beiträge dieses Heftes befassen sich mit verschiedenen Aspekten der Pornografisierung: Es geht um die Presseberichterstattung über OnlyFans.com, um die nicht-kommerzielle Produktion und Verbreitung von pornografischen Darstellungen unter schwulen, bisexuellen und queeren Männern, um unterschiedliche Präferenzen bei pornografischen Inhalten, die allein oder in der Partnerschaft rezipiert werden, um computergenerierte Rough-Sex-Pornografie und um eine Intervention zur Förderung der Pornografiekompetenz. Das Schwerpunktheft möchte die Kommunikationswissenschaft dazu anregen, sich der sexuell expliziten Kommunikation stärker zu widmen und daran mitzuwirken, bestehende Forschungslücken zu schließen.

**Schlagwörter:** Sexualität, sexuell explizite Medieninhalte, mediale Repräsentationen von Sexualität, Erotika, Pornografie, Pornografisierung, Medieninhaltsanalyse, Pornografiekompetenz.

## 1. Introduction

*Media representations of sexuality* are challenging and ambivalent for both media users and communication researchers: They can evoke curiosity, fascination, pleasure, and arousal as well as disgust, outrage, shame, and fear, sometimes simultaneously in the same person. At the interpersonal and societal levels, too, the outcomes of media portrayals of sexuality are evaluated in contradictory ways: Media representations of different sexual identities, lifestyles, and practices can be associated with inspiration, education, improved couple communication, destigmatization and empowerment, but also with performance pressure, unrealistic expectations, insecurity, conflict among couples, violence, sexism, racism, and disempowerment (e.g., Hakkim et al., 2022; Hoagland & Grubbs, 2021; Litsou et al., 2021a).

According to a widely accepted definition, a depiction of sexuality falls under the broad umbrella category of *pornography*, if it is a) explicit enough to directly show sexual acts and genitals (*sexual content criterion*) and if it is b) produced and used primarily to elicit sexual arousal in the audience (*sexual intention or function criterion*, e.g., Hald & Malamuth, 2008, p. 616; McKee et al., 2020; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016, p. 510). However, it can be difficult for researchers, lawmakers, and laypeople to make a clear distinction between hardcore material such as pornographic films depicting real sex acts being performed and softcore depictions, such as erotic films, showing simulated intercourse. Some researchers therefore prefer the more inclusive term *sexually explicit material* (SEM) or *sexually explicit Internet material* (SEIM), both of which encompass pornography and erotica.

Increasingly, researchers are also adding a third criterion to the established definition of pornography, namely the *consent criterion* (Ashton et al., 2019, p. 144). According to this understanding, the term pornography is reserved to refer to the production, distribution, and use of sexually explicit material between adults, based on the informed consent of all individuals involved. Non-consensual pornography

(e.g., *child pornography*, *youth pornography*, *revenge pornography*, *unauthorized deepfake pornography*) would therefore not be referred to as *pornography* at all, but rather would be labelled as acts of consent violation and violence. Instead, terms such as *depictions of sexual violence* and/or *image-based sexual abuse* are used (e.g., Eaton & McGlynn, 2020). For example, research and media reports increasingly use the term *images of child sexual abuse*, *child abuse material*, or *child sexual exploitation material* in place of *child pornography*, recognizing that children who are victimized in front of a camera are in a very different position to consenting adult pornography performers.

Media and communication scholars have observed a trend towards *pornification* (also *pornographization*, *pornographication*). Three elements have been identified as characteristic of the current so-called era of pornification (e.g., Csányi et al., 2024; Mulholland, 2013; Nikunen et al., 2007; Paasonen, 2016; Sarracino & Scott, 2009; Smith, 2010; Tyler et al., 2016):

*Normalization of pornography*: Digitalization and the internet have made pornography more accessible, diverse, and widespread than ever before. Digital pornography platforms such as PornHub.com are among the top 30 most popular websites in the world (SimilarWeb, 2024). Subscription-based platforms such as OnlyFans.com allow content creators to market their self-produced sexually explicit material. Sexualized selfies and nudes are shared on social media platforms and via direct messaging (so-called *sexting* and *self-pornography*). With the advent of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools, so-called *synthetic pornography* (also *AI pornography*) has emerged as a new type of sexually explicit content (Döring et al., in press).

*Sexualization of media content*: In addition, the codes of pornography have been widely adopted in popular culture and media content, such as “porno chic” in the fashion and beauty industry and advertising, “gangsta and porno rap” in music, and explicit sex talk and sexual interactions in reality television (e.g., Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). For example, the reality TV dating show “Naked Attraction” has couples meet in the nude, and the TV dating format “Are You the One”, provides an official “Boom Boom Room” for couples to have sex on the show.

*Expansion of public debates about pornography*: Last but not least, the normalization of pornography and the sexualization of media content have led to widespread and sustained public debates about pornography and its effects. News media reports include topics such as today’s youth potentially being a “porn generation”, “the epidemic of porn addiction” and “the rise of ethical porn” (e.g., Montgomery Graham et al, 2015). As a result, public debates about the risks and legal regulation of digital and AI pornography, but also about the benefits of, for example, ethical text and audio pornography produced by and for women (e.g., Dipsea.com, Audiodesires.com), have intensified.

It is important to note that “pornification” – as a trend towards greater cultural visibility of, and debates about, pornography – is a broad and descriptive umbrella term that covers different and sometimes contradictory media developments that deserve nuanced analyses (Paasonen, 2016). Consequently, the term does not imply a single overall assessment of these developments as positive or negative.



## 2. State of research

Together with scholars from related disciplines – such as psychology, sociology, education, medicine, queer and gender studies – media and communication researchers have been addressing the uses and effects of sexual and pornographic media content for decades.

Most often, the focus is on *negative and harmful effects*. Negative effects have been considered to be most severe and prevalent among heterosexual boys and men, who seem to be prone to excessive use, the adoption of biased and harmful views of sexuality, sexual dysfunction, and dissatisfaction (e.g., Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022; Sniewski et al., 2018). In contrast, self-determined sexual and pornographic media use among sexual minorities, girls and women is more often empirically associated with positive outcomes such as self-validation, pleasure, and empowerment (e.g., Böthe et al., 2019; Litsou et al., 2021b; McCormack & Wignall, 2017). However, women can be particularly conflicted and divided about pornography. Research reviews report women's ambivalent experiences with pornographic material (Ashton et al., 2018). Within feminist scholarship, debates about the meaning and effects of pornography have been so heated that the literature refers to the “feminist porn wars of the 1980s”: debates between feminists who rejected the whole genre as inherently sexist and dehumanizing and feminists who produced and promoted some of the first examples of feminist pornography featuring agentic female sexuality (Williams, 1999).

But pornography is also a subject of controversy outside of feminist scholarship, for example with regard to the question of working conditions in the pornography industry (e.g., McKee, 2016), the risk of “pornography addiction” (also *problematic pornography use*, *pornography use disorder*; e.g., Brand et al., 2019), and the extent to which pornography use promotes sexual violence (e.g., Ferguson & Hartley, 2022; Mellor & Duff, 2019; Wright et al., 2016) or disorients young people (e.g., Massey et al., 2020). Individual governments (e.g., the US state of Utah) have already declared pornography a “public health crisis”, to which researchers have responded with critical comments in scientific journals (e.g., McKay et al., 2020).

The normalization of pornography use has not only increased public concern and research about its harmful effects but also interest in its potential positive effects. A growing body of research among single and partnered people of different genders, sexual orientations, and nationalities shows that the majority of people do not believe that pornography has had any effect on their sexual lives. Those who have observed effects are much more likely to report positive than negative effects (Döring & Mohseni, 2018; Koletić et al., 2021; Štulhofer et al., 2022). The negative effects of pornography are often assumed to be presented in others rather than oneself (e.g., Lee & Tamborini, 2005), an example of the *third-person effect* (Davison, 1983). However, subjective self-reports of pornography effects are limited and could be biased, so additional data from experimental studies are needed to test causal hypotheses.

In contrast to the proliferation of sexually explicit media use and media effects studies, *media content research* has received considerably less attention (Miller &

McBain, 2022). Not infrequently, sexually explicit or pornographic media content is treated as a homogenous media genre without clarifying its characteristics or distinguishing between different types and subgenres (e.g., mainstream pornography versus feminist pornography; Fritz & Paul, 2017) as well as national peculiarities. In an era of pornification, there is a growing need for sound analyses of sexual and pornographic media content in order to avoid speculation and overgeneralization about the media material in question. Media content research is also needed to better understand the extent to which contemporary public debates and news coverage of pornography focus on the risks and/or benefits of open and explicit sexual communication.

### 3. Contributions in the Special Issue

Against this background, the current Special Issue of SCM explores sexual and pornographic media content in the contemporary media landscape. The five empirical studies presented contribute to a better understanding of media representations of sexuality in an era of pornification. They complement research articles in previous SCM issues that have addressed different aspects of sexuality-related media content, such as the types of symbolic images used in media coverage of child sexual abuse (Döring & Walter, 2021), audience quality assessments of news coverage of child sexual abuse (Döring & Walter, 2024), fear effects of news coverage of a serial sexual offender and killer (Custers & van der Bulck, 2024), the victimization of female and male YouTube and YouNow content creators resulting from aggressively sexual online comments (Döring & Mohseni, 2020), the effectiveness of different radio and television public service announcements aimed at promoting sexual health through condom use (Ort & Fahr, 2020), and the impact of ethical as well as non-consensual deepfake pornography (Godulla et al., 2021).

This Special Issue begins with an article on media coverage of OnlyFans.com and the predominantly female adult performers on the platform. While many popular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok prohibit sexually explicit content, OnlyFans.com allows content creators to monetize their self-produced erotica and pornography and engage directly with their audience. Top creators, including many young women, are reported to earn up to \$100,000 US per month (Fitzgerald, 2024). Since its launch in 2016, OnlyFans.com has amassed 210 million active users worldwide as of 2024 (Fitzgerald, 2024). In their research article, Antonia Wurm and Jeffrey Wimmer (2024) use a qualitative content analysis of  $N = 65$  newspaper articles published between 2020 and 2023 to investigate how the success of OnlyFans.com has been portrayed in the German press. Their findings reveal contradictory narrative patterns familiar from broader discussions around the pornification of society: concerns about the commodification of interpersonal intimacy, but also recognition of the potential for empowerment when women create new sources of income and control how they present themselves sexually. The article highlights changes in the media coverage of OnlyFans.com over the four-year period and identifies differences between quality newspapers and tabloid media in how the website is discussed.

The second article focuses on the production of pornographic photos and videos by gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ+) men in the context of social media. Paul Byron, James D. A. Newton, Olivia Hansen, Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, Bernard Saliba, and Daniel Demant (2024) conducted an online survey in early 2023 among  $N = 596$  GBQ+ men in Australia (mean age 36 years). The self-selected sample was recruited through online queer communities and included only men who had consumed pornography in the past 12 months. Based on their data, the authors show that the vast majority of respondents had shared self-produced pornographic photos and videos with others, typically without commercial intent, via private channels such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, dating apps such as Grindr, or publicly via X (formerly Twitter). In response to an open-ended question about their motivations, three main themes emerged: sexual arousal, social connection, and self-validation. The findings suggest a noteworthy normalization of so-called self-pornography among GBQ+ men and point to subjectively experienced gratifications. This article contributes to discussions about the pornification of society by suggesting that in the current era, not only has the consumption of digital pornography become more widespread, but so too has the production and distribution of self-produced digital pornographic content.

The third article examines the types of pornography content users consume in different contexts. Taylor Kohut, Kiara Fernandez, William A. Fisher, and Lorne Campbell (2024) surveyed a sample of  $N = 367$  partnered women and men in Canada (mean age 32 years) in 2013 to investigate their preferences for different types of pornographic content. Participants were asked to describe, in open-ended responses, the typical content of the pornographic media they consume a) alone or b) with their partner. The results showed that respondents described content primarily according to the gender of protagonists, number of participants, and sexual practices performed. Typically, women and men in mixed-gender relationships reported choosing pornographic content featuring mixed-gender couples engaged in oral, vaginal, or anal sex. The authors interpret these findings as consumers having a predominant preference for conventional content. They offer a critical perspective on public and academic discourses on pornification, which often emphasize and problematize the supposedly growing extremity, violence, and perversity of currently available pornographic content. In addition, the data suggest that both women and men are somewhat more likely to engage with pornographic content beyond conventional mixed-gender couple sexuality when consuming pornography alone. For example, women were more likely to report selecting content involving gay or lesbian sex, group sex, BDSM, and rough sex themes when using pornography alone.

The issue of the prevalence and impact of violent themes in pornography has been a focus of both research and production practice for decades. Aggressive depictions of sexuality can be perceived as arousing, are favored by significant user groups, and are marketed as distinct subgenres (e.g., rough sex, BDSM). At the same time, they are considered ethically problematic and dangerous because of their potential harm to both performers and consumers. The fourth paper by Jessica M. Szczuka and Natalia Szymczyk (2024) addresses media representations of rough sex – sexual practices that include aggressive behaviors such as spanking,

hair-pulling, or choking in the context of intercourse. In a pre-registered experimental study conducted in the summer of 2022 with  $N = 274$  heterosexual participants recruited through Prolific (mean age 34 years), the authors examined whether people prefer depictions of rough sex when they are purely computer-generated, thereby eliminating concerns about the well-being of human performers during the production of such intense scenes. This study makes a valuable contribution to the current discourse on pornification, which is increasingly focused on the opportunities and risks of computer- and AI-generated pornography.

Possible effects of pornography depend not only on who consumes what kind of pornographic content, in what amounts, and in what contexts, but also on how people assess the degree of realism of pornographic depictions of sexuality. *Pornography literacy* can be considered a genre-specific *media literacy*. Proponents of pornography literacy posit that the possible negative effects of pornographic depictions can be countered by understanding the differences between staged sexual acts performed by professional porn actors in front of the camera and real-life sexual encounters. In particular, this includes a critical understanding of the fact that body features (e.g., breast and penis size) and sexual practices (e.g., duration and number of positions during sexual intercourse, frequency of unusual and rough sexual practices) are exaggerated in visual pornography in order to increase the show value of the media material. The fifth and final article in this Special Issue by Marina F. Thomas and Moniek Buijzen (in press) is dedicated to the promotion of pornography literacy. A minimal intervention in the form of a three-minute educational video on the making of pornography was developed and tested in a pre-registered experimental study with  $N = 80$  students in the Netherlands (mean age 23 years) in the spring of 2019. The intended effects of the intervention could not be demonstrated. Possible reasons for this are discussed in detail, providing valuable lessons for researchers planning similar studies. All materials, data, and analysis scripts are shared via [osf.io](https://osf.io). This contribution will be published in the next issue of SCM.

#### 4. Outlook on future research

If you look through the current issues of the International Communication Association's (ICA) journals, you will find various articles on sexual and pornographic media content, its meaning, use, and impact. For example, there is an article on pornography use, alcohol consumption and condomless sex in the *Journal of Communication* (Wright et al., 2024); an article on pornography and religiosity in *Human Communication Research* (Wright et al., 2023); an article on media literacy in *Communication Theory* (Austin & Domgaard, 2024), which can be applied to pornography literacy; an article on the online strategies of transgender sex workers in Singapore in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (Chib et al., 2021); in *Communication, Culture & Critique* an article on the erotic bestseller "Fifty Shades of Grey" (Och, 2019); and in the *Annals of the International Communication Association* a systematic research review on internet pornography (Grubbs et al., 2019). However, we were unable to find another Special

Issue on the topic of pornography in any other ICA-associated communication journal.

Private and public sexual communication has not yet been established as a separate field within communication research; instead, issues related to the handling of sexually explicit media content would be accommodated as a cross-cutting theme within ICA divisions such as “Children, Youth and Media”, “Communication and Technology”, “Communication Law and Policy”, “Feminist Studies”, “Health Communication”, “Popular Media and Culture” and “Visual Communication Studies”. While digital games, which are often criticized for their potentially negative effects and are also associated with the dangers of violence and addiction, have had their own “Game Studies” division within the ICA since 2012, this is still not the case for “Porn Studies”. It might be interesting to take a closer look at the content-related and institutional reasons for this difference in treating a popular media phenomenon. The multidisciplinary journal *Porn Studies* (Routledge), founded in 2014, is primarily anchored in cultural and media studies and publishes mainly theoretical and qualitative work, rarely empirical-quantitative studies.

Which open research questions on the individual and social handling of pornography could communication research devote itself to in the future in order to show academic and practical relevance in this subject area in the age of pornification? In conclusion, we would like to make a few suggestions:

*Production of sexually explicit media content:* Pornographic media content is nowadays produced and shared by amateurs in non-commercial contexts (Byron et al., 2024, part of this Special Issue) and is also created and marketed by entrepreneurial individuals (for example, via OnlyFans.com; see Wurm & Wimmer, 2024, part of this Special Issue). In addition, the majority of productions take place in professional studios. Relatively little is known about the production conditions in the pornography industries of different countries (e.g., Voss, 2012). It is also unclear how the tools of generative AI will affect the production of pornographic texts, images, and videos, both in private and commercial contexts. For example, sex workers have started to use AI technology to create virtual clones of themselves so that the AI can fulfil online performances on their behalf and make contact with customers (Döring et al., in press); the economic and psychosocial implications of such developments are still unclear.

*Characteristics of sexually explicit media content:* In the course of the normalization of pornography, the genre has become highly differentiated. Generalized statements about “pornography” are therefore questionable. However, there is still no consensus among researchers as to how sexually explicit content can be meaningfully divided into subgenres, as researchers, content providers, and users sometimes use different categorizations (Kohut et al., 2024, part of this Special Issue). There are also major discrepancies as to how pornographic content should be coded, for example, how to recognize a female orgasm or the use of violence in a pornographic film (Miller & McBain, 2022). Conceptual clarifications, as well as a standardization of codebooks, are necessary here, such as those promoted by the *DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis* (<https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca>), which contains several contributions to the measurement of pornography content (Döring & Miller, 2022).

*Sexually explicit media use:* Current and, in particular, representative data on the use of different types of sexually explicit media content in the general population of different countries is often lacking. Researchers complain about inconsistent measurement methods (e.g., Marshall & Miller, 2019) – a methodological problem that is to be solved by cross-culturally validated psychometric scales (e.g., Koós et al., 2024). Comprehensive inventories that cover different media forms (e.g., text, audio, image, video, computer-/AI-generated) and also different content categories (e.g., gender constellations, number of people, sexual practices) of pornography are still lacking. Appropriately differentiated and standardized measures would be useful for describing the consumption of sexually explicit materials, especially as there are indications that there are also interactions between preferences for different sexual content and media forms (Szczuka & Szymczyk, 2024, part of this Special Issue).

*Sexually explicit media effects:* Public and academic debates on the effects of sexually explicit media are often polarized between assumptions of lack of effects versus strong effects, as well as between predominantly negative versus positive effects. In order to further develop the field of research, it is necessary to work out causal paths for different content, users, and contexts more precisely, both theoretically and empirically. Correlative data is still often interpreted prematurely and one-sidedly in a causal manner. And there is often no theoretical justification for which variables are treated as predictors, mediators, moderators, or control variables in the context of pornography effects research (Wright, 2021). Conceptualizations of online pornography effects should be seen in the context of different, potentially sexually arousing online activities (Döring et al., 2021). A better understanding of cause-and-effect relationships would also ultimately help to develop effective interventions to prevent negative effects (Thomas & Buizjen, part of this Special Issue).

As the first unintentional, but also intentional, confrontations with digital pornography now take place in early puberty, research into its use and effects with children is becoming increasingly important. In the *EU Kids Online Study*, for example, up to 20% of 9–11-year-olds in various European countries reported that they had already seen sexual images on the Internet (Smahel et al., 2020, p. 90). Pornography use and effect research with children is relevant but raises many unresolved ethical and methodological questions. In view of technological change, pornography research is called upon to explore computer- and AI-generated pornography as an object and to use computational methods to investigate pornographic material and public debates about pornography on a large scale (Döring et al., in press). Last but not least, it may be useful for communication research to understand what specific theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches it can bring to the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field of pornography research and what it can learn from other disciplines about sexual communication and its scientific investigation. It would be desirable to create a platform for such research collaborations, for example in the context of the ICA.



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## FULL PAPER

### **Zwischen feministischer Selbstermächtigung und Ausverkauf emotionaler Intimität: Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse der deutschen Berichterstattung über OnlyFans von 2020 bis 2023**

**Between feminist self-empowerment and selling out emotional intimacy: A qualitative content analysis of German reporting on OnlyFans from 2020 till 2023**

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## Zwischen feministischer Selbstermächtigung und Ausverkauf emotionaler Intimität: Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse der deutschen Berichterstattung über OnlyFans von 2020 bis 2023

### Between feminist self-empowerment and selling out emotional intimacy: A qualitative content analysis of German reporting on OnlyFans from 2020 till 2023

*Antonia Wurm & Jeffrey Wimmer*

**Zusammenfassung:** In den letzten Jahren wurde die Erotik-Plattform OnlyFans in der deutschen Berichterstattung als kontroverses neues Netz-Phänomen thematisiert. Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse nach Kuckartz untersuchte daher, wie deutsche Medien die Plattform OnlyFans und deren Anbieter:innen in der Berichterstattung charakterisieren (F1), inwieweit thematische Phasen innerhalb der Berichterstattung vorliegen (F2) und welche Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten sich zwischen Medien zeigen (F3). Als Grundlage dienen Theorien der Plattformisierung und parasozialen Beziehungen auf sozialen Netzwerkeiten. Insgesamt wurden 65 journalistische Artikel aus dem Zeitraum 01.01.2020 bis 01.06.2023 analysiert. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse zeigen mediale Stereotype von Anbieter:innen als Feministinnen, kapitalistisch oder künstlerisch orientierten Individuen (F1). Es wird ein enger Zusammenhang zwischen Wahl der Darstellungsweise, der politischen Ausrichtung der Medien und den zeitlichen Phasen der Berichterstattung deutlich (F2 und F3).

**Schlagwörter:** Berichterstattung, Inhaltsanalyse, OnlyFans, Plattformisierung, Sex Content-Creator

**Abstract:** In recent years, the erotic platform OnlyFans has been discussed in German media coverage as a controversial new online phenomenon. A qualitative content analysis based on Kuckartz therefore examines how German media characterize the OnlyFans platform and its providers in their reporting (RQ1), to what extent there are thematic phases within the reporting (RQ2), and what differences and similarities can be seen between media (RQ3). Theories of platformization and parasocial relationships on social network sites serve as a basis. A total of 65 journalistic articles between 01.01.2020 and 01.06.2023 were analyzed. The results of the analysis show stereotypes of providers as feminists and capitalist or artistically oriented individuals (RQ1). There is also a close connection between the choice of presentation style, the political orientation of the media, and the temporal phases of reporting of different media (RQ2 and RQ3).

**Keywords:** Content analysis, media coverage, OnlyFans, platformization, sexual content creator

## 1. Einleitung<sup>1</sup>

Individuelle digitale Inhalte gegen Geld: Man kann an dieser Stelle an Streamende auf Twitch denken oder an die Webseite Patreon, die sich selbst als „Social-Payment-Service“ beschreibt. Im Bereich Sexualität basiert die Plattform OnlyFans auf diesem Modell mit derzeit knapp 170 Millionen registrierten Nutzer:innen (Fame-mass, 2021). Sie wurde von dem britischen Geschäftsmann Timothy Stokley gegründet und ging 2016 online. Auf ihr werden von ca. 1,5 Millionen Anbieter:innen in selbstgewählten Abständen Inhalte erstellt, die meist (aber nicht immer) einen erotischen Bezug aufweisen (Hamilton et al., 2022, S. 2). Die Sichtbarkeit dieser Inhalte, in der Regel Bilder, Videos oder Mitteilungen, müssen durch kostenpflichtige Abonnements freigeschaltet werden. Mithilfe sogenannter Trinkgelder können individuelle Wünsche der Nutzenden an Inhaltsproduzierende realisiert werden (Bonifacio et al., 2021, S. 4). Die Besonderheit dieser Tätigkeit heben Hamilton et al. (2022, S. 1) hervor: „OnlyFans creators are uniquely positioned at the intersection of professional social media content creation and sex work“.

OnlyFans unterscheidet sich besonders durch seine Strukturen, die den Affordanzen sozialer Netzwerkseiten (SNS) ähneln (DeVito et al., 2017; Sundar, 2007; Treem & Leonardi, 2013) von anderen Plattformen für sexuelle Inhalte. Sie grenzt sich aber auch klar von SNS ab, da es den Fokus auf den Aufbau einer monetarisierten parasozialen Beziehung legt (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Das hohe Nachrichtenpotenzial (Eilders, 2016) der Plattform zeigt sich durch Schlagzeilen der Boulevardpresse wie „Bonny wird reich mit sexy pics und Fake Beziehungen<sup>2</sup>“ (reporter, 2020).

Bisher wurde kommunikationswissenschaftlich (wenn überhaupt) die Berichterstattung über Prostitution in Deutschland untersucht (Döring, 2014; Höly, 2014). Die Frage, wie deutsche Medien über eine Plattform berichten, die in der Aufmachung einer sozialen Netzwerkseite sexualisierte Inhalte und emotionale Intimität anbietet, befasst sich jedoch mit einem Blickwinkel auf das Thema, der über Sexualität hinausgeht. Den medialen Diskurs über eine Plattform wie OnlyFans nachzuvollziehen, ist auch für das Verständnis der spezifischen Phänomene der tiefgreifenden Mediatisierung (Hepp, 2021) wie Plattformisierung und digitale Arbeitskontexte (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020) relevant. Da pornografische Inhalte in einen Bereich der Alltagswelt fallen, der eher im Privaten liegt, gibt die Analyse Einblick in die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz der fortschreitenden Integration sozialer Netzwerkseiten in unterschiedliche Lebensbereiche.

Im Fokus der Studie steht die Frage, wie das Phänomen OnlyFans von Berichterstattungsmedien dargestellt und beurteilt wird. Dies erfolgt mittels einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Kuckartz, bei der neben traditionellen Leitmedien auch Online-

- 1 Die Autor:innen möchten den Herausgeber:innen und den Reviewer:innen für die wertvollen Hinweise danken.
- 2 Bonny Lang ist eine der bekanntesten deutschen Erotik-Models auf OnlyFans. Auf ihrem Account hat sie über 1.300 Bilder ebenso wie zahlreiche Videos hochgeladen. Diese und neue Inhalte können für zehn Dollar im Monat freigeschaltet werden. Ihr Profil bewirbt Bonny Lang mit der Beschreibung: „Hey, mein Lieber, möchtest du tägliche Nachrichten mit mir schreiben und andere Bilder als auf meinem Feed? Dann bist du bei meinem OnlyFans genau richtig.“

Medien berücksichtigt werden. Im Folgenden wird der Begriff der Sex-Arbeiter:innen sowie dessen Transformation durch Plattformen erläutert. Anschließend wird die Methode der Studie und das Kategoriensystem der Inhaltsanalyse vorgestellt. Darauf folgen die Ergebnisse der Analyse entlang der drei Forschungsfragen, woraufhin Limitationen der Studie reflektiert und Impulse für anknüpfende Untersuchungen gegeben werden.

## 2. Forschungsstand

Die Darstellung des Forschungsstandes geht auf vier Aspekte ein: 1) Begriffsbezeichnung der Anbieter:innen von digitalen sexuellen Inhalten, 2) Merkmale von OnlyFans als digitale Plattform, 3) parasoziale Beziehungen auf digitalen Plattformen und 4) mediale Darstellung von Sex-Arbeit.

### 2.1 Anbieter:innen von digitalen sexuellen Inhalten

Eine besondere Herausforderung der Studie stellt die Frage dar, mit welchen Begriffen sich Forschende dem Thema Sex-Arbeit auf digitalen Plattformen nähern sollten. So wird in wissenschaftlichen Studien über OnlyFans selten von Prostitution gesprochen, die Döring (2014, S. 100) zufolge als physische Handlung bei der „sexuelle Handlungen mit Körperkontakt“ gegen Geld oder andere Entlohnungsformen definiert werden kann. Hamilton et al. (2022, S. 1) beziehen sich exemplarisch auf den Begriff „sexual content creators“, was darauf zurückzuführen ist, dass in Ländern wie den USA Prostitution gesetzlich unter Strafe steht (Sanchez, 2022, S. 3). Die von Leigh in den 1970er Jahren geprägte Bezeichnung Sex-Arbeit repräsentiert eine feministische Perspektive von „sex work as a choice“ (Leigh, 1998, S. 223) und hat zum Ziel, als Synonym den gesellschaftlich negativ besetzten Begriff der Prostitution zu ersetzen: „Exchange of sexual services, performances or products of material compensation and can refer to direct physical contact between buyers and sellers as well as indirect sexual stimulation“ (Gerassi, 2015, S. 593). Sanchez (2022, S. 7) beschreibt die Digitalisierung von Sex-Arbeit auch als „technology mediated sex industry“. Im Kontext der Studie wird daher von digitaler Sex-Arbeit durch Anbieter:innen auf OnlyFans gesprochen, womit Personen gemeint werden, die sexuell orientierte Dienstleistungen ohne physischen Kontakt auf digitalen Plattformen erbringen. Die Besonderheiten digitaler Sex-Arbeit sprechen Cardoso et al. (2022) in ihrer qualitativen Studie an. Interviewteilnehmende berichten von der ständigen persönlichen Verfügbarkeit, die durch den digitalen Kontext bei ihrer Arbeit auf OnlyFans erwartet wird (Cardoso et al., 2022, S. 175).

### 2.2 OnlyFans als Plattform für digitale sexuelle Inhalte

Döring (2014, S. 27) führt die einfachere Vermarktung als einen Grund für die verstärkte Verlagerung von erotischen Dienstleistungen ins Internet an. Sanchez (2022, S. 7) betont, dass durch diese Digitalisierung besonders die Unabhängigkeit von Sex-Arbeiter:innen gestärkt wird, da sie selbst Produktionszeitraum und Ort bestimmen können. Hinsichtlich der Motive von Anbieter:innen, OnlyFans zu



nutzen, nennen Hamilton et al. (2022, S. 8) die gesellschaftliche Sichtbarkeit und Akzeptanz der Plattform, vor allem aber die Möglichkeit, aufdringliche Nutzer:innen zu sperren und Abokosten eigenverantwortlich festzulegen (Fox & McEwan, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2022; S. 9). Das Finanzierungsmodell von OnlyFans beruht auf dem Abschluss von Monatsabos (Mindestpreis 4,99 Dollar), für die Inhalte der Account-Betreiber:innen zur Verfügung gestellt werden (Hamilton et al., 2022, S. 2). Weitere Kosten (und der höchste Gewinnanteil der Plattform) entstehen für die Erfüllung individueller Wünsche. Die Plattform erhält von allen geschäftlichen Transaktionen 20% des gezahlten Betrags (Uttarapong et al., 2022, S. 2). Tatsächlich orientierte sich das ursprüngliche Konzept und die Vermarktung der Plattform nicht speziell an erotischen Inhalten, was auch an der Namenswahl der Plattform erkennbar ist. Dieser Fokus ergab sich erst durch das Verbot sexueller Inhalte auf anderen SNS (Drenten et al., 2018). Cardoso et al. (2022, S. 172) weisen auf die Bedeutung des Plattform-Namens hin: „Its focus on fans demonstrates a clear conceptual connection to artists who are surrounded by their fans, with the attending parasocial relationship as such a word carries“. Durch eine Inhaltsanalyse von Nachrichtenartikeln, Memes und Blogbeiträgen über OnlyFans kann van de Nagel (2021, S. 394) aber das mediale Image einer Plattform herausarbeiten, mit deren Hilfe gerade Frauen zwar leicht Geld verdienen können, aber in einem misogynen Umfeld agieren. Die Unternehmenskommunikation der Plattform stellt dagegen bewusst Anbieter:innen von nicht sexuellen Inhalten, sogenannten „safe for work content“, in den Vordergrund. Zusätzlich kann vermutet werden, dass OnlyFans durch Bezüge zur Populärkultur (z. B. Liedtexte von Beyoncé) ein gewisses Maß an Normalisierung erfährt, wodurch dieser Stil digitaler Sexarbeit entstigmatisiert werden könnte (Hamilton et al., 2022).

### 2.3 Parasoziale Beziehungen auf digitalen Plattformen

Für die meisten Anbietenden auf digitalen Plattformen ist es unerlässlich, ein Publikum aufzubauen, auf dessen langfristige (finanzielle) Unterstützung sie sich verlassen können (Craig & Cunningham, 2019). Das Konzept einer parasozialen Bindung (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Liebers & Schramm, 2019; Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen, 2016), eine Beziehung als „illusory relationship between a member of the audience and a media character“ (Kreissl et al., 2021, S. 1022). Dieser Ansatz ist gegenwärtig durch Phänomene wie Influencer:innen auf Instagram oder Twitch-Streamer:innen schwieriger zu greifen, da durchaus reale soziale Interaktionen zwischen Mediencharakteren und Publikum stattfinden (Wohn et al., 2019). Beispielsweise beschreiben Streamende von Videospielen oft sich selbst und ihre Zuschauenden als Community (Johnson, 2021) und sehen sich in einem familiären Verhältnis zueinander (Consalvo et al. 2020). Auch bei politischen Influencer:innen werden von Nutzenden die Interaktionsmöglichkeiten und ein daraus entstehendes Community-Gefühl geschätzt (Nitschke & Schug, 2024). Auf OnlyFans hingegen sprechen Anbieter:innen nicht von einer Community, sondern von Kund:innen, und betonen ein Geschäftsverhältnis (Cardoso et al., 2022, S. 175, Hair, 2021, Pezzuto, 2019). Die parasoziale Beziehung dient einer sogenannten „sexual interaction in digital contexts“ (Döring et al., 2021, S. 1), indem Anbieter:innen auf

OnlyFans via digitale Technologien ihre Dienstleistung vermarkten (Döring et al., 2021, S. 2). Litam et al. (2022) weisen auf die Besonderheit hin, dass im Fall von OnlyFans ein eher homogenes Publikum bedient wird, zum größten Teil männliche, weiße, heterosexuelle Personen.

## 2.4 Charakterisierung von Sex-Arbeit in der Berichterstattung

Die kommunikationswissenschaftliche Forschung zur Berichterstattung über Sex-Arbeit-Inhalte kann als lückenhaft beschrieben werden. Aufgrund der Sensibilität des Themas widmen sich Aufsätze eher dem Für und Wider von Sex-Arbeit (Grenz, 2018). Zur Frage, wie digitale Sex-Arbeit oder die Vermarktung pornografischer Inhalte in der Berichterstattung dargestellt wird, gibt es bisher weder national noch international aussagekräftige Studien. In einer quantitativen Inhaltsanalyse zur Berichterstattung über Prostitution kann Höly (2014, S. 89–91) vier Frames zum Thema Prostitution identifizieren: Prostitution als normale Erwerbstätigkeit, als Verletzung der Menschenwürde, als Moralfrage und die Rolle des Staates als Regulator. Besonders die ersten beiden Frames zeigen eine polarisierte Berichterstattung auf, bei der beide Meinungsextreme zur Prostitution vertreten werden. Im internationalen Bereich zeigt eine US-Studie, dass in der Berichterstattung Sex-Arbeiter:innen als Opfer charakterisiert werden und dabei verzerrte Statistiken und emotionalisierte Narrative zum Thema Prostitution zum Einsatz kommen (Jackson, 2016). Hierbei fehlt allerdings die Auseinandersetzung mit möglichen Veränderungen der Berichterstattung in Form von temporären Phasen, wie es beispielsweise Cohen (1972) mit dem Phänomen der moralischen Panik beschreibt. Ebenso wenig wird eine Differenzierung zwischen Berichterstattungsmedien vorgenommen, um aufzugreifen, inwieweit bestimmte Darstellungsformen mit der politischen und redaktionellen Ausrichtung von Berichterstattungsmedien verknüpft sein können.

## 3. Forschungsfragen

Bei der Plattform OnlyFans handelt es sich um ein Phänomen der tiefergehenden Mediatisierung, wodurch sich eine inhaltliche Nähe zum Konzept der plattformisierten Arbeit und Begriffen Content-Creator:innen ergibt. Wie gezeigt, existieren vereinzelt Studien, die sich mit Motiven von Anbieter:innen oder der Berichterstattung über Prostitution beschäftigen. Allerdings fehlt eine tiefergehende wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der medialen Darstellung der Plattform wie auch deren Anbieter:innen. Vor diesem Hintergrund wurden folgende Forschungsfragen formuliert:

*F1: Wie werden die Plattform OnlyFans und deren Anbieter:innen in der Berichterstattung charakterisiert?*

*F2: Inwieweit lassen sich thematische Phasen innerhalb der Berichterstattung feststellen?*

### F3: Welche Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten zeigen sich zwischen den Berichterstattungsmedien?

## 4. Methode

Im Folgenden werden Stichprobe, Instrument, Datenerhebung und Datenanalyse der Studie erörtert.

### 4.1 Stichprobe

Die vorliegende Studie verwendete eine zielgerichtete Stichprobe (Möhring et al., 2005, S. 158) von Beiträgen überregionaler Qualitäts-, Boulevard- und Online-Medien. Der Einbezug von Berichterstattungsmedien mit hoher Auflage und Reichweite sowie unterschiedlicher Periodizität diente der Identifizierung von Phasen und Schlüsselereignissen. Es wurden zusätzlich reine Online-Medien untersucht, die sich an ein junges Publikum richten, sogenannte „Millennial-Medien“ (Bødker, 2017, S. 28). Möglich wäre ebenfalls der Einbezug von Regionalmedien gewesen, allerdings erwies sich hier die Berichterstattung als zu gering. Die Auflagenzahl wurde mithilfe von Daten der Informationsgemeinschaft für Verbreitung von Werbeträgern (IVW) erfasst. Die Blattlinie wurde Redaktionsstatuten sowie bisherigen Studien (Bartels, 2021) entnommen.

Zur Ermittlung der Stichprobe wurde eine Vollerhebung über die Publikationsdatenbanken WISO-net und Nexis Uni sowie der spezifischen Online-Archive der SZ, FAZ, VICE und *Buzzfeed* zu OnlyFans durchgeführt. Diese Datenbanken umfassten sowohl Print-Artikel als auch Artikel, die nur in Online-Ressorts erschienen. Dies erfolgte für den Untersuchungszeitraum 01.01.2020 bis 01.06.2023. Als Stichwort wurde *OnlyFans* verwendet (vgl. Tabelle 1). Die hohe Artikelzahl der Vollerhebung (siehe FAZ und BILD) war z. T. auf Artikel zurückzuführen, in denen OnlyFans allein als Schlagwort auftauchte (beispielsweise als Berufsbeschreibung) oder die sowohl online als auch gedruckt mit minimalen Abänderungen erschienen. Die Vollerhebung wurde um diese Artikel bereinigt, wobei immer der Ursprungsartikel beibehalten wurde und die Auswahl auf Artikel verengt, die sich ‚schwerpunktmäßig‘ mit OnlyFans befassten: (1) der Begriff *OnlyFans* musste in der Überschrift und/oder mindestens zweimal als Schlagwort im Fließtext erscheinen und (2) die Funktionsweise der Plattform thematisieren.

Nach Anwendung dieser Vorgaben reduzierte sich die Auswahl von zur Analyse geeigneten Artikeln pro Medium um circa die Hälfte. Um jedem Berichterstattungsmedium dieselbe inhaltliche Gewichtung zu geben, sollte dieselbe Anzahl an Artikeln pro Medium ausgewertet werden. Zur Identifikation von Schlüsselereignissen und Phasen der Berichterstattung, wurde festgelegt, dass – falls vorhanden – aus jedem Jahr des Analysezeitraums mindestens ein Artikel pro Medium vertreten sein musste. Insgesamt wurde versucht, neun Artikel pro Medium zu analysieren, womit, falls möglich, innerhalb des Untersuchungszeitraums eine ausgewogene Artikelanzahl pro Jahr ausgewertet wurde, allerdings konnten für VICE nur drei Artikel, für *taz* drei und für *Buzzfeed* fünf Artikel identifiziert werden (vgl. Tabelle 1).

Tabelle 1. Stichprobenbeschreibung

Titel	Auflagenzahl	Blattlinie	Periodizität	Erscheinungsmodus	Vollerhebung	Stichprobe
BILD	1.1 Millionen	Konservativ	Werk-täglich	Print & Online	54 Artikel	9 Artikel
Business Insider	Keine Angabe	Keine Angabe	Täglich	Online	24 Artikel	9 Artikel
Buzzfeed	Keine Angabe	Links-alternativ	Täglich	Online	30 Artikel	5 Artikel
FAZ	190.300	Konservativ-liberal	Werk-täglich	Print & Online	40 Artikel	9 Artikel
SPIEGEL	709.700	Links-liberal	Täglich	Print & Online	22 Artikel	9 Artikel
SZ	298.100	Links-liberal	Werk-täglich	Print & Online	28 Artikel	9 Artikel
taz	45.400	Links-alternativ	Werk-täglich	Print & Online	8 Artikel	3 Artikel
VICE	Keine Angabe	Links-alternativ	Täglich	Online	9 Artikel	3 Artikel
WELT	88.800	Konservativ-liberal	Montag bis Freitag	Print und Online	33 Artikel	9 Artikel
Gesamtzahl					248 Artikel	65 Artikel

4.2 Codebuch

Für die Analyse der 65 Artikel (vgl. ausführlich Tabelle 3 im Anhang) wurde eine inhaltliche-strukturierende qualitative Inhaltsanalyse mit dem Ziel einer Typenbildung (Kuckartz, 2016, S. 45ff.) gewählt. Im Fokus steht dabei ein Gruppierungsprozess von „Ähnlichkeiten in ausgewählten Merkmalsausprägungen“ (Kuckartz, 2010, S. 555), woraus eine Typologie als „Gesamtheit der für einen bestimmten Phänomenbereich geltenden Typen“ (Kuckartz, 2010, S. 556) abgeleitet wird. Hierfür wurden zuerst grundlegende Dimensionen des Codebuchs aus den Forschungsfragen abgeleitet: Kommunikator:innen“, „Plattform“, „Medien-Diskurs“ sowie „Formale Eigenschaften“. Aus dem Material wurden sogenannte Hauptkategorien (HK) abgeleitet und den jeweiligen Dimensionen zugeordnet (vgl. Tabelle 2).

Tabelle 2. Hauptkategorien (HK) der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans

Kategorie	Beschreibung	Ankerbeispiele
Kommunikator:innen		
HK1	Charakterisierung	Art und Weise der Schilderung von Kommunikator:innen durch das Hervorheben von Eigenschaften
		„Sie ist nicht selbstbewusst und fragt sich jedes Mal, nachdem sie etwas hochgeladen hat, ob sie es nicht gleich wieder löschen soll“ (FAZ, 2021, 21. Februar)

HK2	Publikumsbeziehung	Darstellung der Beziehung zwischen Kommunikator:innen und ihrem Publikum	„Digitale Intimität könnte man es nennen. In einer Zeit, in der sich die meisten nach Intimität sehnen, ihnen diese aber in den meisten Fällen verwehrt bleibt. Insbesondere heterosexuellen Männern“ (WELT, 2023, 28. Mai)
HK3	Finanzieller Gewinn	Beschreibung des Umgangs mit dem finanziellen Gewinn	„St James‘ OnlyFans-Karriere hat sie glücklich gemacht und es ihr ermöglicht, ein Auto, eine Lebensversicherung und Urlaube zu bezahlen“ (Business Insider, 2023, 07. Februar)
HK4	Produzierte Inhalte	Darstellung der OF-Inhalte	„Etwa zehn Prozent der Männer wollen tatsächlich gar keine Bilder, sondern dass ich ihnen ein Dick-Rating gebe“ (VICE, 2022, 14. September)
Plattform			
HK5	Affordanzen	Darstellung der Plattform-Affordanzen von OF	„Onlyfans sei ‚Wie Instagram, nur mit Bezahlfunktion‘, beschreibt Influencerin Pati Valpati das Konzept“ (SZ, 2022, 28. Juni)
HK6	Beziehung Geschäftspartner:innen	Darstellung von OF als Geschäftspartner:in	„Tim Stokely hatte in der Financial Times geklagt, von Banken zur Änderung gedrängt worden zu sein. Denn diese hätten aus Angst um ihren Ruf die Zusammenarbeit erschwert“ (Business Insider, 2022, 07. November)
Medien-Diskurs			
HK7	Diskurs-Semantik Kommunikator:innen	Wertneutrale Begriffszuweisung für Kommunikator:innen	„Profilinhaber“ (FAZ, 2021, 29. August)
HK8	Diskurs-Semantik Plattform	Wertneutrale Begriffszuweisung für die Plattform	„Webportal“ (SPIEGEL, 2020, 05. Dezember), „Internetplattform“ (SZ, 2021, 20. August)
HK9	Diskurs-Beteiligung	Nennung weiterer Sprecher:innen	„Lilian Suter von der Züricher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften forscht zum Thema Medienpsychologie“ (Business Insider, 2022, 07. November)
Formale Eigenschaften			
HK10	Medium	Name des Berichterstattungsmedium	
HK11	Erscheinungsdatum	Datum der Veröffentlichung des Artikels	
HK12	Artikellänge	Wortzahl des Artikels (inkl. Überschrift)	
HK13	Ressort	Ressort des Artikels	

### 4.3 Datenerhebung und Datenanalyse

Nachdem Dimensionen und Hauptkategorien der Analyse festgelegt wurden, erfolgte die Phase der offenen Codierung, in der induktiv Subkategorien aus dem Analysematerial abgeleitet wurden. Subkategorien dienten als Verdichtung von Mustern innerhalb des Materials, beispielsweise zur Beschreibung der Lebensverhältnisse der Kommunikator:innen. Sie wurden durch eine axiale Codierung auf mögliche Querverbindungen geprüft, wenn nötig zusammengefasst, definiert und Hauptkategorien zugeordnet. Eine Recodierung erfolgte so lange, bis aus dem Analysematerial ein überschneidungsfreies, eindeutig definiertes Subkategoriensystem abgeleitet wurde (vgl. Tabelle 4 im Anhang).

Durch Reduktion und Zusammenfassung (Kuckartz, 2016, S. 43) von Merkmalsmustern wurden Kriterien identifiziert, die einen bestimmten Typen innerhalb der Darstellung definierten. Durch das Zuordnen von Fällen innerhalb des Analysematerials wurde diese Kriterien überprüft und verfeinert. Auf diese Weise konnten mediale Merkmalsmuster für Anbieter:innen und für die Plattform in jeweils drei prototypische Charakterisierungen zusammengefasst werden.

## 5. Ergebnisse

Im Mittelpunkt des medialen Diskurses stehen nicht die moralischen Dimensionen von Sex-Arbeit. Der Begriff der Prostitution taucht weder für die Beschreibung der Anbieter:innen, noch im Zusammenhang mit der Plattform in der Berichterstattung auf. Vielmehr werden das Ausmaß und die Legitimität der Monetarisierung parasozialer Beziehungen und emotionaler Intimität medial diskutiert und damit auch implizit die Folgen einer tiefergehenden Mediatisierung. Hier zeigt sich, dass der Fokus der Berichterstattung nicht auf der gesellschaftlichen Akzeptanz von pornografischen Inhalten liegt. Da die in der Berichterstattung vorgestellten Protagonist:innen beinahe ausnahmslos weiblich sind, wird im Folgenden für die Benennung der Kommunikatorinnen keine genderneutrale Form verwendet.

### 5.1 Ergebnisse zu F1: Charakterisierung der Plattform OnlyFans und deren Anbieterinnen in der Berichterstattung

Im Folgenden wird die mediale Charakterisierung der Plattform OnlyFans und derer Anbieterinnen erörtert.

#### 5.1.1 *Creatorin*

Der Begriff *Creatorin* charakterisiert Anbieterinnen aus der Perspektive von Plattform-Kommunikatorinnen als ‚neue‘ Form von Influencerinnen oder Content-Creatorinnen. Diese Darstellung fokussiert auf digitale Praktiken, wie zum Beispiel der Aktivität auf einer digitalen Plattform und der Erstellung von Inhalten auf dieser. Der Begriff steht für eine Phase der Berichterstattung, in der sie Begriffe verwendet, die mit SNS assoziiert werden, und in der sie einen eher neutralen Standpunkt hinsichtlich der erstellten Inhalte einnimmt. Auch bei der Beschreibung

des Publikums der Creatorin werden in der Berichterstattung entweder sachliche Begriffe wie Nutzende oder Abonnenten verwendet oder solche, die eine emotionalere Beziehung andeuten wie Fan oder Follower. Es wird kein direkter Hinweis darauf gegeben, dass es sich bei der Tätigkeit um die Erstellung sexueller Inhalte oder um die monetarisierte Interaktion mit dem Publikum handelt. Der Begriff steht also für eine gewisse Normalisierung von Anbieterinnen auf OnlyFans, da sie in die Nähe des wirtschaftlich etablierten Begriffs des Content-Creators gerückt werden. Die Artikel beschreiben oftmals Frauen, die nicht nur auf OnlyFans aktiv sind, sondern auch auf anderen bekannten Plattformen wie Instagram, TikTok und Facebook. Deren Motivation beruht nicht auf einer bereits bestehenden Tätigkeit in der Sex-Industrie, sondern eher auf Wünschen von Followern, auch auf OnlyFans Inhalte zu rezipieren. So steht weniger deren finanzielle Motivation, sondern auch ein kreativer Aspekt der Inhalterstellung im Mittelpunkt (*Business Insider*, 03. April, 2023).

### 5.1.2 Geschäftsfrau

Die Geschäftsfrau steht für eine Berichterstattung, die die kapitalistische Intention von Anbieterinnen auf OnlyFans akzentuiert. Anbieterinnen werden hier vor allem als profitorientierte Sex-Arbeiterinnen beschrieben, die nicht nur Inhalte hochladen, sondern auch „krasse Karriere“ machen (*BILD*, 26. April, 2022). Auch beim Publikum der Geschäftsfrau wird anstatt der emotionalen Verbindung vor allem der Aspekt der Geschäftsbeziehung hervorgehoben, indem von Kunden oder Abonnenten gesprochen wird. Folglich betrachtet die Geschäftsfrau die Inhaltserstellung primär als Mittel zur Finanzierung des eigenen Lebensunterhalts: „Mein Content ist nicht nur Spaß, sondern mein Job. Es spült mir jeden Monat rund 10 000 Franken auf mein Konto, wovon ich meine Rechnungen zahle.“ (*BILD*, 29. März, 2023). Diese Stereotypisierung von Frauen findet sich vor allem bei konservativ ausgerichteten Medien und Boulevardmedien wie der *BILD*-Zeitung. Bei der Geschäftsstrategie betont, dass sie auf der Instrumentalisierung von parasozialen Beziehungen fußt. Das Hauptmotiv der Geschäftsfrau ist, anders als bei der Creatorin (oder im Folgenden der Feministin), damit der finanzielle Aspekt. Als moralisch problematisch wird folglich nicht der sexuelle Inhalt an sich thematisiert, sondern der hohe Gewinn daraus: „Im Februar dieses Jahres schließlich, als Nowak sich bei OnlyFans anmeldete, ersetzte sie die Schamgrenze durch eine Paywall“ (*SZ*, 2020b).

### 5.1.3 Feministin

Bei der Charakterisierung Feministin steht das Motiv der sexuellen Befreiung im Vordergrund: Zum einen für professionelle Sex-Arbeiterinnen, indem ihnen die Möglichkeit gegeben wird, ohne Intermediäre über ihre Inhaltserstellung zu entscheiden. Zum anderen auch für Individuen, die vorher nicht in der Sex-Arbeit, sondern als ‚normale‘ Content-Creatorinnen oder Influencerinnen tätig waren, indem sie nun die Aufmerksamkeit des männlichen Publikums für sich nutzen können: „Das ist, warum wir aktuell in einer Zeit leben, in der wir endlich die Möglichkeit haben, die Bedürfnisse von Männern nicht mehr umsonst stillen zu

müssen, sondern dieses Unterfangen zu monetarisieren“ (WELT, 28. Mai, 2023). Die in der Darstellung der Geschäftsfrau als moralisch fragwürdig betrachtete Tätigkeit wird dadurch gerechtfertigt, dass es sich dabei um einen feministischen Akt handelt. Frauen sind dieser Argumentation zufolge Sexualisierung nicht länger ausgeliefert, sondern können sich diese „zum eigenen Vorteil machen“ (SZ, 28. Juni, 2022). Dadurch, dass weibliche Personen ohnehin einer ungewollten Sexualisierung durch männliche Personen ausgesetzt seien, wird die Monetarisierung sexueller Annäherung als Schritt zu höherer Selbstbestimmtheit gerechtfertigt: „Für sie habe das etwas mit Respekt ihr gegenüber zu tun, sagt sie, mit Wertschätzung. Was nichts kostet, ist in einer Marktwirtschaft nichts wert“ (SZ, 05. September, 2020). Dass die OnlyFans-Tätigkeit mit einer feministischen Intention als weniger problematisch charakterisiert wird, zeigt sich auch in der Darstellung des Umgangs mit finanziellen Erlösen. Hier ziehen die Frauen nicht nur einen rein monetären Gewinn aus ihrer Tätigkeit auf OnlyFans, sondern beispielsweise höheres Selbstvertrauen und die Befreiung von normativen Schönheitsidealen (SPIEGEL, 25. März, 2020) oder die Erfüllung persönlicher Ziele und Träume (Business Insider, 07. Februar, 2023). Auch andere aktivistische Intentionen können durch die OnlyFans-Tätigkeit verfolgt werden, wie zum Beispiel eine authentische Repräsentation marginalisierter Gruppen in der Pornografie (VICE, 2021a).

#### 5.1.4 Gelddruckmaschine

Aus dieser Perspektive ist die Intention der Plattform, möglichst effizient sowohl von Nutzenden als auch Anbieterinnen den größtmöglichen Profit zu erhalten. Die Plattform befindet sich in der Rolle eines Dienstleistungsunternehmens, das vor allem auf Gewinnmaximierung ausgerichtet ist. Hierbei greift sie auch zu fragwürdigen Maßnahmen wie der unangekündigten Löschung von Profilen und dem Einfrieren von Guthaben (FAZ, 21. Februar, 2021). Das Verhältnis zu Anbieterinnen ist dabei ambivalent, da diese zwar durch die Plattform enorm hohe Beträge verdienen, sich dafür aber auch in ein starkes Abhängigkeitsverhältnis zur Plattform begeben und von deren Regulierungen abhängig sind (SZ, 04. November, 2021). Diese mediale Perspektive zeigt sich auch in der Berichterstattung zum angekündigten Verbot von pornografischen Inhalten, in der betont wird, dass die Intention der Plattform nicht darin liegt, marginalisierten Gruppen in der Sex-Industrie einen sicheren Ort zu bieten, sondern vor allem die eigenen Geldgeber zufrieden zu stellen.

#### 5.1.5 Kreativen-Plattform

In Zusammenhang mit der Creatorin wird in Anlehnung an das Narrativ der Plattform-Betreibenden OnlyFans medial als Kreativen-Plattform charakterisiert, die kreativen Personen die Möglichkeit bietet, Inhalte zu veröffentlichen. Es wird die Inklusivität und Vielfalt der Plattform betont, die, anders als auf pornografischen Webseiten, Personen nicht in Kategorien einsortiert: „Größtenteils unabhängig von Geschlecht, Körperform und Hautfarbe konnten sie [Kommunikatorinnen] hier mitunter große Fangemeinden aufbauen“ (SPIEGEL, 21. August, 2021). Die Platt-



form wird als ein Ort dargestellt, an dem Creatorinnen mit ihren Fans in Austausch treten können und eine emotionale Bindung möglich ist, bei der die Plattform-Nutzenden ihre favorisierten Anbieterinnen durch finanzielle Zuwendung fördern können. Die Beziehung von Anbieterinnen und Plattform ist auf Augenhöhe, wobei die Plattform in die Rolle eines Förderers tritt: „Im Vergleich zu einem selbstgestellten Blog, bei dem man sich von Grund auf um alles selbst kümmert, stellt Onlyfans (sic!) eine bereits vorhandene Infrastruktur bereit“ (SZ, 04. September, 2020).

### 5.1.6 Selbstermächtigungswerkzeug

Im Zusammenhang mit der Feministin wird die Plattform als Ort dargestellt, der durch seine Infrastruktur eine feministische Selbstständigkeit überhaupt ermöglicht. Zunächst dadurch, dass die Plattform den Nutzenden überlässt, welche Inhalte sie wann hochladen wollen und zu welchem Preis: „Jeder entscheidet selbst, was er hochlädt und verdient damit Geld. Dafür wird das Portal nicht nur als ‚empowerend‘ gelobt, sondern auch als feministisch“ (SZ, 28. Juni, 2022). Besonders für professionelle Sex-Arbeiterinnen wird die Plattform in dieser Darstellungsform als Möglichkeit charakterisiert, bisherige Intermediäre zu umgehen und dadurch Unabhängigkeit zurückzugewinnen: „Wer mit Erotik Geld verdienen will, braucht dank OnlyFans kein großes Studio mehr oder eine Vermarktungsagentur. Das macht man einfach selbst und erreicht direkt die Leute, die einen sehen wollen“ (WELT, 02. September, 2020). Auch die Tatsache, dass die Plattform Anbieterinnen nicht eigenmächtig kategorisiert und diesen die Möglichkeit bietet, sich vor Anfeindungen zu schützen, wird positiv hervorgehoben (SZ, 28. Juni, 2022). Dadurch wiederum dient die Plattform als Mittel zur selbstbestimmten Inszenierung und Monetarisierung von Sexualität.

## 5.2 Ergebnisse zu F2: Thematische Phasen der Berichterstattung

In der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans konnten vier aufeinanderfolgende thematische Phasen differenziert werden. In der ersten Berichterstattungs-Phase, der *Vorstellung*, wird die Plattform als neuer Trend präsentiert, dessen Funktionsweise und Herkunft den Leser:innen erst erklärt werden muss. Der Fokus der Berichterstattung liegt folglich auf der Bearbeitung der Fragen, um was für eine Art Plattform es sich handelt, welche Inhalte dort im Vordergrund stehen und wer sie nutzt. Auffällig in dieser Phase der Berichterstattung ist, dass OnlyFans vor allem als neue „Social Media Plattform“ (BILD, 27. Oktober, 2020) bezeichnet wird. Es wird zwar berichtet, dass sexuelle Inhalte dort eine Rolle spielen, allerdings wird stärker betont, dass dort jede Art von Inhalt hochgeladen werden kann. So betitelt beispielsweise die FAZ einen Artikel mit der Überschrift: „Zwischen Beauty und sexy Fotos“ (FAZ, 05. Dezember, 2020). Darüber hinaus übernimmt die Berichterstattung die Bezeichnungen der Plattform für Anbieterinnen, nennt diese „Creators“ und spricht bei deren Publikum von Fans (FAZ, 12. Oktober, 2020). Als Auslöser für die Berichterstattung wird vor allem der Beginn der Covid-19 Pandemie angeführt: Zum einen aufgrund veränderter Arbeitsbedingungen für Sex-Ar-

beiterinnen durch das Verbot physischer Dienstleistungen, zum anderen aber auch durch ein höheres Bedürfnis nach sozialen Kontakten und emotionaler Nähe (FAZ, 17. Juni, 2021).

Als zweite Phase in der Berichterstattung, die mit dem Folgejahr 2021 beginnt, lässt sich eine *inhaltliche Aushandlung* feststellen. Ein Schlüsselereignis innerhalb dieser Phase stellt das im Sommer 2021 von den Betreibern angekündigte (und kurz darauf wieder zurückgenommene) Verbot pornografischer Inhalte dar, mit dem sich die Berichterstattung intensiv auseinandersetzt. Hier lässt sich feststellen, dass zu diesem Zeitpunkt von OnlyFans vor allem als Erotik- oder Porno-Plattform gesprochen wird. Schwerpunktmäßig wird diskutiert, welche Auswirkungen deren Funktion und Inhalte auf die Gesellschaft besitzen und inwieweit die Nutzung von OnlyFans sozial akzeptabel ist. Es kommen nun vermehrt Anbieterinnen selbst zu Wort, wodurch verschiedene Interpretationsrahmen der OnlyFans-Tätigkeiten beispielsweise als feministischer Akt oder Verbesserung der Arbeit von Sex-Arbeiterinnen entstehen.

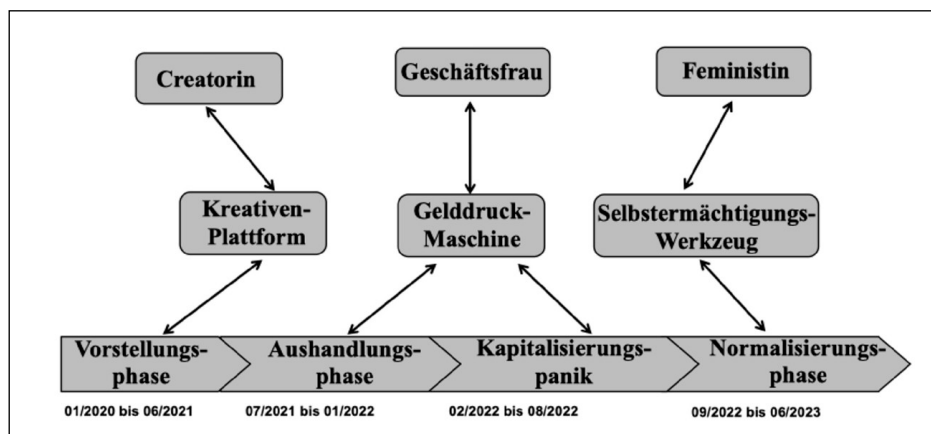
Überschriften wie „Neue Internetfirmen und Corona verändern die Pornoindustrie. Junge Frauen werden zu Solounternehmerinnen, die im Netz ihre Nacktheit an zahlende Kunden verkaufen“ (WELT, 14. März, 2021) markieren eine dritte Phase, die als *Kapitalisierungsangst* bezeichnet wird. In dieser wird ein sehr starker Fokus auf den Erlös der Anbieterinnen und der Plattform deutlich wie z. B. „Der irre Gehaltszettel: 19-Jährige verdient 40 Mio. Euro mit OnlyFans im Jahr“ (BILD, 26. April, 2022) oder „Pornos, Profite und Primitives“ (FAZ, 21. November, 2022). Bezeichnend ist, dass OnlyFans als neues Mittel präsentiert wird, sehr schnell hohe finanzielle Gewinne zu erzielen. In dieser Phase wird inhaltlich vor allem die Legitimität der Monetarisierung von emotionaler Nähe als Produkt und der Illusion einer partnerschaftlichen Beziehung verhandelt. Die Inanspruchnahme der Dienstleistungen auf OnlyFans wird zum einen als durch die Covid-19 Pandemie ausgelöster Trend dargestellt, zum anderen aber auch als Notwendigkeit für manche Personen, während der Pandemie emotionale Zuwendung zu erfahren.

Mit dem Ende der Covid-19 Pandemie nimmt die Frequenz der Berichterstattung stark ab. In der *Normalisierungsphase* wird in deutlich größeren Abständen über OnlyFans berichtet, oft auch nur noch als Erwähnung der Tätigkeit einer Person. Zwar liegt der Fokus der Berichterstattung noch immer auf einzelnen Kommunikatorinnen der Plattform, allerdings wird weniger betont, dass sie zu großem Reichtum gekommen sind, sondern eher herausgestellt, dass diese durch OnlyFans berufliche Erfüllung und ein höheres Selbstbewusstsein erlangen. Dies zeigt sich durch Berichte wie: „Früher war ich Erzieherin, jetzt bin ich Curvy Model auf OnlyFans – darum habe ich diesen Schritt nie bereut“ (Business Insider, 21. Januar, 2022). Auch wird in diesem Kontext wieder eher von Models und Darstellerinnen gesprochen als von Sex-Arbeiterinnen und Porno-Stars.

Abbildung 1 veranschaulicht, welche prototypischen Charakterisierungen die jeweiligen Phasen prägen und umgekehrt. Wie skizziert hängen die Darstellungsmuster der Anbieterinnen und der Plattform mitunter stark zusammen, wie zum Beispiel die Zuschreibung der kapitalistischen Geschäftsfrau mit der von OnlyFans als Gelddruckmaschine. Zu erwähnen ist, dass die Darstellungsformen der Plattform und der Kommunikatorinnen fließend ineinander übergehen und nicht klar vo-

neinander abgegrenzt werden können. Inhaltliche und zeitliche Überschneidungen sind folglich möglich, deutliche Schwerpunkte von Charakterisierungen bleiben jedoch erkennbar.

**Abbildung 1.** Mediale Charakterisierung der Plattform OnlyFans und deren Anbieterinnen im Kontext der inhaltlichen Phasen der Berichterstattung



### 5.3 Ergebnisse zu F3: Vergleich der Berichterstattungsmedien

Hinsichtlich der Quantität und Periodizität der Berichterstattung fällt bei der Vollerhebung auf, dass die konservativ ausgerichteten Leitmedien *FAZ* und *WELT* sowie die Boulevardzeitung *BILD* besonders häufig über OnlyFans und deren Kommunikatorinnen berichten. Dabei stehen Artikel in der Regel für sich und nehmen weder innerhalb des Mediums noch übergreifend Bezug aufeinander (ausgenommen allgemeinere Formulierungen, die auf den thematischen Trend an sich verweisen). Politisch eher links eingeordnete Medien wie *taz* oder *VICE* berichten wesentlich seltener über die Plattform als andere Medien des Samples. Dies ist besonders bei Online-Medien wie *VICE* überraschend, da OnlyFans in der Berichterstattung als Phänomen charakterisiert wird, das vor allem bei jungen Leuten Verbreitung findet. Insgesamt zeigt sich bei allen Berichterstattungsmedien, dass im Zeitraum der Covid-19 Pandemie besonders regelmäßig über die Plattform berichtet wird. Das untermauert die These einer moralischen Panik, wonach ein Thema in seiner gesellschaftlichen Bedeutsamkeit und Verbreitung eher künstlich konstruiert wird, um beispielsweise mediale Reichweite zu steigern (Kühne & Sadowski, 2011, S. 76). Stilmittel einer moralischen Panik wie Übertreibung und Verzerrung lassen sich vor allem in Boulevardmedien finden. Stark auf Nachrichtenfaktoren akzentuierte Schlagzeilen zu OnlyFans werden eher bei der *BILD*, *FAZ* und *WELT* verwendet, wodurch in konservativen Medien die Phase der Kapitalisierungsphase besonders deutlich erkennbar wird. In konservativen Medien erfolgt die Diskussion über die Plattform und Kommunikatorinnen eher aus der Distanz.

Anbieterinnen kommen selten selbst zu Wort, noch seltener werden die Perspektiven von Expertinnen wie z. B. Sexual-Forscherinnen (SZ, 2022b) einbezogen.

*Buzzfeed*, *VICE* und *taz* setzen sich im Gegensatz zu anderen Medien weniger mit gesellschaftlichen Bedeutungsdimensionen auseinander. Sie beleuchten das Thema stattdessen eher aus dem Blickwinkel der Anbieterinnen, indem diese in Interviews selbst zu Wort kommen (*VICE*, 14. September, 2022). Auch werden neue Perspektiven zur Sprache gebracht, wie männliche Sex-Arbeiter auf OnlyFans (*Buzzfeed*, 06. Oktober, 2021). Die Phase der inhaltlichen Aushandlung kann daher eher den liberal ausgerichteten Medien zugeschrieben werden, da diese sich am stärksten mit Konsequenzen der Plattform-Nutzung auseinandersetzen und dabei auch Perspektiven von Expert:innen einbeziehen.

## 6. Diskussion

Abschließend sollen die vorgelegten Ergebnisse interpretativ eingeordnet, die Limitationen der Fallstudie benannt und ein Fazit für die zukünftige Forschung gezogen werden.

### 6.1 Interpretation

Eine besondere Rolle spielte im medialen Diskurs zu OnlyFans das Geschlechter-Verhältnis. Da Anbieter:innen auf OnlyFans mit nur wenigen Ausnahmen weibliche und deren Abonnenten männliche Personen sind, wurde verhandelt, inwieweit der finanzielle Gewinn von Frauen aus der Sexualisierung durch männliche Personen eine Form von Feminismus sein darf oder sollte. Somit stand folglich die Thematik weiblicher Sexualisierung nach einer Social-Media-Logik im Vordergrund. Hierbei wurden vor allem Anbieterinnen beleuchtet, während Aspekte wie die Perspektive der Nutzenden kaum thematisiert wurden. Im Fall von OnlyFans wird es nicht der Thematik gerecht, das Phänomen allein auf sexuelle Inhalte zu reduzieren. Vielmehr gibt die Analyse der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans Einblicke in die mediale und damit gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der fortschreitenden Plattformisierung und der Rolle von SNS-Affordanzen als Mittel der Normalisierung des Diskurses über Digitalisierung. Besonders die ambivalente Repräsentation von Anbieterinnen der Plattform verweist auf die von Journalist:innen als gesellschaftlich relevant empfundene Diskussion, wie weit die Monetarisierung parasozialer Beziehungen gehen sollte. Sie ist Teil eines Phänomens, das in anderen Kommunikationsbereichen u.a. mit Rückgriff auf Begriffe wie „Produser“ (Bruns, 2010, S. 191) schon länger diskutiert wird, aufgrund des Kontextes der sexuellen Dienstleistung bisher aber noch nicht in Bezug auf erotische und pornografische Plattformen angewendet wird. Als praktische Implikation können die Ergebnisse der Studie dazu dienen, journalistische Standards zu reflektieren, wenn über neue digitale Phänomene berichtet wird. Besonders im Bereich der Sexualität ist hier eine sensible Herangehensweise zum Abbau von Stigmata gefordert. Durch diesen Beitrag soll ebenfalls ein breiteres Verständnis von digitaler Arbeit angeregt werden, welches die ethischen Herausforderungen parasozialer Beziehungen auch wissenschaftlich in den Fokus nimmt.

## 6.2 Limitationen

Als Limitation der Studie kann genannt werden, dass aufgrund zeitlicher und personeller Ressourcen keine umfassende Analyse formaler Kategorien wie Bebilderung, Artikelformat oder Länge vorgenommen wurde. Diese hätte unter anderem Einblicke in die visuelle Stereotypisierung von Kommunikatorinnen geboten. Aus selbigen Gründen wurden auch keine lokalen Berichterstattungsmedien in die Stichprobe aufgenommen. Darüber hinaus konnte unter Berücksichtigung der Auswahlkriterien für Berichterstattungsmedium nicht dieselbe Anzahl von Artikeln analysiert werden, was den Medientitelvergleich beeinflusst haben könnte. Auch sollte die tiefergehende Analyse von Unterschieden und Konsistenzen innerhalb des Mediums als Limitation genannt werden. Ebenso gab es keine Analyse, die spezifische Veränderungen innerhalb des Mediums oder der Berichterstattung spezifischer Autor:innen nachvollzog.

## 7. Fazit

Im mediatisierten Alltag wird die Monetarisierung sozialer Beziehungen in der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans als problematisches Phänomen diskutiert. Tatsächlich weist sie aber auch auf einen Wandel der Vermarktung von Pornografie im Zeitalter sozialer Netzwerkseiten hin, in dessen Zuge Konsument:innen nicht nur frei verfügbare pornografische Inhalte wählen, sondern kostenpflichtige dafür jedoch personalisierte Inhalte. Dass dieses Thema wieder einem Tabu unterliegt, zeigt sich dadurch, dass Berichterstattungsmedien mit einem gewissen Abstand über OnlyFans und deren Anbieterinnen berichten. Selten wird auf Nutzererfahrungen und Motivation von Konsument:innen der Plattform eingegangen, da überwiegend eine Skandalisierung der Anbieterinnen und deren Einnahmen im Vordergrund steht. Für die Zukunft empfiehlt sich daher nicht nur eine erweiterte Analyse der Berichterstattung, sondern auch die wissenschaftliche Beobachtung der Konvergenz sozialer Netzwerkseiten und Vermarktungsmediatoren pornografischer Inhalte.

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## Anhang

**Tabelle 3. Übersicht der analysierten Artikel der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans**

Medium (Erscheinungsdatum)	Artikelüberschrift
BILD (23. Juni 2020)	Was steckt hinter der Porno-Plattform „OnlyFans“? Hier geben auch Promis ihr letztes Hemd
BILD (27. Oktober 2020)	Bonny Lang ist Deutschlands größter Onlyfans-Star. Heiße Fotos bringen ihr bis zu 30 000 Euro pro Monat!
BILD (04. Juni 2021)	Supermarkt-Azubi Vanessa (25) packt aus. Nach Feierabend: Das verdiene ich mit Erotik-Fotos
BILD (03. Dezember 2021)	So funktioniert die Masche mit der Porno-Plattform; Wie Wendler und Laura bei „Only Fans“ abkassieren
BILD (26. April 2022)	Der irre Gehaltszettel; 19-Jährige verdient 40 Mio. Euro mit OnlyFans – im Jahr
BILD (28. April 2022)	Pralles Konto dank OnlyFans; Der nackte Wahnsinn, was diese Girls PRO TAG verdienen
BILD (03. Juni 2022)	Dana (53) ist Hausfrau, Mutter und Erotikmodel; Bevor sie blankzog, fragte sie ihre Söhne
BILD (29. März 2023)	„Er war mein Traummann“; Erotik-Model schießt für OnlyFans ihren Freund ab
BILD (14. Juni 2023)	Früher Rentnerin, jetzt Erotik-Star: Warum sie lieber Pornos statt Runden dreht
Business Insider (07. Juni 2021)	Diese Anwältin hat gekündigt um OnlyFans Darstellerin zu werden: Sie sagt, dass sie jetzt mehr Geld verdient und glücklicher ist
Business Insider (24. Dezember 2021)	Das geheime Leben der Ghostwriter von Onlyfans, deren Job das Betrügen von zahlenden Fans beinhaltet
Business Insider (21. Januar 2022)	Früher war ich Erzieherin, jetzt bin ich Curvy-Model auf Onlyfans – darum habe ich diesen Schritt nie bereut
Business Insider (06. November 2022)	26-Jährige verdient bis zu 50.000 Euro pro Monat auf Erotik-Plattformen wie Onlyfans: „Die eigene Chefin zu sein, fühlt sich gut an“
Business Insider (07. November 2022)	„Man kauft sich das Schamgefühl einfach weg“: Wie Onlyfans mit Nacktfotos im Abomodell Milliarden verdient
Business Insider (07. Februar 2023)	Diese 55-jährige OnlyFans-Creatorin macht in zwei Jahren 630.000 US-Dollar auf der Erotik-Plattform
Business Insider (27. Februar 2023)	Ich arbeite auf Onlyfans und verkaufe persönliche Gegenstände wie meine Unterwäsche – so finde ich meine Kunden
Business Insider (03. April 2023)	Ich verdiene 2000 Dollar im Monat mit der Bewertung von Penissen auf OnlyFans
Business Insider (16. April 2023)	So haben diese drei Frauen mit der Plattform Onlyfans die finanzielle Freiheit erreicht
Buzzfeed (06. Oktober 2021)	Triff die Sexarbeiter von OnlyFans. Und die Frauen, die sie befriedigen.
Buzzfeed (01. März 2022)	Onlyfans-Creator werfen Agenturen Ausbeutung und Knebelverträge vor – „sie machen einen fertig“
Buzzfeed (23. Juni 2022)	20 Leute verraten, wie viel sie auf Onlyfans verdienen und ich habe einfach zu viele Klamotten an

Buzzfeed (14. Mai 2023)	„Nicht unter sechsstellig“: Damit verdient Katja Krasavice jedes (sic!) Monat ein Vermögen
Buzzfeed (27. Mai 2023)	Militante Veganerin zieht sich aus: „Die Fleisch-Kommentare sind angebracht“
FAZ (10. Oktober 2020)	Auch Beyoncé singt schon darüber
FAZ (12. Oktober 2020)	Intimfluencer auf Onlyfans
FAZ (05. Dezember 2020)	Zwischen Beauty und sexy Fotos
FAZ (21. Februar 2021)	Die Mädchen von nebenan. Auf der Plattform OnlyFans wird Sex als Lifestyle verkauft
FAZ (17. Juni 2021)	Körper und Kapital: Die Gesellschaft diskutiert immer sensibler den Umgang mit Körpern. Im Netz aber zeigen überraschend viele junge Menschen viel Haut. Wie passt das zusammen?
FAZ (20. August 2021)	Warum OnlyFans die Pornos verbannt
FAZ (29. August 2021)	Pornos dürfen bleiben. Die Kehrtwende des Chefs von OnlyFans
FAZ (31. August 2021)	EroTikTok – OnlyFans rudert zurück
FAZ (21. November 2022)	Pornos, Profite und Primitives
SPIEGEL (25. März 2020)	Wie Intimfluencer ihr Geld verdienen
SPIEGEL (11. November 2020)	„Warum zahlen, wenn es Pornos im Internet gratis gibt?“
SPIEGEL (05. Dezember 2020)	OnlyFans macht zwei Milliarden Dollar Umsatz
SPIEGEL (21. Februar 2021)	Die Porno-Pandemie
SPIEGEL (19. August 2021)	OnlyFans untersagt künftig pornographische Inhalte
SPIEGEL (21. August 2021)	„Es fühlt sich wie Verrat an“
SPIEGEL (25. August 2021)	OnlyFans-Chef gibt Banken die Schuld am Porno-Aus
SPIEGEL (25. August 2021)	OnlyFans sagt Porno-Stopp vorerst ab
SPIEGEL (31. Oktober 2021)	Erotik auf den zweiten Klick
SZ (23. Mai 2020)	Ausweitung der Profitzone – Die grassierende Arbeitslosigkeit in den USA treibt immer mehr Frauen dazu, Nacktbilder von sich zu verkaufen
SZ (04. September 2020)	Pornographie im Internet als moderner Feminismus?
SZ (05. September 2020)	Nur mein Körper: Nacktfotos von sich zu verkaufen ist der neue Social Media Trend. Ist das schon Pornografie? Yma Louisa Nowak sagt: Es ist Feminismus
SZ (04. November 2020)	Die Gier der Großen
SZ (25. Januar 2021)	Viele tausend Mäzene
SZ (20. August 2021)	OnlyFans will Pornographie verbannen
SZ (28. Juni 2022)	Sie sind so frei: Ein Podcast über die Erotik-Plattform OnlyFans
SZ (04. August 2022)	Ein kleiner Fehler kann ein ganzes Leben verändern
SZ (29. März 2023)	Rotlicht auf Twitter
taz (27. August 2021)	Mehr Strenge für sexy Inhalte. Auf OnlyFans soll Pornographie nun doch weiterhin zugänglich sein
taz (25. Mai 2022)	Keine Betonideologie: Der neue Podcast Hype & Hustle betrachtet Sex-Arbeit auf der Social Media Plattform OnlyFans

taz (23. Mai 2023)	Die ZDF Serie Watchme, Sex sells über Erotik Plattformen wie OnlyFans zeigt: Niedrigschwellige Paid Content Dienste führen nicht automatisch zu Selbstbestimmung
VICE (03. April 2021)	Diese Paare erzählen uns wie sie im Lockdown Pornos drehen
VICE (30. November 2021)	Dieser Typ verdient als OnlyFans Account-Manager mehrere 10.000 Euro im Monat
VICE (14. September 2022)	10 Fragen an ein OnlyFans Model, die du dich niemals trauen würdest, zu stellen
WELT (2. September 2020)	Porno-Instagram? Das steckt hinter dem Hype um OnlyFans
WELT (06. September 2020)	Intimfluencer, OnlyFans: Das steckt hinter dem neuen Porno-Hype
WELT (14. März 2021)	Generation Porno: Neue Internetfirmen und Corona verändern die Porno-Industrie
WELT (14. März 2021)	Der Direktor der Landesmedienanstalt über das Bemühen, das deutsche Jugendschutzgesetz auch im Internet durchzusetzen
WELT (26. August 2021)	OnlyFans nimmt geplanten Porno-Bann zurück
WELT (14. November 2021)	Die Kultur der Creator: Gigantische Plattformen wie YouTube, Instagram und TikTok diktierten bisher die Bedingungen dafür, wie kreative Arbeit im Netz entlohnt wird.
WELT (22. Oktober 2021)	Wiener Museen zeigen nackte Kunst auf OnlyFans-Plattform
WELT (13. Juni 2022)	Revolution oder Problem? So feministisch ist OnlyFans wirklich
WELT (28. Mai 2023)	OnlyFans: Warum ich emotionale Nähe gegen Geld anbiete

**Tabelle 4. Vollständiges Codebuch der Haupt- (HK) und Subkategorien (SK) der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse der Berichterstattung über OnlyFans**

Kategorie		Beschreibung	Ankerbeispiele
Kommunikator:innen			
HK1	Charakterisierung	Art und Weise der Schilderung von Kommunikator:innen durch das Hervorheben von Eigenschaften	„Sie ist nicht selbstbewusst und fragt sich jedes Mal, nachdem sie etwas hochgeladen hat, ob sie es nicht gleich wieder löschen soll“ (FAZ, 2021, 21. Februar)
SK1.1	Status	Beschreibung des gesellschaftlichen Status	„Der Trash-TV-Star“ (BILD, 2023, 29. März)
SK1.2	Alter	Altersangabe	„Auffällig ist das junge Alter der Menschen hinter den Accounts“ (SZ, 29. März, 2023), „Sie ist dreißig Jahre alt“ (FAZ, 2021, 21. Februar)
SK1.3	Geschlecht	Bezugnahme auf das Geschlecht	„Als männlicher Creator habe ich ziemlich wenig verdient“ (Buzzfeed, 2023, 21. April)

SK1.4	Vorgeschichte	Beschreibung des beruflichen Werdegangs vor der Tätigkeit auf OF	„Früher arbeitete Bonny Lang als Zerspannungsmechanikerin“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2022, 06. November)
SK1.5	Charakterisierung äußerlich	Beschreibung von äußerlichen Merkmalen	„Eine normale Frau Anfang 50, ohne Operationen oder Fotofilter, stattdessen dezent geschminkt, Fältchen, Dehnungsstreifen und Poren“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2022, 03. Juli)
SK1.6	Lebensverhältnisse	Beschreibung der Lebensverhältnisse	„Vorerst ist Nowak halb Intimfluencerin, halb Sexdienstleisterin, die in einer Zweizimmerwohnung mit barbiepinkfarbenen Wänden in Bewertungen, Sexnachrichten und Videos macht“ ( <i>SZ</i> , 2021, 14. März)
SK1.7	Tätigkeitsmotivation	Beschreibung der Motivation, die zur Tätigkeit auf OF führte	„Mein Gehalt war zwar nicht der Hauptgrund für meine Kündigung. Aber es war ein Faktor, der mir zu schaffen machte. Also kündigte ich im Mai 2020 meinen Job und konzentrierte mich auf das Modeln“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2022, 21. Januar)
SK1.8	Soziale Akzeptanz Tätigkeit	Beschreibung der sozialen Akzeptanz der OF-Tätigkeit	„Eine ehemalige Kundin, die anonym bleiben möchte, da ihre Familie nichts von ihrem OnlyFans-Konto weiß“ ( <i>Buzzfeed</i> , 2022, 01. März)
SK1.9	Familienverhältnisse	Beschreibung der familiären Verhältnisse	„Dana (53) ist Hausfrau, Mutter und Erotikmodel“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2022, 03. Juli)
SK1.10	Crossplattform-Tätigkeiten	Beschreibung von plattformübergreifenden Praktiken	„Im Jahr 2016 ermutigten Monica Huldts Instagram-Follower sie dazu, ein Onlyfans-Konto zu eröffnen“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2023, 16. April)
HK2	Publikumsbeziehung	Darstellung der Beziehung zwischen Kommunikator:innen und ihrem Publikum	„Digitale Intimität könnte man es nennen. In einer Zeit, in der sich die meisten nach Intimität sehnen, ihnen diese aber in den meisten Fällen verwehrt bleibt. Insbesondere heterosexuellen Männern“ ( <i>WELT</i> , 2023, 28. Mai)
SK2.1	Motivation Konsum	Darstellung der Motivation des Publikums, Inhalte auf OF zu konsumieren	„Sie zahlen also auch für eine Beziehung, die bis zu einem gewissen Grad exklusiv ist, in der sie Vorlieben und Wünsche äußern können“ ( <i>FAZ</i> , 2020, 10. Oktober)

SK2.2	Thematisierung Geschlecht	Thematisierung des Geschlechts der Konsument:innen	„Ihre Kunden, hauptsächlich Männer, und viele mit fester Freundin, kämen aus allen Gesellschaftsschichten“ ( <i>VICE</i> , 2022, 14. September)
SK2.3	Umgangston	Beschreibung des Umgangs zwischen Anbieter:innen und Konsumenten	„Meine Abonnenten sind reizend und interessieren sich wirklich für mich“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2023, 03. April)
SK2.4	Art der Beziehung	Beschreibung der Beziehung zwischen Kommunikator:innen und Konsument:innen	„Ich produziere jeden Tag Content, der meinen Fans, Followern und Frenemies das Gefühl gibt, an meinem Leben teilnehmen zu dürfen“ ( <i>WELT</i> , 2023, 28. Mai)
HK3	Finanzieller Gewinn	Beschreibung des Umgangs mit dem finanziellen Gewinn	„St James' OnlyFans-Karriere hat sie glücklich gemacht und es ihr ermöglicht, ein Auto, eine Lebensversicherung und Urlaube zu bezahlen“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2023, 07. Februar)
SK3.1	Einnahmen Plattform	Verweis auf finanzielle Gewinnmöglichkeiten	„Das liegt auch daran, dass hier [auf OnlyFans] ordentlich Kohle möglich ist“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2021, 03. Dezember)
SK3.2	Investitionen	Beschreibung der Zwecke, für die Einnahmen durch OF genutzt werden	„Sie lebt inzwischen in Hamburg, dreht ausschließlich mit einem Freund und sagt, dass sie gerade zwei Häuser baut, um für später vorzusorgen“ ( <i>WELT</i> , 2021, 14. März)
SK3.3	Akzeptanz Einnahmen	Charakterisierung der Reaktionen des sozialen Umfeldes OF-Einnahmen	„Mary ist eindeutig der Star“, sagt Case. „Ich habe jetzt nicht das Gefühl, dass ich Anspruch auf irgendeinen Teil der Einnahmen von unseren Videos habe. Wenn überhaupt, dann lädt sie mich mal zum Essen ein“ ( <i>VICE</i> , 2021, 03. April)
HK4	Produzierte Inhalte	Darstellung der OF-Inhalte	„Etwa zehn Prozent der Männer wollen tatsächlich gar keine Bilder, sondern dass ich ihnen ein Dick-Rating gebe“ ( <i>VICE</i> , 2022, 14. September)
SK4.1	Inhaltsart	Beschreibung der digitalen Formate, die hochgeladen werden	„In den ersten zwei Wochen postete sie Fotos und Videos ohne ihr Gesicht“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2023, 07. Februar)

SK4.2	Sexuelle Inhalte	Beschreibung der sexuellen Inhalte, die auf OF hochgeladen werden	„Und wer mehr von ihr sehen möchte, kann auf Onlyfans oder Patreon ihr Abonnent werden: Für sechs Euro im Monat bekommt man Nacktfotos“ (FAZ, 2021, 21. Februar)
SK4.3	Nicht sexuelle Inhalte	Beschreibung anderer Inhalte, die auf OF hochgeladen werden	„Auch wenn einige populäre Musiker und Schauspieler wie etwa Bella Thorne und Cardi B Onlyfans-Konten betreiben und mit Vice sogar eine Nachrichten-seite auf der Plattform ist“ (FAZ, 2021, 20. August)
SK4.4	Inhaltsmanagement	Beschreibung, wie Kommunikator:innen bei der Auswahl und Entwicklung von Inhalten für ihren Account vorgehen	„Ich dachte, ich würde nur Bilder posten, aber ich schaute mir die Konten anderer OnlyFans-Mädchen an und sah, dass ich auch andere Dinge anbieten konnte“ (Business Insider, 2023, 03. April)
SK4.5	Arbeitszeiten	Darstellung von Arbeitszeiten und Arbeitsbelastung durch OF	„Im Schnitt arbeitet Bonny Lang rund fünf Stunden pro Tag. Meistens beginne der Arbeitstag erst spät und gehe bis tief in die Nacht“ (Business Insider, 2023, 06. November)
SK4.6	Produktionsbedingungen	Beschreibung der Produktionsbedingungen von OF-Inhalten	„Entweder fotografiert mich mein Mann, oder ich arbeite mit Handy und Stativ.‘ Das mache sie autark, die Kosten blieben übersichtlich“ (BILD, 2022, 03. Juli)
<b>Plattform</b>			
HK5	Affordanzen	Darstellung der Plattform-Affordanzen von OF	„Onlyfans sei ‚Wie Instagram, nur mit Bezahlungsfunktion‘, beschreibt Influencerin Pati Valpati das Konzept“ (SZ, 2022, 28. Juni)
SK5.1	Funktionsweisen	Darstellung der Nutzungsmöglichkeiten von OF	„Auf der Onlineplattform können Anbieter zahlenden Abonnenten unter anderem Erotikinhalte zur Verfügung stellen“ (SPIEGEL, 2021, 21. Februar)
SK5.2	Nutzerzahlen	Thematisierung der Nutzerzahlen	„Mitte Mai verkündete CEO Ami Gan, dass die Zahl der OnlyFans-Creator*innen 2022 um fast 40 Prozent im Vergleich zum Vorjahr gestiegen sei“ (taz, 2023, 23. Mai)
SK5.3	Eigentümer	Charakterisierung der Plattform-Eigentümer:innen	„Zumindest Stokely selbst weiß, wer er ist: Auf seiner Instagram-Seite präsentiert er sich als seriöser Geschäftsmann im Anzug, nichts deutet auf den pornografischen Hintergrund seines Unternehmens hin“ (FAZ, 2021, 29. August)

SK.5.4	Regulierungen Plattform	Darstellung der OF-Regulierungsmaßnahmen	„Das führte dazu, dass die Plattform ein paar Beschränkungen einführte, wie zum Beispiel ein Maximal-Trinkgeld von 100 Dollar (davor 200)“ (SZ, 2020, 04. November)
HK6	Beziehung Geschäftspartner	Darstellung von OF als Geschäftspartner:in	„Tim Stokely hatte in der Financial Times geklagt, von Banken zur Änderung gedrängt worden zu sein. Denn diese hätten aus Angst um ihren Ruf die Zusammenarbeit erschwert“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2022, 07. November)
SK6.1	Beziehung Anbieter	Charakterisierung der Beziehung zwischen OF und Anbieter:innen	„Sexarbeiterinnen und Sexarbeiter haben insbesondere seit Beginn der Coronapandemie eine sichere Arbeitsumgebung auf OnlyFans gefunden“ ( <i>SPIEGEL</i> , 2021, 25. August)
SK6.2	Beziehung Konsument	Charakterisierung der Beziehung zwischen OF und Konsument:innen	„Diese Gefahren lauern: Jeder, der die exklusiven Inhalte eines Users sehen möchte, muss zahlen! Und genau hier lauert eine große Suchtgefahr“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2020, 23. Juni)
SK6.3	Covid-19 Auswirkungen	Kontextualisierung von Covid-19	„Die Plattform OnlyFans verzeichnete zu Beginn der Pandemie einen signifikanten Anstieg bei Neuansmeldungen“ ( <i>VICE</i> , 2021, 03. April)
<b>Medien-Diskurs</b>			
HK7	Diskurs-Semantik Kommunikator:innen	Wertneutrale Begriffszuweisung für Kommunikator:innen	„Profilinhaber“ ( <i>FAZ</i> , 2021, 29. August)
SK7.1	Sex-Arbeit	Begriffszuweisung, die sich dem Bereich der Sex-Arbeit zuordnen lassen	„Erotikmodel“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2022, 3. Juli), Sexarbeiterinnen ( <i>FAZ</i> , 2020, 12. Oktober)
SK7.2	Digitale Arbeit	Charakterisierung der Erstellung digitaler Inhalte als Arbeit	„Influencer“ ( <i>SPIEGEL</i> , 2020, 25. März), „Creator“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2022, 6. November)
HK8	Diskurs-Semantik Plattform	Wertneutrale Begriffszuweisung für die Plattform	„Webportal“ ( <i>SPIEGEL</i> , 2020, 05. Dezember), „Internetplattform“ ( <i>SZ</i> , 2021, 20. August)
SK8.1	Gesellschaftliche Einordnung	Beschreibung der gesellschaftlichen Bedeutung von OF als Plattform	„Obwohl es die Plattform seit 2016 gibt, ist erst in diesem Jahr ein echter Hype um sie entstanden“ ( <i>SPIEGEL</i> , 2020, 11. November)
SK8.2	Erotik Bezug	Charakterisierung der Plattform bezüglich sexueller Inhalte	„Nackig-Plattform“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2021, 26. April)

HK9	Diskurs-Beteiligung	Nennung weiterer Sprecher:innen	„Lilian Suter von der Züricher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften forscht zum Thema Medienpsychologie“ ( <i>Business Insider</i> , 2022, 07. November)
SK9.1	Distanz	Berichterstattungsweisen ohne Nennung der Kommunikator:innen	„Ob Achseln, Beine oder Bikini-zone. Damit verdient sie rund 1200 Euro pro Monat“ ( <i>BILD</i> , 2022, 28. April).
SK9.2	Originalton	Berichterstattungsweisen, bei denen Betroffene selbst zu Wort kommen	„Seitdem ich diese Plattform habe, verdiene ich im Monat nicht unter sechsstellig“, erläutert Katja“ ( <i>Buzzfeed</i> , 2023, 14. Mai).
<b>Formale Eigenschaften</b>			
HK10	Medium	Name des Berichterstattungsmedium	
HK11	Erscheinungsdatum	Datum der Veröffentlichung des Artikels	
HK12	Artikellänge	Wortzahl des Artikels (inkl. Überschrift)	
HK13	Ressort	Ressort des Artikels	



## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

**Between feminist self-empowerment and selling out emotional intimacy: A qualitative content analysis of German reporting on OnlyFans from 2020 till 2023**

**Zwischen feministischer Selbstermächtigung und Ausverkauf emotionaler Intimität: Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse der deutschen Berichterstattung über OnlyFans von 2020 bis 2023**

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# EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## 1. Introduction

On OnlyFans, around 1.5 million providers create content at self-selected intervals, which is usually (but not always) erotic in nature (Hamilton et al., 2022, p. 2). The visibility of this content, usually images, videos, or messages, must be activated through paid subscriptions. Hamilton et al. (2022, p. 1) emphasize the special nature of the OnlyFans activity: “OnlyFans creators are uniquely positioned at the intersection of professional social media content creation and sex work”. OnlyFans differs from other platforms for sexual content due to its structures, which are similar to the affordances of social networking sites (SNS) (DeVito et al., 2017). However, it also clearly differentiates itself from SNSs as it focuses on building a monetized parasocial relationship (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

However, the question of how German media report on a platform that offers sexualized content and emotional intimacy in the guise of a social networking site deals with a perspective on the topic that goes beyond sexuality. Understanding the media discourse on a platform like OnlyFans is also relevant for understanding the specific phenomena of profound mediatization (Hepp, 2021), such as platformization and digital work contexts. Since pornographic content falls into an area of the everyday world that is more private, the analysis provides insight into the social acceptance of the progressive integration of social network sites into different areas of life.

The study focuses on how the OnlyFans phenomenon is portrayed and assessed by the reporting media. This is done by means of a qualitative content analysis, according to Kuckartz (2010, 2016), in which online media are also considered alongside traditional media.

## 2. State of research

The presentation of the current state of research addresses four aspects: 1) the terminology used by providers of digital sexual content, 2) characteristics of OnlyFans as a digital platform, 3) parasocial relationships on digital platforms and 4) media representation of sex work.

Communication science research on reporting on sex work content can be described as fragmentary. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, essays tend to be dedicated to the pros and cons of sex work (Grenz, 2018). To date, there have been no comprehensive national or international studies on the question of how digital sex work or the commercialization of pornographic content is portrayed in reporting. In a quantitative content analysis of reporting on prostitution, Höly (2014, pp. 89–91) was able to identify four frames on the topic of prostitution: prostitution as normal employment, as a violation of human rights, as a moral issue and the role of the state as a regulator. The first two frames in particular reveal polarized

reporting in which both extremes of opinion on prostitution are represented. Internationally, a US study shows that reporting characterizes sex workers as victims and uses distorted statistics and emotionalized narratives on the topic of prostitution (Jackson, 2016). However, there is no discussion of possible changes in reporting in the form of temporary phases, as Cohen (1972), for example, describes with the phenomenon of moral panic. There is also no differentiation between reporting media to address the extent to which certain forms of representation can be linked to the political and editorial orientation of reporting media.

### 3. Research questions

The OnlyFans platform is a phenomenon of deeper mediatization, which results in a substantive proximity to the concept of platformed work and the term content creator. As shown, there are isolated studies that deal with the motives of providers or reporting on prostitution. However, there is a lack of in-depth scientific analyses of the media portrayal of the platform and its providers. Against this background, the following research questions were formulated:

*RQ1: How are the OnlyFans platform and its providers characterized in the reporting?*

*RQ2: To what extent can thematic phases be identified within the reporting?*

*RQ3: What are the differences and similarities between the reporting media?*

### 4. Method

This study used a purposive sample (Möhring et al., 2005, p. 158) of articles from national quality, tabloid, and online media. The inclusion of reporting media with high circulation and reach and varying periodicity served to identify phases and key events. Online-only media aimed at a young audience, so-called “millennial media”, were also analyzed (Bødker, 2017, p. 28). It would also have been possible to include regional media, but the coverage here proved to be too low. The circulation figures were recorded using data from the Informationsgemeinschaft für Verbreitung von Werbeträgern (IVW). The editorial line was taken from editorial statutes and previous studies. To determine the sample, a full survey was conducted using the publication databases WISO-net and Nexis Uni and the specific online archives of *SZ*, *FAZ*, *VICE*, and *Buzzfeed* on OnlyFans. These databases included both print articles and articles that only appeared in online sections. This was done for the research period from 1st January 2020 to 1st June 2023, and *OnlyFans* was used as the keyword.

For the analysis of 65 articles, a content-structuring qualitative approach was chosen with the aim of creating a typology (Kuckartz, 2016, p. 45 ff.). The focus here is on a grouping process of “similarities in selected characteristics” (Kuckartz, 2010, p. 555), from which a typology is derived as the “totality of the types that apply to a specific phenomenon area” (Kuckartz, 2010, p. 556). For this purpose,

the basic dimensions of the codebook were first derived from the research questions: “Communicators”, “platform”, “media discourse” as well as “formal characteristics”. So-called main categories (HK) were derived from the material and assigned to the respective dimensions.

## 5. Results

The moral dimensions of sex work are not at the center of the media discourse. The term prostitution does not appear in the reporting, neither in the description of the providers nor in connection with the platform. Rather, the extent and legitimacy of the monetization of parasocial relationships and emotional intimacy are discussed in the media and thus also implicitly the consequences of deeper media-tization. This shows that the focus of reporting is not on the social acceptance of pornographic content.

### 5.1 Results for RQ1: Characterization of the OnlyFans platform and its providers in the reporting

Various media characterizations of the OnlyFans platform and the providers can be identified in the reporting.

The term *creator* characterizes providers from the perspective of platform communicators as a ‘new’ form of influencer or content creator. This representation focuses on digital practices, such as activity on a digital platform and the creation of content on it. The term stands for a phase of reporting in which she uses terms associated with SNSs and takes a more neutral stance regarding the content created. When describing the creator’s audience, the reporting either uses factual terms, such as user or subscriber, or terms that suggest a more emotional relationship, such as fan or follower. There is no direct indication that the activity involves the creation of sexual content or monetized interaction with the audience. The term, therefore, stands for a certain normalization of providers on OnlyFans, as they are brought close to the commercially established term of content creator.

The characterization as a *businesswoman* stands for reporting that accentuates the capitalist intentions of providers on OnlyFans. Providers are primarily described here as profit-oriented sex workers who not only upload content but also make a “crass career” (*BILD*, 26th April 2022). The businesswoman’s audience also emphasizes the aspect of the business relationship instead of the emotional connection by talking about customers or subscribers. Consequently, the businesswoman sees content creation primarily as a means of financing her own livelihood.

The characterization *feminist* focuses on the motif of sexual liberation: on the one hand, for professional sex workers by giving them the opportunity to decide on their content creation without intermediaries. On the other hand, for individuals, who were previously not active in sex work but as ‘normal’ content creators or influencers, as they can now utilize the attention of the male audience for themselves.

The term “money printing press” is used to characterize the platform’s intention to obtain the greatest possible profit from both users and providers as efficiently

as possible. The platform is in the role of a service company that is primarily geared towards maximizing profits. In doing so, it also resorts to questionable measures such as the unannounced deletion of profiles and the freezing of credit balances (FAZ, 21st February 2021). The relationship with providers is ambivalent, as although they earn enormous amounts of money through the platform, they are also highly dependent on the platform and its regulations (SZ, 4th November 2021).

In connection with the creator, OnlyFans is characterized in the media as a creative platform that offers artists and other creative people the opportunity to publish content, in line with the narrative of the platform operator. The inclusivity and diversity of the platform are emphasized, which, unlike pornographic websites, does not sort people into categories.

In the context of the feminist, the platform is presented as a place that enables feminist independence through its infrastructure (characterization as a tool for self-empowerment).

## 5.2 Results for RQ2: Thematic phases of reporting

In the reporting on OnlyFans, four successive thematic phases could be differentiated. In the first reporting phase, the *introduction*, the platform is presented as a new trend whose functionality and origin must first be explained to the readers. The focus of the reporting is therefore on dealing with the questions of what kind of platform it is, what content is in the foreground, and who uses it. What is striking in this phase of reporting is that OnlyFans is primarily described as a new “social media platform” (BILD, 27th October 2020). The second phase in the reporting, which begins in the following year 2021, is a *negotiation of content*. A key event within this phase is the ban on pornographic content announced by the operators in the summer of 2021 (and withdrawn shortly afterward), which is the subject of intensive reporting. It can be seen here that OnlyFans is primarily referred to as an erotic or porn platform at this time. The focus is on the impact of their function and content on society and the extent to which the use of OnlyFans is socially acceptable. Female providers themselves are now increasingly having their say, giving rise to various interpretations of OnlyFans’ activities, for example, as a feminist act or an improvement in the work of sex workers.

Headlines such as “New internet companies and coronavirus are changing the porn industry. Young women are becoming solo entrepreneurs who sell their nudity online to paying customers” (WELT, 14th March 2021) mark a third phase known as the *capitalization panic*. In this phase, there is a very strong focus on the revenue of the providers and the platform. It is significant that OnlyFans is presented as a new means of generating high financial profits very quickly. In this phase, the legitimacy of the monetization of emotional closeness as a product and the illusion of a partnership relationship is negotiated. The use of services on OnlyFans is presented on the one hand as a trend triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, but on the other hand also as a necessity for some people to experience emotional affection during the pandemic.

### 5.3 Results for RQ3: Comparison of the reporting media

Regarding the quantity and periodicity of reporting, it is noticeable in the full survey that the conservatively orientated leading media *FAZ* and *WELT* and the tabloid newspaper *BILD* report particularly frequently on OnlyFans and their communicators. As a rule, articles stand alone and make no reference to each other within the medium or across the board (except for more general formulations that refer to the thematic trend itself). Politically left-leaning media such as *taz* or *VICE* report much less frequently on the platform than other media in the sample. This is particularly surprising in the case of online media such as *VICE*, as OnlyFans is characterized in the reporting as a phenomenon that is particularly popular among young people. Overall, all reporting media show that the platform is reported on particularly regularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. This supports the thesis of a moral panic, according to which a topic tends to be artificially constructed in terms of its social significance and dissemination, for example, to increase media coverage.

## 6. Conclusion

In everyday mediatized life, the monetization of social relationships in reporting on OnlyFans is discussed as a problematic phenomenon. However, it also points to a change in the marketing of pornography in the age of social network sites, in the course of which consumers not only choose freely available pornographic content but also paid but personalized content. The fact that this topic is once again subject to a taboo is shown by the fact that reporting media report on OnlyFans and its providers with a certain distance. The user experiences and motivations of consumers of the platform are rarely discussed, as the focus is predominantly on scandalizing the providers and their revenues. For the future, we, therefore, recommend not only an extended analysis of the reporting but also the scientific observation of the convergence of social network sites and marketing mediators of pornographic content.

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## FULL PAPER

### **Social media, self-pornography, and gay/bisexual/queer men's psychosexual wellbeing**

**Soziale Medien, pornographische Selbstdarstellung und das  
psychosexuelle Wohlbefinden von schwulen, bisexuellen und  
queeren Männern.**

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## Social media, self-pornography, and gay/bisexual/queer men's psychosexual wellbeing

### Soziale Medien, pornographische Selbstdarstellung und das psychosexuelle Wohlbefinden von schwulen, bisexuellen und queeren Männern.

*Paul Byron, James D. A. Newton, Olivia Hansen, Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, Bernard Saliba & Daniel Demant*

**Abstract:** Despite the internet's historical significance for LGBTQ+ identities and communities, contemporary public health research overlooks how gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ+) men utilise online spaces for sexual expression and connections. This study explores the role of pornographic content creation and sharing on social media among Australian GBQ+ men, addressing the gap in understanding its implications for health and wellbeing. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among  $N = 596$  men ( $M_{age} = 36.1$  years;  $SD = 11.4$ ) in Australia, allowing us to investigate their practices of producing and sharing pornographic content on social media. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed to explore demographics, psychosexual wellbeing, and motivations for content creation. It was found that 71.3% of participants reported producing sexual self-representations, and 15.1% shared this content publicly on social media, without commercial interest. Participants who produced content (either for sharing privately or publicly) exhibited higher sex positivity and sexual self-esteem than those not producing content. There was no significant difference regarding age or sexual orientation. Qualitative analysis revealed the key motivations for sharing sexual content on social media were for arousal, connection, and validation. These findings underscore the multifaceted motivations behind GBQ+ men's engagement with pornographic content creation, emphasising its role in social connection and personal validation. Recognising these practices within health frameworks is crucial for understanding and accommodating GBQ+ men's digital sexual cultures.

**Keywords:** pornography, sexually explicit media, social media, gay community, self-representation

**Zusammenfassung:** Trotz der historischen Bedeutung des Internets für LGBTQ+-Identitäten und -Communities wird in der aktuellen Public-Health-Forschung häufig übersehen, wie schwule, bisexuelle und queere (GBQ+) Männer digitale Räume zur sexuellen Ausdrucksform und zur Knüpfung sozialer Beziehungen nutzen. Diese Studie untersucht die Rolle der Erstellung und des Teilens pornografischer Inhalte in den sozialen Medien unter australischen GBQ+ Männern und schließt damit eine Forschungslücke bezüglich der Im-

plikationen für Gesundheit und allgemeinem Wohlbefinden. Eine Onlineumfrage unter  $N = 596$  australischen Männern ( $M = 36,1$  Jahre;  $SD = 11,4$ ) wurde durchgeführt, um Praktiken zur Produktion und Teilens pornografischer Inhalte in sozialen Medien zu analysieren. Quantitative und qualitative Analysen wurden angewendet, um zu erforschen wie demografische Merkmale, psychosexuelles Wohlbefinden und Motivationen sich auf die Erstellung pornographischer Inhalte auswirken. Der Großteil aller Teilnehmer (71,3 %) gaben an, sexuelle Selbstrepräsentationen zu erstellen, und 15,1 % teilten diese Inhalte ohne kommerzielle Absicht öffentlich in sozialen Medien. Teilnehmer, die solche Inhalte produzierten (privat oder öffentlich), zeigten eine höhere Sex-Positivität und ein stärkeres sexuelles Selbstwertgefühl als Teilnehmer, die keine Inhalte erstellten. Es gab keinen signifikanten Unterschied hinsichtlich des Alters oder der sexuellen Orientierung. Die qualitative Analyse zeigte, dass die Hauptmotive für das Teilen sexueller Inhalte in sozialen Medien sexuelle Erregung, soziale Verbindung und Fremdbestätigung waren. Diese Ergebnisse verdeutlichen die facettenreichen Motivationen hinter dem Engagement von GBQ+ Männern in der Erstellung pornografischer Inhalte und betonen deren Rolle in sozialer Verbindung und persönlicher Bestätigung. Die Anerkennung dieser Praktiken im Rahmen von Gesundheitskonzepten ist entscheidend, um die digitalen sexuellen Kulturen von GBQ+ Männern zu verstehen und zu berücksichtigen.

**Schlagwörter:** Pornografie, Sexuell explizite Medien, Soziale Medien, Gay Community, Selbstrepräsentation

## 1. Introduction

Research into the wellbeing of gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ+) men has typically focused on traditional health measures, with some attention to community connectedness (Frost & Meyer, 2012). Research has highlighted the importance of digital and social media in forming LGBTQ+ networks and facilitating peer and community connections, including friendships, sex, and relationships (Robards et al., 2021). However, public health research has given less attention to the intricacies of how particular digital spaces, sexual practices, and online communities may be experienced as supportive to the health and wellbeing of GBQ+ men.<sup>1</sup>

From early scholarship on GBQ+ men's online dating to today's hook-up apps, as well as HIV/sexual health research and health promotion initiatives from the 1990s onwards, there has been strong recognition that the internet, and subsequently social media and dating/hook-up apps, have been central to queer identities, communities, and relationships (Campbell, 2004; Miles, 2018). Given the prevalent use of social and digital media, there is a need to consider how GBQ+ men's everyday digital media practices offer access to community connection and support. Community connection has long been a factor of social research into GBQ+ men's health and wellbeing, despite disagreement on what community means to LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2022). Sexual health and substance use research, alongside health promotion, has particularly recognised the benefits of community connectedness for the circulation of peer-based support and health information (Demant et al., 2018; Veinot et al., 2013).

1 For simplicity, we use GBQ+ men throughout this paper, though this acronym is limited. This study includes trans men and transmasculine participants who identify as gay, bisexual and/or queer.

The present study reports on data from a survey of GBQ+ men (cisgender and trans) in Australia who use pornography, with a particular focus on participant practices of producing and sharing pornographic content on social media for non-commercial purposes. While porn research typically situates pornographic content as *consumed* media, attention to the production and dissemination of pornographic content, as well as the audiences and communities involved (or imagined), necessarily expands current research discussions of ‘porn use’. The practice of sharing self-made pornographic content with personal networks and strangers on social media is especially pertinent to understanding how porn use impacts GBQ+ men’s health and wellbeing. Research has indicated that this practice likely influences various dimensions of psychosexual wellbeing such as sexual self-esteem or sex positivity. Receiving positive feedback and validation from online audiences can boost sexual self-esteem, helping individuals to feel more confident and positive about their sexual identities (Miller, 2022; Roig-Mora et al., 2024). This feedback loop of sharing and receiving responses contributes to a more affirming and accepting view of one’s own sexuality, which is linked to higher levels of sex positivity. Moreover, the erotic gratifications obtained through these practices are not merely about sexual arousal but expand deeper into the area of sexual wellbeing through the experience of control and agency over one’s sexual expression (Hakim, 2019). This is particularly relevant for GBQ+ men, who often navigate stigmatised and marginalised sexual identities.

Research has highlighted that GBQ+ men’s use of porn is near ubiquitous (Downing et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2020). Gay porn offers a key site of sex education, in lieu of heterosexual-focused education from schools and through the informal education of much popular culture (Kubicek et al., 2010; Stout et al., 2023). Beyond its use for sexual arousal, gay porn is not only educational and informative but offers the potential benefit of social connection. While there is a growing body of literature on DIY porn communities (discussed below), this is yet to be considered in relation to GBQ+ men’s wellbeing and social connection.

## 2. Literature review

We note that terminology of related studies shifts between ‘gay’, ‘queer’, ‘LGBTQ+’, and other terms, and we adopt the terminology used by the original authors where possible. While this literature reports on diverse settings beyond the Australian context of our participants, it also reflects global trends and is suggestive of trans-cultural expressions of gender and sexuality (Yue, 2017) within GBQ+ men’s wider social practices of digital sexual communication.

### 2.1 Digital media’s influence on pornography

Gay, bisexual, and queer men were early adopters of digital media for sexual and social connection (Grov et al., 2014), and research has highlighted their use of these media for accessing sexual information, sexual partners, friendships, and community. The safety of digital media use for connecting to support and communities is well

documented, as is the digital promise of expanding sexual and social worlds in otherwise unavailable ways (Byron et al., 2019; Grov et al., 2014; Miles, 2018).

Men's use of digital and social media spans a range of sexual expressions and connections, including producing and sharing content traditionally described as pornographic. Ashton et al. (2019) argue that digital media has complicated previous definitions of pornography and notes common disagreement about which sexual media constitute pornography. For Ashton et al. (2019), this depends on the intention of producers, and they 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" (p.163). Attention to consent is uncommon to definitions of pornography among current leading scholars (see McKee et al.'s (2020) Delphi panel survey of porn researchers). This reflects a tendency to not include sexual self-representations and their dissemination in porn research. However, the below literature brings digital sexual culture research into the fold of porn studies. Much like Ashton et al. (2019), this scholarship demonstrates that sexual media extends from traditional understandings of pornography to community-level cultures of producing and sharing content with the intention to arouse.

Sexualities researchers have long discussed gay male culture as 'pornified' (Maddison, 2017; Mowlabocus 2007), with digital and social media playing a significant role in this. Mowlabocus (2007), discussing Grindr, argued that porn "is written into the code of gay men's everyday lives" (p. 61), and Maddison (2017) explores this claim further, ten years later, analysing how "porn consumption in gay cultures produces particular kinds of subjectivity" (p. 139). Citing over 30 years of research on gay pornography, Maddison (2017) notes that "gay porn has provided images of our desires, and ones associated not with shame and disgust but with pleasure and transcendence" (p. 141). More recently, Ding and Song (2023) adopt this pornification thesis for their study of Chinese gay men's use of porn for learning about their sexuality. Discussing DIY gay porn culture on Twitter (now X), they bring a more contemporary and global focus to how gay men's understanding of themselves and their sexualities are informed by seeing and reproducing themselves in pornographic contexts (2023). As Kane Race (2018) argues, it has become commonplace for sharing sexual self-representations on gay sexual networking platforms, and "digital media are involved in the emergence of new forms of literacy, articulation and mediated activity" (p. 1327). Race builds on Tim Dean's statement that "Now anyone with a phone and internet access can become a pornographer" (2014, p.6; cited in Race, 2018, p. 1325).

## 2.2 Social media and sexual communities

The increased use of social media platforms has supported LGBTQ+ community-building and sexual self-exploration in safe environments (Cao, 2021; Wignall, 2017). For GBQ+ men, social media offer vital connection with, and insight into, a range of sexual practices and communities (Ding & Song, 2023; En et al., 2013). In recent years, queer men have appreciated more seemingly authentic displays of sexuality and pornographic content (Ashford & Longstaff 2022; Wang 2021) that

is easily available through social media. Alongside Race's (2018) observation, increased accessibility to porn production has encouraged more self-created pornographic material for commercial and non-commercial purposes, including participating in what's colloquially known as 'alt Twitter' (Ashford & Longstaff, 2022). Such sharing can foster or anticipate connections to others, including potential hook-ups and relationships (Race, 2018). Similarly, this digital environment has exacerbated what Wang and Ding (2022) refer to as 'the sexual platform economy' which, they argue, "incorporates users' erotic online activities becoming an indispensable part of digital media's success" (p. 824). While popular social media platforms typically prohibit sexually explicit content (Paasonen et al., 2019), platforms with liberal content policies have become key sites for distributing self-pornography – notably Twitter (now X) (Cao, 2021; Wang, 2021; Wignall, 2017), Reddit (Robards, 2018; Watson, 2021) and, before its 2018 porn ban, Tumblr (Byron, 2019; Tiidenberg, 2014).

For Reddit use, Watson (2021) highlights the value of content tagging within sexual communities, through which new sexual terms and classification systems have developed and are useful for locating interest – or identity-based communities. Discussing gay sexual representations on Reddit, En et al. (2013) argue that personal identities of community members are strongly informed by the collective sexual identities of such groups, and social and subcultural norms are reflected in subreddit interactions. This likely includes sexual self-representation norms – as part of a 'queer sexual literacy' (Ding & Song, 2023) and its ongoing development (Race, 2018). Laurin (2019) similarly describes how the amateurism of personal sexual content posted by gay men creates new sexual representations that do not simply mimic commercial porn. This amateurism reflects and reproduces intimacy through which 'everyday selfies' can feel proximate, relatable, and more authentic than other pornographic content (Cao, 2021; Laurin, 2019; Paasonen et al., 2019). Social media provide GBQ+ men with opportunities to widen practices and performances of intimacy and can be used to generate or suggest intimate proximity to others (Tziallas, 2015), and this can support psychosexual wellbeing (Miller, 2022). In his discussion of Grindr and similar apps, Tziallas (2015) also argues that such proximity connotes sexual potential – emphasising that other queer men are always "within your reach" (p. 761).

Cao (2022) highlights that among Filipino gay men who share amateur porn on Twitter, production and displays of sexual content overlap with more everyday social media use. He found an integration of sexual self and identity within users' everyday social media interactions and self-presentations, fostering the ability to express oneself and feel validation, and this likely reflects sexual self-expressions that are fostered globally, through social media that have a wide reach and can thus support the development of more global or transcultural practices of queer expression (Yue, 2017).

## 2.3 Self-esteem in sexual self-representation

Building self-esteem is another factor found to be influencing sexual self-representations online (Miller, 2022), as per supportive feedback and reactions from community members (Tiidenberg, 2014). Sharing sexual self-representations on Tumblr has been considered a form of collective therapy, providing access to supportive and encouraging comments from peer creators (Tiidenberg, 2014). Corneau et al. (2017) discuss how porn use can serve as a gay affirmative mechanism, promoting sexual exploration and self-acceptance among gay men.

Although there is limited literature on the relevance of gay pornography for sexual self-esteem among GBQ+ men, one study provides valuable insights. An online survey of 477 Norwegian gay and bisexual men by Kvaem et al. (2015) found that internet pornography use was associated with body ideals and sexual self-esteem. Their study suggests that self-perceived attractiveness, having an ideal body type, and viewing internet pornography in longer sessions each are associated with higher self-esteem as a sexual partner. Moreover, the preference for watching pornographic actors with ideal bodies was not related to sexual self-esteem. These findings highlight the importance of recognising the potential links between pornography as a form of sexual self-representation and individual self-perceptions, emphasising the complex dynamics involved in sexual self-esteem.

## 3. Current study

In the present study, we explore key aspects in relation to GBQ+ men producing and publicly sharing their own pornographic content on social media. This paper is part of a broader research project with an epidemiological study design with the overall purpose of understanding associations between pornographic media and GBQ+ men's social, emotional, psychological, sexual, and physical health and wellbeing (Demant et al., 2024).

This paper addresses significant gaps in the literature regarding the production and sharing of sexual self-representations among GBQ+ men. Previous research has primarily focused on traditional health measures and the consumption of pornography, often neglecting the practices of creating and distributing sexual content. By considering both quantitative and qualitative data, this paper seeks to explore the nuanced digital sexual cultures of GBQ+ men and their implications for psychosexual wellbeing.

Our research is significant in that it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how GBQ+ men use social media to share sexual content and how these practices relate to their wellbeing. By examining the motivations behind content creation and the impact on sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and community connectedness, this study contributes to a more holistic view of pornography use among GBQ+ men. The findings have the potential to inform future research and health promotion initiatives, recognising the positive aspects of these practices while considering their broader social and cultural contexts. From these data, we ask the following research questions:



*RQ1: To what extent are gay, bisexual, and queer men engaging in sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?*

*RQ2: What are the motivations of gay, bisexual, and queer men who share sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?*

*RQ3: How do practices of public sharing of sexual content complicate current understandings of pornography use among gay, bisexual, and queer men?*

*RQ4: How do social media practices of sharing pornographic self-representations relate to gay, bisexual, and queer men's wellbeing?*

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 Participants and recruitment

Men who self-identified as gay, bisexual, queer or another non-heterosexual orientation participated in an anonymous cross-sectional online survey in January and February 2023. Adult men (18 years or older) living in Australia were eligible to participate in the survey, regardless of their sex recorded at birth. Only men who used pornography within the past 12 months before commencing the survey were eligible to participate, regardless of producing pornography themselves.

Recruitment for the study took place online, utilising private and public special interest groups on social media platforms (Facebook/Reddit) that are highly frequented by sexual minority men from Australia, such as the 'Australian Gay Social' group on Facebook or the subreddit 'r/Ausgaybros' on Reddit. Additionally, advertisements were placed on Grindr. As an incentive, participants were offered to enter a prize draw of twenty retail vouchers valued at AU\$25 each. Ethical approval was granted through the University of Technology Sydney's Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: ETH22-7691). Informed consent was sought from each participant before commencing the survey.

Out of a total of 747 participants who provided their consent to participate in the survey and initiated the questionnaire, 54 individuals were excluded due to their failure to meet at least one of the eligibility criteria. Specifically, 26 did not identify as part of a sexual minority (and therefore exited the survey), 16 resided outside of Australia, 11 did not identify as men, seven had not used any pornography in the past 12 months, and five were below the age of 18. Among the remaining 693 participants, 35 were excluded for not responding to essential demographic questions. Lastly, 26 participants were excluded for not answering any questions related to their porn usage and 36 for not answering questions about creating pornographic content, resulting in a final sample size of  $N = 596$  participants.

## 4.2 Variables and concepts

### 4.2.1 Demographics

Participants were asked about their age in years, their gender, their sex assigned at birth, and their sexual orientation. Available sexual orientation responses were gay, bisexual, queer, 'don't know', or 'another term' that respondents were invited to share. Respondents were also asked about their ethnicity, relationship status, first language, and the Australian state in which they live.

Almost 80% of these participants were from the three largest Australian states: New South Wales (31.0%,  $n = 185$ ), Victoria (26.8%,  $n = 160$ ) and Queensland (21.8%,  $n = 130$ ). The mean age in the entire sample was 36.1 years ( $SD = 11.4$ ). Most participants identified as gay (71.0%,  $n = 423$ ), followed by bisexual (21.6%,  $n = 129$ ) and queer (5.0%,  $n = 30$ ), and a small minority were unsure or used other terms – most commonly, pansexual (2.3%,  $n = 14$ ).

Most participants identified as European/Anglo-Saxon (63.8%,  $n = 380$ ), followed by Asian participants (14.8%,  $n = 88$ ), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (7.2%,  $n = 43$ ), and multiethnic participants (5.0%,  $n = 30$ ), while all other ethnicities made up 9.3% ( $n = 55$ ) of the sample. More than half the participants were in a relationship with one (44.3%,  $n = 264$ ) or more than one regular partner (12.8%,  $n = 76$ ), while 246 (41.3%) were not a relationship, with 10 being unsure (1.7%).

### 4.2.2 Psychosexual wellbeing

To assess psychosexual wellbeing, we focused on five variables: sex positivity, sex negativity, sexual self-esteem, LGBTQ+ community connectedness, and importance of porn. Positive and negative perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality (often also referred to as 'erotophilia and erotophobia' respectively) were assessed using the Sex-Positivity-Negativity Scale, developed and validated by Hangen and Rogge (2022). This instrument comprises 16 items designed to gauge respondents' sentiments concerning sex and sexuality, using descriptive terms such as 'Fun', 'Enriching', and 'Annoying'. Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert Scale (1 – Not at all, 2 – A little, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Very much, 6 – Extremely), resulting in two scales measuring sexual positivity and negativity, each ranging from 1 to 7.

Sexual self-esteem was quantified using the Sexual Self-Esteem Scale, originally developed by Snell et al. (1992) and adapted by Lammers and Stoker (2019). This scale comprises five statements, for instance, "I am better at sex than most people," with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Agree) to 5 (Disagree).

Connectedness to the LGBTQ+ community was assessed using Demant et al.'s (2018) adapted version of a scale originally created by Frost and Meyer (2012). The scale comprises eight statements that evaluate participants' connections to the LGBTQ+ community, with responses on a defined Likert scale ranging from 1 (Agree strongly) to 4 (Disagree strongly), resulting in scores ranging from 8 to 32.

In addition, participants were asked about the importance of porn use for their general sex life as a single global item on a scale from 1 (Not important at all) to 10 (Very important).

#### 4.2.3 Production of pornography

Prior to the first items concerning porn, participants were provided with the following working definition: *“For the purpose of this study, porn is defined as any material aimed at creating or enhancing sexual feelings in the person using it by showing genitals and sexual acts, such as oral or anal sex, masturbation, fetish play etc.”* This is one of many possible definitions in a field where there is little agreement (McKee et al., 2020), and it differs from Ashton et al.’s (2019) cited earlier definition, which includes attention to consent. Our definition reflects existing social science definitions (McKee et al., 2020) and our initial anticipation of a more traditional focus on porn consumption.

Concerning the creation of pornographic content, this was broadly defined for participants as *“images or videos that show your genitals or yourself in a sexual act”*. Participants were asked *“In the past 12 months, did you produce sexual content of yourself regardless of their purpose?”* with four single-choice options: 1) No; 2) Yes, but only images; 3) Yes, but only videos; and 4) Yes, images and videos. Those who produced any sexual content were then asked: *“What was the general purpose of producing these?”* with three multiple-choice options: 1) Private WITHOUT commercial intentions (e.g., for partner, hook-up app, etc.); 2) Public or behind paywalls WITH Commercial intentions (e.g., for OnlyFans); and/or 3) Public WITHOUT commercial intentions (e.g., to post on Reddit or Twitter). Finally, participants who indicated that they share pornographic content on social media without commercial intentions had the opportunity to answer the following qualitative question: *“Please say more about how you publish sexual content online. What do you enjoy about this?”*

#### 4.3 Analysis

No aspects of this study were pre-registered. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v28. Descriptive statistics are reported as frequencies and percentages for categorical variables and as means with standard deviations (*SD*) for continuous variables. Differences between content creation groups were analysed using chi-square analyses for categorical variables and independent samples *t*-tests for continuous variables. The internal reliability of scales was interpreted using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  with an acceptable cutoff set at  $\alpha > .7$ . All scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  between .883 and .941.

Qualitative data was initially reviewed by the three primary authors who, taking a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), generated a working list of key themes for first pass coding by Author 3. As an inductive analysis, codes were cross-checked by Author 1 and followed by an iterative discussion of coded statements until agreement was met for the themes within each participant response.

This process also produced agreed upon descriptions of key themes and subthemes (see Table 3).

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Quantitative results

Out of 596 participants, 71.3% ( $n = 425$ ) had produced personal sexual content in the preceding 12 months, for any reason. These 425 participants were then asked a multiple-choice question about their intention for producing this content, with three options offered. For this paper, we focus on non-commercial production of self-pornography and the motivations for sharing this. This led to a three-category variable to differentiate between (a) those *only* producing for private sharing; (b) those producing for non-commercial public sharing on social media (regardless of whether they also share privately or commercially), and (c) those not sharing non-commercial sexual content. The latter group includes participants not sharing any sexual content, whether privately or publicly, and the small number of participants only sharing for commercial reasons. The 596 participants are therefore categorised into one of these groups, with a view to more closely consider those who produce and share non-commercial sexual content publicly on social media.

Within the three categories, most respondents indicated producing sexual content for private use and sharing only (51.8%,  $n = 309$ ), such as on Grindr, or with partners. Following this, 15.1% ( $n = 90$ ) indicated publicly sharing sexual content on social media without commercial intentions. The remaining 33.1% did not produce content for non-commercial public sharing (28.7% [ $n = 171$ ] did not produce any sexual content and 4.4% [ $n = 26$ ] produced and shared content for commercial reasons). We herein focus on the 15.1% of participants who publicly share sexual images and videos online, for non-commercial intention.

There was no significant difference in age between the three sexual content groups (see Tables 1 and 2). Significant differences were found between ethnic backgrounds, with participants with an Asian, European, or 'Other' background being significantly more likely to share non-commercial sexual content than other ethnic groups. No significant difference in relationship status was found between those who only shared non-commercial content privately, those who shared non-commercial content publicly, and those not sharing non-commercial sexual content.

Table 1. Chi-square tests comparing sexual content groups by demographic variables

Variable	Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing only (N = 309)			Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)			Not producing sexual content for non-commercial sharing (N = 197)			Chi-Square Test
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		
Relationship	One regular partner	148	47.9	42	46.7		74	37.6		$X^2 (6, N = 596) = 6.306, p = .390;$ $Cramér's V = .071$
	More than one regular partner	35	11.3	11	12.2		30	15.2		
	No	122	39.5	36	40.0		88	44.7		
	Unsure	4	1.3	1	1.1		5	2.5		
Ethnicity	European/Anglo-Saxon	197	63.8 <sup>a</sup>	73	81.1 <sup>b</sup>		110	55.8 <sup>a</sup>		$X^2 (8, N = 596) = 26.916, p < .001;$ $Cramér's V = .150$
	Asian	42	13.6 <sup>a,b</sup>	5	5.6 <sup>b</sup>		41	20.8 <sup>a</sup>		
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	24	7.8 <sup>a</sup>	3	3.3 <sup>a</sup>		16	8.1 <sup>a</sup>		
	All other	34	11.0 <sup>a</sup>	2	2.2 <sup>b</sup>		19	9.6 <sup>a,b</sup>		
	Multicultural	12	3.9 <sup>a</sup>	7	7.8 <sup>a</sup>		11	5.6 <sup>a</sup>		
	Gay	224	72.5	65	72.2		134	68.0		
Sexual Orientation	Bisexual	62	20.1	16	17.8		51	25.9		$X^2 (6, N = 596) = 8.891, p = .180;$ $Cramér's V = .086$
	Queer	19	6.1	5	5.6		6	3.0		
	Any other	4	1.3	4	4.4		6	3.0		

Notes. Significant chi-square tests were followed up with column proportions tests. No Bonferroni correction was applied when carrying out these tests. In each row, proportions with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

Table 2. ANOVAs comparing sexual content groups by demographic and psychosexual wellbeing variables

Variable	Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing only (N = 309)		Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)		Not producing sexual content for non-commercial sharing (N = 197)		ANOVA
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Age	35.6	11.2	36.2	10.9	38.0	12.0	$F(2, 593) = 2.690, p = .069; \eta^2 = .009$
Sex Positivity	5.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.7	5.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.8	4.8 <sup>b</sup>	0.8	$F(2, 552) = 5.888, p = .003; \eta^2 = .021$
Sex Negativity	2.5	1.2	2.2	0.9	2.6	1.3	$F(2, 544) = 2.963, p = .053; \eta^2 = .011$
Sexual Self-Esteem	4.2 <sup>a</sup>	4.6	4.6 <sup>a</sup>	4.6	2.8 <sup>b</sup>	5.3	$F(2, 579) = 6.436, p = .002; \eta^2 = .022$
LGBT Community Connectedness	18.2	5.5	17.2	6.2	18.5	5.7	$F(2, 551) = 1.450, p = .235; \eta^2 = .005$
Importance of porn	6.0	2.4	5.9	2.7	6.0	2.5	$F(2, 625) = .104, p = .902; \eta^2 = .001$

Notes. Significant ANOVA tests were followed up with post hoc testing (Tukey adjusted). In each row, means with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level

Statistically significant differences were detected for some psychosexual constructs, with participants who produced non-commercial content for private sharing and participants who produced non-commercial content for public sharing both being significantly more sex positive than those not engaging in these behaviours. Both of these groups also had higher sexual self-esteem than those who do not share non-commercial sexual content. No statistically significant differences were found for sex negativity, connectedness to the LGBTQ+ community, and the perceived importance of porn.

A Chi-Square test (see Table 3) showed that participants who publicly shared non-commercial sexual content were significantly less likely to only share images and were significantly more likely to share both images and videos compared to those who shared non-commercial sexual content privately.

**Table 3. Characteristics of production**

Variable		Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing <i>only</i> (N = 309)		Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)		Chi-Square Test
		n	%	n	%	
Type of content	Only images	96	31.1 <sup>a</sup>	11	12.2 <sup>b</sup>	X <sup>2</sup> (2, N = 399) = 15.533, <i>p</i> < .001; <i>Cramér's V</i> = .197
	Only videos	12	3.9 <sup>a</sup>	1	1.1 <sup>b</sup>	
	Images and videos	201	65.0 <sup>a</sup>	78	86.7 <sup>b</sup>	

*Notes.* Significant chi-square tests were followed up with column proportions tests. No Bonferroni correction was applied when carrying out these tests. In each row, proportions with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

5.2 Qualitative results

The 90 survey participants who indicated sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial intentions were given the opportunity to say more about this, and most did (*n* = 54). Responses ranged from one or two words to a paragraph of text, and we report on these to illustrate a range of self-reported practices and motivations in GBQ+ men’s non-commercial pornographic self-representations on social media.

Through inductive coding of these 54 responses, we arrived at three key themes relating to practices and motivations of arousal, connection, and validation. While the three major themes will be presented and analysed separately, many responses crossed two or more themes. The following is an example response that include all three key themes:

*I enjoy the exhibitionism of it. I enjoy positive feedback on my body. I enjoy showing off small cocks in a sexual manner since I see it so rarely. I enjoy engaging with other queer men. I enjoy the creativity of it. [P12]*

The following sections give specific attention to the key themes of arousal, connection, and validation, including subthemes within each theme (see Table 4 for subtheme descriptions and quantities).

**Table 4. Qualitative response themes, subthemes, quantities, and subtheme descriptions**

Themes ( <i>n</i> )	Subthemes ( <i>n</i> )	Subtheme descriptions
Arousal (32)	Self-pleasure (20)	The pleasure received from sharing one's sexual content
	Pleasure of others (16)	The pleasures other people receive from participants' shared sexual content
	Fetish/exhibitionism (12)	Statements about self-exposure and exhibitionism or mention of other fetishes
Connection (23)	Sharing oneself (16)	Sharing one's sexual self-representations in anticipation of responses
	Sex partners (8)	Connecting with sex partners or hook-ups, both real and potential
	Community and/or friends (7)	Connecting with community (specific or general communities) and/or friends
Validation (21)	Positive feedback (12)	Receiving positive feedback from viewers
	Self-esteem (9)	Gaining confidence in one's own sexual appeal, often described as 'self-esteem'
	Body positivity (5)	References to feeling more body positivity
	Attention (4)	Explicit mention of attention-seeking

*Notes.* Themes and subthemes generated through qualitative analysis of open survey responses (*n* = 54) regarding motivations for sharing non-commercial sexual content on social media.

### 5.2.1 Arousal

The most common theme was arousal. From these data, we located three dominant subthemes of self-pleasure, the pleasure of others, and fetish/exhibitionism. Statements in which self-pleasure was connected to the pleasure of others were common, demonstrating reciprocal pleasure practices. Fewer responses solely related to self-pleasure or the pleasure of others. The reciprocal aspects of pleasure/arousal can be seen in the following responses:

*Like to show my cock on the internet, it gives me pleasure to read other people's comments and to hear how they would pleasure me [P33]*

*It's kinda fun to show off. Good question tho[ugh]. I don't know why I do it. I'm not particularly vain, but it's nice to know I can make other people horny. [P39]*



*I have sent nudes and videos of me both by myself and getting fucked to others via WhatsApp and Snapchat... I enjoy the attention that you get from posting nudes and videos. It feels good to know that others get turned on by me, and I get turned on by seeing myself in the content too. [P42]*

Specific focus on self-pleasure often involved simple statements about the fun or pleasure that participants personally felt or references to this being ‘exciting’ (e.g., “I find it exciting to put myself out there” [P14]). In some cases, having an audience was key to the pleasure or excitement discussed:

*I like being seen to enjoy my sexual activities. It makes me happy to be able to share how much I enjoy having sex [P17]*

Many accounts of self-pleasure reference exhibitionism, crossing over with the subtheme of fetish/exhibitionism discussed below. In relation to the pleasure of others, often this was about exciting or enticing people who respondents were attracted to (e.g., “for people I want to fuck” [P41]). Some focused more on the sexual pleasure of others, and in the below example, this relates to pleasing strangers in similar ways to pleasing partners.

*In my sex life I get a lot of enjoyment from getting my partner/s off and so this translates to creating and publishing content in a similar kind of way. [P23]*

In responses relating to fetish/exhibitionism, participants often explicitly mentioned exhibitionism, with others referring to the enjoyment of being watched (e.g., “I find it hot to show myself and get nudes in return” [P15]). Across all responses relating to arousal, and overlapping subthemes of self-pleasure, the pleasure of others, and fetish/exhibitionism, there was mention of the reciprocal benefits of sharing sexual content, with a common experience of receiving sexual content in return.

### 5.2.2 Connection

Many participants referred to connection as key to the practice and motivation for sharing sexual content online. This further highlights the reciprocal and relational aspects of sharing sexual content, which can be for partners, friends, and strangers alike. Data reflect different intended audiences, and how these orient certain forms of sharing. Responses were further coded into subthemes of ‘sharing oneself’, sex partners, and community and/or friends, with each of these explored below.

Statements about the value of sharing oneself through sexual content reflected a range of audiences, whether direct recipients, a perceived community, or an imagined viewer who may be a potential sex partner. In addition to the pleasure of being seen (as discussed above, regarding exhibitionism), is the pleasure of the risk of being recognised.

*I do not show my face but that doesn't really hide my identity. I have tattoos that are very identifiable. I think maybe it's the partial anonymity/partial*

*recognition that makes it exciting. Not knowing if people who follow me recognise me or not but they potentially can. [P21]*

This response reflects that participating in anonymous practices of sharing sexual content can be accompanied by an awareness of a lack of control and knowledge over who is seeing this content and that unintended viewers may recognise the people featured. For this participant, this was a key aspect of the pleasure of sharing sexual content, and this was noted by other participants too.

*[On] twitter and reddit, [it] just feels fun to be exposed and helps me find people to trade with [P51]*

This 'sharing self' subtheme has much crossover with the subtheme of sex partners, as sharing oneself was seen as a useful lever to meeting others, sexually, whether online or moving to an in-person encounter. In fact, many participants were interested in meeting others who lived nearby.

*It also helps with finding partners who are not on apps like Grindr. [P14]*

*It makes me feel attractive and has often lead to real life hook ups. [P28]*

For some, social media platforms such as Twitter (now X) were specifically seen as useful for facilitating hook-ups, suggesting that social media offers hook-up potential that is more 'traditionally' associated with Grindr and similar apps – arguably offsetting limits of a geolocative grid and that platform's prohibition of public photos that are sexually explicit.

*To meet guys they want to see photos and video clips. I am also meeting people via Twitter after they have seen my Twitter account. [P49]*

Others also indicated different practices (and platforms) used for private and public sharing of sexual content (free or commercial), and how these fostered a range of different connections.

*Private, for people I want to fuck and to share on sex apps. Public Free, on twitter and occasionally fetlife. Public Paid, when I work for production companies or for porn film festivals. [P41]*

A sense of community in public and private sharing of sexual content on social media is commonly mentioned or alluded to. Sometimes this relates to specific Twitter (now X) or Reddit communities, or more general 'social media communities.'

*The Ego boost from comments on social media. The sense of community with other nsfw<sup>2</sup> accounts and the excitement of potentially hooking up with these other people [P46]*

For one participant, it was specifically about "Getting validation from friends and gay men in the Melbourne community" [P8]. In total, four participants explicitly

refer to sharing content with friends. Whether these are sexual friendships is not always clear, but this blurred aspect of friends and sex partners (and a likely overlap), is resonant with discussions of the intimacy of social media sharing.

*Sharing my content online tends to lead to others sharing with me, which I enjoy. I sometimes share with a few of my friends (and they do the same in return) [P43]*

*Enjoy showing off and the attention it garners... probably more when friends/people I think are attractive respond or interact with me based on it. [P40]*

### 5.2.3 Validation

Many participants shared sexual content on social media for validation. These data were categorised into subthemes of positive feedback, self-esteem, body positivity, and attention.

Receiving positive feedback was heavily associated with the key theme of arousal, with many of these responses mentioning exhibitionism. Those who shared personal sexual content via social media seemingly found arousal in self-exposure alongside their appetite for positive feedback from friends, strangers, and community. The desire to be observed and to evoke sexual arousal in others was also a desire for viewer comments and appraisal that could empower creators and assist in developing aspects of their self-worth and self-image.

*I've had a complicated relationship with self image for most of my life which has recently changed, so it's enjoyable to know that people like my content even though I often feel unattractive. [P23]*

Others expressed pre-established body confidence where sharing sexual content was a form of self-expression for which positive feedback was not the key motivation, but an added benefit of public sharing.

*I'm hot af, have a giant dick, and a banging body so it seems unfair not to share it with the world and I'm a narcissist so I enjoy getting compliments. [P29]*

For others, the act of receiving positive feedback from viewers via comments and appraisals allowed improvements in self-esteem – e.g., “It’s nice when someone reminds you that there’s always someone who will think your sexy” [P32]. This link between positive feedback and developing self-esteem also highlights the interlinking theme of connection, given that positive feedback had led to real life hookups, and an awareness of this potential.

*The Ego boost from comments on social media ... and the excitement of potentially hooking up with these other people. [P46]*

Positive interactions that improve a sense of participants’ own attractiveness and result in a confidence boost further highlight the underlying links to improved wellbeing through pornographic content sharing. It is also notable that some par-

ticipants' development of self-esteem was fostered through creating and sharing sexual content, not necessarily in the resulting feedback or interactions.

*I enjoy posting content online both for the exhibitionism aspect of it but also the self-esteem/body image boost I feel by putting myself out there.* [P10]

The interconnectedness across different aspects of validation and the other key themes of arousal and connection, with the concept of vitality becoming increasingly more evident within responses, shows how these practices can positively influence social wellbeing. As one participant states: "It is indispensable in my life. Without it, life feels like it's missing something important" [P27].

Within the subtheme of body positivity, participants specifically mention that creating and sharing sexual content online generated body positivity. For some, sharing such content supported them processing trauma or adjusting their insecurities, linking the theme of validation to improved wellbeing and self-acceptance.

*It feels sexually liberating, also helps with body confidence and self-acceptance* [P26].

*As a survivor of sexual assault I found that my sense of sexual autonomy and comfort expressing my sexuality in real life felt dismissed and/or unsafe. Sharing content expressing my sexuality online has been a step towards regaining the sense of control lost. I've also found it's been beneficial for body positivity and acceptance.* [P2]

Lastly, the subtheme of attention is explicitly linked to the theme of arousal and its fetish/exhibitionism subtheme. While the pleasures of exhibitionism – along with pleasure of the risk of recognition – are associated with attention, in the context of validation, this offers something more specific. In these responses, receiving attention can also operate as a tool to recognise and solidify one's self-confidence.

*[I] Enjoy showing off and the attention it garners.* [P40]

*I enjoy the attention that you get from posting nudes and videos.* [P42]

## 6. Discussion

Together, the quantitative and qualitative data presented above indicate that practices of producing and sharing non-commercial pornographic content are relatively common among participants and are meaningful. Such practices reflect shared motivations for sexual arousal, community and sexual connections, and personal validation. As existing literature demonstrates, the production and sharing of digital sexual content are ever-changing, reflecting a constantly evolving landscape of social media and their affordances for producing and sharing such content, alongside cultural practices (whether localised or more global) of sex and sexual expression. Our survey sought to elicit a current snapshot of Australian GBQ+

men's use of social media for sharing such content, with findings demonstrating recurring sentiments and motivations. Below we respond to each of our research questions.

### 6.1 RQ1: To what extent are GBQ+ men engaging in sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

The survey results indicate that a large proportion of respondents had produced personal sexual content for sharing in the past 12 months (71.3%). Among participants, most only had shared sexual content privately (51.8%), often on platforms like Grindr or with partners. Notably, a smaller proportion of this sample (15.1%) shared non-commercial sexual content publicly, using social media platforms such as Twitter (now X), Reddit, and Snapchat (this includes some participants who also shared sexual content privately and/or with commercial intentions). Our focus on the 15.1% who share non-commercial content on social media revealed a complex landscape of sexual self-expression and reciprocal interactions.

Despite the robust data, these figures alone may not fully capture the complexity of producing, sharing, and swapping self-pornography across various social media platforms. The practices involved in these activities are further understood through our qualitative data, which reveals a shared language and common engagement that extend beyond mere statistics. For instance, while quantitative results show that self-pornography creators are significantly more sex-positive and have higher sexual self-esteem compared to non-creators, qualitative insights suggest these behaviours are embedded in broader cultural practices.

### 6.2 RQ2: What are the motivations of GBQ+ men who share sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

For participants, arousal was a principal motivation for sharing sexual content on social media – both for self-pleasure and the pleasure of others. This also includes experiencing arousal through witnessing or hearing about the pleasure their content elicits in audiences. This highlights the value of reciprocity in these pleasure experiences – as something more collaborative or communal (where wider networks are involved). Alongside our findings about the association with higher rates of sex positivity and sexual self-esteem, pornographic content creation may serve as a mechanism to support the development of sexual communities and sexual exploration. This is reflected in many participant statements about sharing sexual content to connect with communities, friends, and potential partners. In addition to these motivations are experiences of self-validation through sexual exploration that producing and sharing content enables, along with audience feedback that was experienced by many participants as particularly validating and a positive influence on self-esteem.

Participants who were motivated by arousal also described subthemes of exhibitionism and fetishes, suggesting that sharing sexual content could enable self-exploration and experimentation in an online environment perceived as safe (Cao,

2021; Wignall, 2017). This is consistent with previous research showing that porn can serve as a catalyst for community building among GBQ+ men, providing a platform for shared interests and connections.

Pornography also offers opportunities for sexual education, allowing GBQ+ men to learn about different sexual practices and identities (Kubicek et al., 2010). The theme of connection as a motivation for sharing self-pornography underscores the social dimension of porn for many GBQ+ men. Participants leverage social media platforms not only for broad community engagement but also to facilitate online and offline interactions with others. Consequently, sharing sexual content serves as a conduit for expanding opportunities to meet potential sex partners. Grov et al. (2014) emphasise the pivotal role of social media platforms in shaping the online experiences of gay and bisexual men, providing spaces for sexual expression, community engagement, and the formation of social networks. This facilitates the construction of GBQ+ identities and fosters a sense of belonging within the community. Stout et al. (2023) reaffirm the enduring reliance of adolescent sexual minority men through the use of Google, online porn, and social media, in the absence of adequate mainstream sources. Considering our findings, it is plausible that this reliance extends to fulfilling sexual partner needs as well.

### 6.3 RQ3: How do practices of public sharing of sexual content complicate current understandings of pornography use among GBQ+ men?

Current research on 'porn use' often only considers porn consumption, neglecting attention to practices of creating and distributing sexual content. As a result, porn research findings often reflect pre-digital understandings of porn – as a product of media industries, used for private consumption and individualised arousal. The definitions and parameters of 'porn use' have shifted due to digital media platform affordances that support individual production and distribution of personalised sexual content (Ashton, 2019), both widely or within specific sexual communities or networks.

The predominance of sexual content creation among participants speaks to increased technologies and opportunities for creating and sharing one's own pornographic content. This includes the rise in popularity of OnlyFans (van der Nagel, 2021), alongside GBQ+ sexual cultures of sharing self-pornography on social media platforms including Twitter (now X), Reddit, and Snapchat.

Porn research typically measures and highlights the sexual arousal aspects of porn use. Our data demonstrates that while this is central to porn use, attention to practices and motivations of porn creation and sharing tells a more complex story of the relationship between porn and GBQ+ men's digital cultures of connection, belonging, and self-knowledge. That 15.1% of participants shared sexual content on social media without commercial interest, suggests that 'online pornography' extends beyond private use for acts of arousal for many, to include participating in 'digital sexual publics' (Song & Ding, 2023). Here, the creation and sharing of pornographic content is reciprocal and responsive to community members and forged within historical practices of cruising, hooking up, friendship, and

more. As Race (2018) argues, digital sharing of sexual self-representations among queer men does not simply operate as a form of seduction but can generate many possibilities. For many participants, these practices exceed motivations for arousal, and as well as facilitating a range of social and sexual connections, can offer personal validation in relation to self-esteem and self-acceptance.

#### 6.4 RQ4: How do social media practices of sharing pornographic self-representations relate to GBQ+ men's wellbeing?

Our findings extend on Corneau et al.'s (2017) discussion that porn can operate as an affirmative mechanism for gay men, promoting sexual expression and greater self-acceptance. Statements from our participants further illustrate the role that creating and sharing sexual content may play in both personal pleasure and communal experiences. This finding implies that non-commercial sexual content creators (and their audiences) may, in turn, experience greater sex positivity, sexual self-esteem, and potentially general wellbeing. Sharing and creating pornographic content may play an important role in the empowerment and validation of GBQ+ men. Participant narratives revealed that by sharing their self-representations, they received external validation, which is deeply intertwined with internal feelings of self-acceptance and self-esteem. This process not only boosted their confidence but also helped cultivate a strong sense of belonging and identity within LGBTQ+ communities. These insights suggest that different forms of media, including porn, might similarly influence self-esteem and potentially strengthen community connections among GBQ+ men, which in turn may support identity formation and affirmation.

By examining sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and community connectedness, we provided a holistic view of how practices of creating and sharing sexual self-representations may be linked to GBQ+ men's psychological and social health. Higher levels of sexual self-esteem and sex positivity among GBQ+ men creating and sharing non-commercial sexual content on social media suggest that these activities may enhance one's self-perception and attitudes towards sex (Kvalem, Træen, & Iantaffi, 2015). Furthermore, the strong sense of community connectedness indicates that sharing sexual content can foster deeper ties within the LGBTQ+ community, offering social support and validation.

### 7. Limitations and future research

Several limitations are worth considering. The present study design, whilst providing rich insights, was cross-sectional and using self-report data. Thus, we cannot draw causal inferences, and the data may be subject to biases (e.g., memory recall and strong sampling bias of the self-selection sample). Future research should consider alternate study designs (e.g., longitudinal) to enable causal/temporal inferences. While many respondents referred to social media 'communities', it is important to note that this is a slippery term that can have many meanings, especially for LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2022), and there is a need for further exploration of how community is perceived by those who refer to their participation in online sexual

communities. Moreover, GBQ+ men's current practices of pornographic self-representation warrant further attention within broader pornography scholarship, to ensure that porn use is not misunderstood as merely a practice of consumption but can encompass wider practices of media use and production for sexual arousal, connection, and validation.

## 8. Conclusion

Gay, bisexual, and queer men's digital sexual cultures, including the production and sharing of self-pornographic content, are continually evolving. These changes reflect the dynamic landscape of social media, which facilitates the creation and dissemination of sexual content. Our survey aimed to capture a current snapshot of Australian GBQ+ men's use of social media for sharing such content, revealing that creating and sharing sexual content is common and encompasses both private and public audiences. This trend is linked to a longstanding history of 'gay culture', wherein digital technologies have significantly fostered connections to communities, sex, and relationships.

Our findings indicate that a substantial proportion of GBQ+ men engage in producing and sharing non-commercial sexual content. Notably, 15.1% of respondents publicly shared their sexual content without commercial intentions on platforms like Twitter (now X) and Reddit. These practices are driven by motivations such as personal arousal, reciprocity, and the desire for connection, suggesting that sharing sexual content serves as a conduit for expanding social and sexual networks. These practices have significant implications for GBQ+ men's wellbeing. Creating and sharing sexual content can enhance sexual expression, self-acceptance, and a sense of belonging within LGBTQ+ communities. Participants reported receiving external validation, which bolstered their self-esteem and self-acceptance, highlighting the positive impact of these practices on sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and overall wellbeing.

It is essential not to stigmatise these forms of expression without understanding their potential positive impacts. Our findings emphasise the importance of considering psychosexual wellbeing as a multifaceted construct when studying GBQ+ men's engagement with pornographic content creation and sharing. These activities can significantly contribute to wellbeing by reinforcing positive self-images, fostering supportive community networks, and providing opportunities for sexual exploration and community engagement.

In conclusion, the digital sexual cultures of GBQ+ men are rich and multifaceted, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in shaping their sexual self-representations and overall wellbeing. Future research should continue to explore these practices, recognising the potential benefits and diverse experiences of individuals involved.

## Data availability statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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## FULL PAPER

**What types of pornographic content are people using? A mixed-method analysis that highlights differences by gender and relationship context of use**

**Welche Arten pornografischer Inhalte nutzen Menschen? Eine Mixed-Method-Analyse, die Unterschiede nach Geschlecht und Beziehungskontext der Nutzung hervorhebt**

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### What types of pornographic content are people using? A mixed-method analysis that highlights differences by gender and relationship context of use

#### Welche Arten pornografischer Inhalte nutzen Menschen? Eine Mixed-Method-Analyse, die Unterschiede nach Geschlecht und Beziehungskontext der Nutzung hervorhebt

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**Abstract:** Although content differences in pornography play an acknowledged role in many theories concerning the use and consequences of such material, relatively few studies have attempted to describe and understand the use of different types of pornography. To begin to address this gap,  $N = 367$  participants who were in predominately mixed-sex relationships were asked open-ended questions about the pornography they used alone and the pornography they used with a romantic partner. A mixed-methods analysis employing both thematic analysis and content analysis to the same set of responses indicated that participants' responses frequently focused on the gender of the performers, the sexual behaviors they engaged in, and the number of performers present in the pornography they watched. Other content features ranging from the presence of BDSM and rough sex to the race of performers were also mentioned by participants but to a lesser extent. Exploratory quantitative analyses indicated that the content of shared pornography use was more mono- and heteronormative than the content of solitary pornography use. Also, gender differences in the content of pornography tended to be more accentuated with respect to solitary pornography use than shared pornography use. The findings confirm that men and women may be using different kinds of pornography when they use it alone and are the first to suggest that consumers may be using different materials when they use pornography alone than when they use it with a partner. The results of the current study reinforce the importance of adopting content-specific measures of pornography use and suggest a potential avenue for conceptualizing a new taxonomic system for organizing pornographic materials.

**Keywords:** Pornography, sexually explicit media, content, media use

**Zusammenfassung:** Obwohl inhaltliche Unterschiede von Pornografie in vielen Theorien zu deren Verwendung und Folgen eine anerkannte Rolle spielen, haben wenige Studien versucht, die Verwendung verschiedener Arten von Pornografie zu beschreiben und zu verstehen. Um diese Lücke zu schließen, wurden  $N = 367$  Teilnehmende in überwiegend gemischtgeschlechtlichen Beziehungen offen nach den Pornografie-Inhalten gefragt, die sie allein und mit ihren Partner:innen verwendeten. Eine Mixed Methods Analyse, bei der eine

thematische Analyse sowie eine Inhaltsanalyse der Antworten angewendet wurde, ergab, dass sich häufig auf das Geschlecht, das Sexualverhalten und die Anzahl der Darsteller in der angesehenen Pornografie konzentriert wurde. Andere Inhaltsmerkmale, von der Präsenz von BDSM und hartem Sex bis hin zur Herkunft der Darsteller:innen, wurden ebenfalls erwähnt, wenn auch in geringerem Maße. Explorative quantitative Analysen ergaben, dass der Inhalt der gemeinsamen Pornografienutzung mono- und heteronormativer war als bei der alleinigen Nutzung. Auch geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede bezüglich des Pornografie-Inhalts waren tendenziell ausgeprägter, wenn es um die alleinige anstatt der gemeinsamen Pornografienutzung ging. Die Ergebnisse bestätigen, dass Männer und Frauen möglicherweise unterschiedliche Arten von Pornografie nutzen, wenn sie dies allein tun, und sind die ersten, die darauf hinweisen, dass möglicherweise unterschiedliche Materialien verwendet werden, wenn Nutzende Pornografie allein oder mit ihren Partner:innen konsumieren. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Bedeutung der Einführung inhaltspezifischer Maßnahmen zur Pornografienutzung und legen die Konzeptualisierung eines neuen taxonomischen Systems zur Organisation pornografischer Materialien nahe.

**Schlagerworte:** Pornografie, sexuell explizite Medien, Inhalt, Mediennutzung

## 1. Introduction

The specific nature of media content plays a critical role in several theories that have been applied to the use and effects of pornography. However, research concerning the systematic empirical documentation of the use of specific types of content is underdeveloped and poorly understood (Kohut et al., 2020). Existing research and theorizing on this front, while helpful, is poorly integrated, and limited by constrained top-down researcher-driven beliefs about the features of pornographic content that are most important for understanding the use of pornography or its consequences. While far from a complete remedy for these issues, the current study sought to add to the existing body of knowledge by adopting an open-ended, participant-informed, bottom-up mixed-method analysis of the content of pornography that consumers report using. The goals of this study were threefold. First, we wished to investigate the breadth or range of content that were being used by consumers by employing methods that were unconstrained by researchers' *a priori* assumptions. Second, we wished to obtain a better sense of what "typical" pornography use might look like from consumer's point of view, at least within a single convenience sample, and explore whether the nature of the content varied by gender or social context of use. Finally, we sought to apply insights from consumer reports of pornography use to develop a new empirically based framework for systematically documenting and organizing pornographic content.

## 2. The relevance of content

Although content has often been overlooked in pornography research (Kohut et al., 2020), many theories that are applied within this domain predict different patterns of pornography use, and different consequences of such use, depending on variations in the content of pornography that is under consideration (see, for example, Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Leonhardt et al., 2019; Malamuth, 2018;

Valkenburg & Peter, 2013; Wright et al., 2011). It has been argued that pornography use is a purposive behavior (Kohut et al., 2020; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Consequently, as with media use more broadly (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), it is reasonable to theorize that a range of individual, social, and contextual factors influence decisions to seek out and/or avoid sexual content compared to non-sexual content, or to seek out and/or avoid specific types of sexual content (Kohut et al., 2020). Such theorizing is supported by a limited body of empirical research, in that pornography use is known to correlate with factors like sensation seeking, low self-control, and low religiosity, among others (see Kohut et al., 2020), and that specific personality and individual difference factors seem to correlate with the use of different types of pornographic content (Bogaert, 2001; Paul, 2009). For example, Bogaert (2001) reports that men with more antisocial personality dispositions are more likely to select rape-themed and child-sexual abuse materials in a free-choice paradigm than men low in such dispositions. While such research has yet to be done (to our knowledge), similar lines of logic may suggest that certain types of users may be more inclined to seek out and consume more prosocial forms of pornography. People who hold more sex-positive feminist values, for example, may be particularly likely to seek out consensual depictions that emphasize female agency and pleasure than those that do not.

The importance of pornographic content is not just limited to understanding the antecedents of pornography use (who seeks out pornography and under what conditions), the content of pornography might also play a role in the consequences of pornography use. Many theories concerning the effects of pornography argue that contact with specific representations, scripts, themes, and ideologies within pornography influence consumers' psychology and behavior in ways that come to mirror the content that they view (Campbell & Kohut, 2017; Leonhardt et al., 2019; Malamuth, 2018; Wright et al., 2011). For instance, the Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression (Malamuth, 2018) has repeatedly argued that exposure to pornography, particularly pornography featuring coercive, violent, and degrading behavior directed towards women, will increase men's sexual aggression towards women. In line with this view, Leonhardt and colleagues (2019) have theorized that users of pornography featuring coercion, dominance, and fetishes may be particularly likely to force a partner into unwanted sexual behavior by unilaterally enacting paraphilic sexual scripts learned from pornography that are not shared by their partner. To take another example, social cognitive theory, when applied to the issue of pornography use, suggests that some users will imitate the specific behaviors that they are exposed to. Indeed, Kohut and Fisher (2013) demonstrated that this was the case in a study that attempted to determine if sexual experiences and orgasm could be improved among women in heterosexual relationships through exposure of specific types of pornography. These researchers found that women engaged in more clitoral self-stimulation following exposure to pornography featuring clitoral self-stimulation than pornography that did not feature clitoral self-stimulation. In this case, no differences were noted in sexual satisfaction or orgasmic consistency because of this behavioral change.



### 3. Theoretical and empirical efforts to organize content differences in pornography

Given the importance of different types of pornography for theories about its use and consequences, some scholars have endeavored to delineate or define the realm of pornographic content into separate subgenres based on distinct theorized antecedents and/or effects of use. One of the first of these efforts can be found in the *Meese Report on Pornography* (United States, 1986), which while failing to “lucidly” define pornography (Burger, 1987, p. 439) differentiated between: (1) child pornography; (2) sexually violent activity; (3) non-violent sexual activity involving degradation, submission, domination, or humiliation; (4) non-violent and non-degrading sexual activity; and (5) nudity without violence or degradation. Along similar lines, Fisher and Barak (1991) proposed a typology that distinguished between violent pornography, degrading pornography, and erotica (non-violent and non-degrading pornography). Similarly, Weaver (1994) separated violent pornography from “mainstream” pornography (characterized as degrading to women but non-violent) and pornography featuring “idealized sexualized themes” (characterized as compassionate and egalitarian portrayals accompanied by social and relational aspects of sex; p. 218). More recently, Leonhardt and colleagues (2019) proposed the following three broad classes of sexual media: sexually suggestive material (eroticism in the absence of sexual acts); sexually explicit material (eroticism with explicit sexual acts); and paraphilic material (eroticism involving coercion, dominance, and fetishes).

To date, such approaches have failed to inspire or guide much research and can be criticized on several grounds. In general, we feel that such typologies are overly broad in that they fail to recognize small but important distinctions between content types, limiting their utility. McKee (2015), for example, has argued quite convincingly that consensual and non-consensual violence in pornography are meaningfully distinct from one another and should not be treated as the same type of content when speculating about the consequences of exposure to such material. Additionally, the divisions between different content types appear arbitrary and, in several instances, separate content types into independent categories when examples of pornography indicate that such content types can co-occur. For example, Kohut and Campbell (2019) have pointed out that Leonhardt et al.’s (2019) definition of paraphilic content presumes that no cues of relational intimacy are depicted between performers (e.g., trust, care, communion) when such cues exist in some BDSM media. The same argument applies equally well to Weaver’s (1994) distinctions between violent pornography and pornography involving “idealized themes.” In other words, these do not appear to be mutually exclusive categories of content, and thus should not be classified in ways that assert their independence.

There have also been a few data – rather than theory-driven attempts to organize the content of pornography into thematically related clusters. For example, Paul (2009) asked participants to indicate how arousing they found 15 different genres of pornography. Arousal responses were factor analyzed separately by gender, and the results indicated two general factors across men and women: standard fare (e.g., group sex, hardcore, interracial, lesbian, amateur) and specialized content

(e.g., “shemales,” watersports, overweight people). In this study, an additional male-focused content factor (e.g., male models only, homosexual males) also emerged in the analysis of male responses. A subsequent empirical taxonomization of pornographic content based on arousal responses to 27 different genres of pornography was conducted by Hald and Stulhofer (2016a; 2016b). In this case, three general dimensions were recognized: non-mainstream / paraphilic content (e.g., “somasochism,” “violence,” “fetish,” bondage/dominance,”), non-heterosexual content (e.g., “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “gay”), and group sex (e.g., “gang bang,” “threesomes,” “orgy”).

Such theoretical and empirical efforts notwithstanding, most of what we know about variations in the content of pornography comes from descriptions provided by empirical content analysis rather than studies of pornography use (e.g., Bridges et al. 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Shor, 2019; Shor & Seida, 2019; Vannier et al., 2014). Although few if any content-analyses appear to be directly inspired by the aforementioned typologies described above, there has been notable attention directed towards assessing the prevalence of violence in pornography. Recent content analyses, for example, have estimated that around 40% of contemporary pornography exhibits violence (Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Shor, 2019; Shor & Seida, 2019). At the extreme end, one highly publicized study suggested that the figure could be as high as 90% (Bridges et al. 2010). The notable range in prevalence estimates of aggression has been partially attributed to differences in operational definitions of violence employed across studies (McKee, 2015), though differences in sampling frames have undoubtedly played a role as well. While violence is commonly examined in content analyses, other content features such as the degree of explicitness, the nature of the performers that are depicted (their number, personal attributes, and social relationships), and the types of behaviors performers engage in (both sexual and non-sexual) have also been documented to various degrees (Kohut et al., 2020). In our view, there have been very few efforts to systematically apply similar operational approaches across different content analyses, which makes it very difficult to pool and organize results of studies that have taken place at different points in time and have sampled vastly different types of media (e.g., textual pornography, comic books, still images, whole magazines, video content; titles or labels of examples of pornography, etc.) from very different sources (e.g., brick-and-mortar adult stores, bulletin board systems, usenet, best sellers lists, Internet portal sites, websites of individual content producers, etc.).

#### 4. The use of different types of content

Although our collective understanding of the content of sexual media and its diversity has been largely informed by studies involving content analyses, such research does not speak directly to the type of content that consumers are using. Content analyses of pornography, by their nature, attempt to describe what is commonly and/or uncommonly depicted in a sample of pornography. However, in most psychological theories that have been applied to pornography use, what matters is whether individuals consume or do not consume specific types of pornographic content, not how common that content is in pornography. If pornography use is a

purposive behavior, then what people actively consume is not solely a matter of the availability of specific types of content; it is also a matter of what individuals choose to seek out and/or avoid.

The case of sexual violence is illustrative in this regard. Available content analytic results suggest that the presence of violence is common and nearly normative in pornography. Based on such findings, it may seem reasonable to conclude that most pornography users will be exposed to violence in pornography and consume such material regularly. However, in our view, the prevalence estimates of aggression in pornography only partially inform what we have come to understand about pornography users' behavior concerning such materials. While it appears that the prevalence of aggression in pornography is high enough that nearly all pornography users report some exposure to it (Davis et al. 2018; Shor 2022), it is also evident that aggressive pornography is less popular than non-aggressive pornography (Shor & Seida, 2019), that its use represents a small portion of most users total pornography consumption (Davis et al., 2018; Kohut & Fisher, 2017), that it is accessed infrequently by most users (Kohut et al., 2018), that many users report strategies for actively avoiding it which limits their extent of exposure (Chadwick et al., 2018; Shor, 2022), and that only a minority of users intentionally seek it out (Bogeaert, 2001; Shor, 2022). In short, relying on prevalence estimates of specific content in pornography to inform our assumptions of pornography consumers' behavior overlooks evident inter-individual (and potential intra-individual) variation in exposure to various themes within pornography. Consequently, naive hypotheses premised on the beliefs of the normativeness of sexual aggression in pornography may overpredict the association between general pornography use and sexual aggression.

At present, it seems that most efforts to study the use of different types or genres of pornography are tied to specific applications in which they are theoretically relevant. This is most evidently true for studies of associations between pornography use and sexual violence, a topic which has received more focused attention than other areas of pornography research. In our work, for example, we have measured the use of pornography featuring violence as well as the use of pornography featuring coercion, and other recent studies in this area have considered the use of pornography featuring "violent" (Huntington et al., 2022) or "extreme" content (Malamuth et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021). Some of this work assumes a causal relationship such that exposure to violent pornography contributes to performance of sexually violent behavior (Huntington et al., 2022; Malamuth et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021). Other work in this area is more agnostic on this issue by entertaining the hypothesis that sexually violent individuals might seek out sexually violent pornography (Kohut & Fisher, 2024). Currently, the measurement of the use of specific types of content seems most common in research concerning sexual aggression, but there are a few other similar examples in the literature. For example, some studies have considered whether the use of pornographic materials that depict condom use or the non-use of condoms are predictive of safer- and riskier-sexual behavior (see Davis et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2014).

Aside from studies with a focused interest in a very limited set of content types, there are surprisingly few efforts that have attempted to document variations in the use of many different types of pornography or to describe the typical content

of pornography that is used by consumers. One example of such research is Paul's (2009) study in which participants were not only asked about the degree to which they found different types of pornography arousing but also how often they viewed each type of pornography in an average week on scales that ranged from 1 – "Not at all" to 7 – "More than 10." The most frequently used pornographic content in Paul's (2009) sample for men included "female models only," "lesbian," and "hard-core" (defined as depiction of dyad or threesome engaging in sexual behavior). For women, the most used types of pornography depicted "hard-core," "ejaculation," and "female models only." Gender comparisons indicated that men used all kinds of pornography more frequently than women except for "male models only." Unfortunately, this comparison failed to exclude nonusers of pornography, of which there were more women than men, and therefore, may have failed to identify pornography types that are more frequently used by female pornography users than male pornography users. Another interesting aspect of this study was that the mean male use of "female models only" (Paul, 2009, p. 356;  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ) was higher than the mean use of "hard-core" pornography ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ), and notably higher than the use of pornography featuring "ejaculation" ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ), the latter two of which are often considered hallmarks of pornography. Indeed, some conceptual and operational definitions of "pornography" explicitly exclude examples of "female models only" such as images in Playboy because sexual behavior is not depicted (see Kohut et al., 2020). While such results are not conclusive, they suggest that basic assumptions held by many people about the typical nature of pornography that users are consuming may not be tenable.

Although we consider existing research concerning the use of specific types of content quite useful and informative, as the example above illustrates, such work has major limitations in that researchers have tended to focus on a very limited range of different types of content when studying use. Researchers have employed top-down approaches in selecting the types of content that are most relevant to their theoretical aims, or in the case of Paul (2009), genres of content that frequently appeared on pornographic websites. Content divisions on pornographic websites are arbitrary and vary considerably from website to website concerning their level of abstraction and exhaustiveness and are generated with commercial rather than research interests in mind. Relying on such genres to guide research can result in major oversights. For example, the categories adopted by Paul (2009), which were inspired by lists on pornographic websites, do not contain rough, violent, or coercive sex. To us, this seems like a major lacuna considering how much theorizing, research, and public concern has focused on the use and consequences of violent pornography. Regardless, because of these collective top-down approaches, we know very little about the use of other types of content in pornography that may have important psychological relevance. For example, we lack information about the use of non-commercial pornography, pornography scripting infidelity, and pornography involving clowns even though the use of such types of pornography may be very relevant to understanding connections between pornography use and body esteem, extra-relational affairs, and paraphilic sexual attractions respectively.

## 5. Current study

Despite the clear importance of differentiating between various types of pornography, efforts to systematize content-based divisions of pornography are sparse, poorly integrated into empirical research programs, and generally restricted by the types of content that researchers believe are most important. More to the point, to our knowledge, there has never been a clear effort to understand and organize the content of pornography based on open-ended descriptions of the types of pornography users seek out. At present, we also lack descriptive information about the many types of pornography that consumers may be using that researchers have simply not thought to inquire about yet. Relatedly, there are relatively few papers that attempt to comprehensively describe the types of pornography that are typically used by consumers and individual differences in the types of content that are used by gender. Furthermore, to our knowledge, there is currently no published information concerning the types of pornography that are used with a partner, despite growing recognition that many partners use pornography together and that such use tends to be positively rather than negatively associated with measures of relationship quality (Kohut et al., 2021). The current study is an attempt to address these gaps in the literature by providing a mixed-method analysis of descriptions of the content that pornography consumers typically use. The goals of this effort were (1) to describe the breadth of variation in the content pornography consumers are using; (2) to provide a descriptive overview of the most typical content that is being consumed by a sample of pornography users, and to explore how the content of porn use may differ by gender and social context of use (solitary vs. shared); and (3) to use the observations to inform the development of a new method for classifying or organizing pornographic content.

## 6. Method

### 6.1 Participants

Participants were recruited through a variety of print, online, and social media channels for a study involving pornography use within heterosexual romantic relationships (see Kohut et al., 2017). Of the 446 individuals who consented to participate in the study and indicated that they had used pornography since the beginning of their current relationship,  $N = 367$  participants (82%) answered open-ended questions about the nature of the pornography that they used alone and/or with a partner. Compared to pornography users who did not answer such questions ( $n = 77$ ), those who were retained for analysis in this report tended to be significantly older (29.15 years old vs. 31.90 years old),  $t(444) = 2.21, p = .027$ , but these groups were similar concerning their gender, the gender of their romantic partners, the nature of their relationship (casual vs. committed), their relationship duration, their race/ethnicity, their attachment orientation (Hazan & Shaver, 1987)<sup>1</sup>, and their frequency of solitary or shared pornography use. We are mentioning attachment orientation here for the sake of transparency, and because participants' orientations help to

1 Attachment orientations reflect the style of emotional bonds participants form with close others.

characterize the nature of the sample, however, considerations of attachment were not involved in the subsequent analyses that follow.

In the subset of data analyzed for this report, participants were almost evenly split between men (51.22%,  $n = 188$ ) and women (47.13%,  $n = 173$ ), though a few participants did not indicate their gender (1.63%,  $n = 6$ ). Most participants were recruited through a published interview involving one of the authors (TK) in the Metro News (50.68%), a Canadian news source that was freely distributed on public transit systems and has since ceased publication, and through ads on Facebook (37.87%), and were primarily Canadian (79.29%) or American (16.89%). As can be seen in Table 1, participants were generally in mixed-gender relationships (97.27%), Caucasian (82.87%), and living together with their relationship partner (55.86%). Participants also generally reported a “secure” attachment orientation (66.49%), almost universally had experiences in which they had used pornography alone (97.82%), and typically had at least some experiences involving shared pornography use with a partner (67.70%). Participants reported a mean age of 32 years, and on average, had reported a relationship duration of 88 months (approximately 7 years).

**Table 1.** Description of the demographic, attachment style, and pornography use of the sample ( $N = 367$ )

	Males <i>n</i> (%)	Females <i>n</i> (%)	Gender Unknown <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
Gender / Sex of Partner				
Male	2 (1.06)	171 (98.84)	1 (16.67)	174 (47.41)
Female	186 (98.94)	1 (0.58)	5 (83.33)	192 (52.31)
Non-binary	0 (0.00)	1 (0.58)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.27)
Race / Ethnicity				
Black / African Origin	1 (0.54)	5 (2.91)	0 (0.00)	6 (1.66)
Caucasian	160 (86.49)	135 (78.49)	5 (100.00)	300 (82.87)
East Asian	5 (2.70)	12 (6.98)	0 (0.00)	17 (4.70)
Hispanic / Latinx	2 (1.08)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.55)
Middle Eastern	4 (2.16)	1 (0.58)	0 (0.00)	5 (1.67)
Mixed	6 (3.24)	13 (7.56)	0 (0.00)	19 (5.25)
Native / Indige- nous	1 (0.54)	1 (0.58)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.55)
South Asian	6 (3.24)	5 (2.91)	0 (0.00)	11 (3.04)
Relationship Status				
Dating several people	6 (3.19)	8 (4.62)	1 (16.67)	15 (4.09)

	Dating one partner exclusively	48 (25.53)	70 (40.46)	4 (66.67)	122 (33.24)
	Living together	123 (65.43)	81 (46.82)	1 (16.67)	205 (55.86)
	Other	11 (5.85)	14 (8.09)	0 (0.00)	25 (6.81)
Attachment Orientation					
	Secure	132 (70.21)	106 (61.27)	6 (100.00)	244 (66.49)
	Avoidant	43 (22.87)	49 (28.32)	0 (0.00)	92 (25.07)
	Anxious	13 (6.91)	18 (10.40)	0 (0.00)	31 (8.45)
Used Pornography Alone					
	Yes	188 (100.00)	165 (95.38)	6 (100.00)	359 (97.82)
	No	0 (0.00)	8 (4.62)	0 (0.00)	8 (2.18)
Used Pornography with Partner					
	Yes	106 (65.43)	110 (70.97)	2 (40.00)	218 (67.70)
	No	56 (34.57)	45 (29.03)	3 (60.00)	101 (32.30)
Age	(years)	35.30 (11.40)	27.98 (7.21)	38.50 (3.62)	31.90 (10.24)
Relationship Duration	(months)	103.33 (104.34)	53.21 (56.76)	75.20 (99.67)	79.25 (88.46)
Frequency of solitary pornography use	(0 = “never” to 7 = “more than once a day”)	4.74 (1.31)	3.12 (1.47)	5.17 (1.47)	3.98 (1.61)
Enjoyment of solitary pornography use	(1 = “I really dislike these experiences” to 5 = “I really like these experiences”)	4.43 (0.80)	4.30 (0.86)	4.33 (0.82)	4.37 (0.83)
Frequency of joint use of pornography with partner	(0 = “never” to 7 = “more than once a day”)	1.51 (1.58)	1.64 (1.50)	1.00 (1.41)	1.56 (1.54)
Enjoyment of joint use of pornography with partner	(1 = “I really dislike these experiences” to 5 = “I really like these experiences”)	4.38 (0.95)	3.99 (1.14)	5.00 (0.00)	4.19 (1.07)

6.2 Procedure and measures

In the fall of 2013 participants completed an online mixed-methods survey that inquired about basic demographic information, attachment style, participants’ solitary pornography use, their perceptions of their relationship partners’ solitary pornography use, and their joint use of pornography with their partners. Closed-ended questions were asked about frequency of pornography use, the types of media that were used (e.g., text, pictures, video, audio, other), acceptance of por-



nography use, and the degree to which participants enjoyed using pornography. Generally, open-ended questions concerned motivations for using pornography, the perceived effects of such use (for a qualitative analysis of the perceived effects of use, see Kohut et al., 2017), and the nature of the content of pornography that was used. Participants who reported solitary pornography use (100% of men; 95.38% of women) were asked: “Please describe the most common types of content that are involved when you use pornography alone (e.g., who is doing what to whom)?” Similarly, participants who reported shared pornography use with a partner (65.43% of male; 70.97% of female participants) were asked: “Please describe the most common types of content that are involved when you use pornography with your relationship partner (e.g., who is doing what to whom)?” A definition of pornography use was provided to participants before relevant questions were asked (see Kohut et al., 2017). The procedure for this study was reviewed and approved by the research ethics board at Western University before data were collected. Neither this study nor the current analyses were pre-registered. Those wishing to review or further analyze the deidentified data may contact the first author.

### 6.3 Mixed method analysis

A variation of Braun and Clark’s (2006) thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses to the questions concerning the types of content that were involved when participants used pornography alone and with their partners. From the outset, we adopted an essentialist semantic approach to coding which assumed that types of content that participants reported using reflected structural realities of the physical world that generally had shared meanings. For example, we assumed that when most people employed the term “threesome” they were referring to the interaction of exactly three people, rather than the interaction between couple or a group of four or more, and that such understanding did not vary considerably across cultures or over time. Additionally, we endeavored to provide a broad overview of the different types of pornographic content that were used by participants rather than peripheral themes that were present in the data (e.g., the creation of pornography by participants, how the use of specific content varied across occasions, etc.). To this end, we (authors TK and KF) began by reading and re-reading all responses independently to familiarize ourselves with the range of responses and separately develop initial lists of codes representing different ideas expressed in the data set. We then met over several sessions to collate our list of codes and develop preliminary definitions for each code (e.g., “*Couples*: two individuals are described in the response”), including illustrative examples of each (e.g., “one male – one female”). Using these definitions, we independently coded all responses systematically for the presence and/or absence of each code. We subsequently reviewed areas of disagreement, clarified and revised the definitions of our codes where necessary, and crystallized our preliminary codes into specific themes by merging related codes into superordinate categories (e.g., “*Couples*” and “*Groups*” were combined in the theme of partner number). This was an iterative process where the data were jointly reviewed by the authors multiple times against our revised codebook until we were satisfied that our resulting codebook provided a good reflection of our data (see Appendix A for finalized codebook). We



then sought to describe each theme verbally as well as their notable connections with other themes. In our results below, we illustrate our themes and analysis with direct quotes from participants' responses. Minor corrections to spelling and grammar have been made to some of these quotes to improve clarity.

To augment our qualitative thematic analysis, we also numerically documented the frequencies with which each theme was mentioned by participants. In addition, the frequency with which each theme was mentioned by men and women were compared statistically using SPSS (IBM, 2019). These gender comparisons were done separately for the responses concerning pornography used alone and pornography used with a partner using Pearson  $\chi^2$  cross-tabulations. Furthermore, for the subset of participants who used pornography alone and used pornography with a partner, within-subject comparisons were done using McNemar tests to determine if the frequencies of themes differed between responses concerning solitary pornography use and those concerning shared pornography use. These within-subject comparisons were done separately by gender. Finally, Pearson  $r$  correlations were used to determine if participants who mentioned one theme in either of their two responses were also more likely to mention other themes in their responses. Note that  $r$  is equivalent to the  $\phi$  coefficient for indexing associations between two dichotomous variables. Post-hoc  $\alpha$  adjustments were not made for multiple comparisons because of the exploratory nature of these tests which prioritized low Type II error rather than low Type I error.

## 7. Results

Thirteen interrelated content-relevant themes emerged in our analysis. Across participants, three themes predominated when participants described the type of pornography they typically consumed: the Gender of the performers, the Types of sexual behavior, and the Number of performers. Other less common themes included: BDSM and rough sex, Media type, Narrative and roleplay, Amateur or professional, Age, Other kinks and fetishes, Body attributes, Force (Non) consent and exploitation, Location, and Race/ethnicity (for coding definitions that informed these themes, see Appendix A).

### 7.1 Gender of the performers

The gender of the performers was the most frequently mentioned aspect of content that participants reported (83.92%; see Table 2) when asked about the pornography they most used. Descriptions of gender and gender combinations were linguistically and expressively diverse. Some participants indicated their preferences with the use of letters (e.g., "M/M,"), while others employed brief sexual orientation/identity labels that lacked further context concerning how many performers were involved or what they were doing with one another (e.g., "Heterosexual porn"), while still others specified their interests more concretely (e.g., "one male and multiple female partners"). Unfortunately, responses did not always contain sufficient information to differentiate between depictions of single individuals of a particular gender or depictions of multiple individuals of the same gender. For example, the response indicating "men humping objects" could have been referring to individual men vie-

wed over multiple scenes or multiple men doing so simultaneously within the same scene. Consequently, responses that indicated an interest in depictions involving a single man or multiple men were coded together as were responses that indicated a single woman or multiple women. Descriptions indicating a specific number of performers frequently co-occurred among descriptions of the gender of the performers.

**Table 2. Prevalence of the description of the performers’ gender within typically consumed pornography by gender and relationship context of use (solitary vs. shared).**

	Solitary Pornography Use		Shared Pornography Use		
Content Viewed	Men <i>n</i> = 186 [ <i>n</i> = 97]	Women <i>n</i> = 162 [ <i>n</i> = 94]	Men <i>n</i> = 99 [ <i>n</i> = 97]	Women <i>n</i> = 105 [ <i>n</i> = 94]	Overall <i>N</i> = 367
Any mention of Gender	77.42% [80.41%]	85.19% [85.11%]	65.67% [65.98%]	66.67% [60.64%]	83.92%
One Male and One Female Performer	46.24% [51.55%]	49.38% [47.87%]	45.45% [45.36%]	42.86% [43.62%]	55.59%
Female Performer(s)	31.18% [28.87%]	41.98% [38.30%]	26.26% [25.77%]	24.76% [25.53%]	40.33%
One Female and Multiple Male Performers	11.29% [13.40%]	13.58% [15.96%]	10.10% [10.31%]	4.76% [5.32%]	13.90%
Multiple Male and Multiple Female Performers	10.75% [12.37%]	11.73% [11.70%]	6.06% [7.22%]	11.42% [6.38%]	12.53%
One Male and Multiple Female Performers	9.68% [14.43%]	5.56% [3.19%]	3.23% [6.19%]	6.17% [10.64%]	11.44%
Male Performer(s)	1.61% [2.06%]	13.58% [14.89%]	3.03% [3.09%]	6.67% [7.45%]	8.17%
Any Mention of Diverse Genders	3.23% [4.12%]	1.23% [0.00%]	1.01% [1.03%]	0.95% [0.00%]	2.45%

Notes: 1. Percentages within [ ] brackets indicate proportions of responses for the subset of participants who used pornography both alone and with their partner.  
2. Percentages in the “Overall” column reflect the mention of particular content in response to the question about solitary pornography use or shared pornography use. Consequently, these percentages can exceed the percentages listed in the other four columns.

Among responses that mentioned the gender of performers, descriptions of male-female couples were most common (55.59%; e.g., “I prefer situations where the girl is pleasuring the guy (oral, etc.), or the guy is pleasuring the girl (oral)”), followed by descriptions involving one or more women (e.g., “female on female sex”). Considerably more respondents mentioned pornographic content featuring one or more female performer(s) compared to one or more male partners (40.33% vs. 8.17%). Among the respondents who used materials with one or more male performers, one respondent noted, “sometimes we watch gay porn (man on man)

which we both enjoy.” Relatedly, participants who mentioned masturbation also frequently mentioned single or multiple women (e.g., “...masturbation (solo woman)”),  $r = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not single or multiple men,  $r = .02$ ,  $p = .755$ . Descriptions of specific gender arrangements were also found among responses that described three or more partners, and similar proportions of participants mentioned pornography involving a single female with multiple males (13.90%; e.g., “2 guys having sex with 1 girl”), a single male with multiple females (12.53%; e.g., “group (3+) sex with a single male”), and/or a group of multiple males and females (11.44%; e.g., “Group sex involving men and women stimulating each other”). We noted that participants who mentioned BDSM and/or rough sex also tended to describe content that involved one female and multiple males (e.g., “Threesomes, Gangbang... Rough stuff.”; “Bondage and mmf”),  $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$  but this was not the case for participants who mentioned other gender arrangements of the performers.

Concerning solitary pornography use, women were more likely than men to indicate that they used pornography featuring one or more women (41.98% vs. 31.18%),  $\chi^2(1) = 4.37$ ,  $p = .044$ , and pornography involving one or more men (13.58% vs. 1.61%),  $\chi^2(1) = 18.60$ ,  $p < .001$ . No other differences between men and women were noted in the preferred gender(s) present in the pornography they used. Male participants were significantly more likely to mention gender when describing the nature of their solitary pornography use than their shared pornography use (80.41% vs. 65.98%),  $p = .020$ . This was largely because men were somewhat more likely to report the use of pornography involving one male with multiple female partners when using pornography alone rather than with a partner (14.43% vs. 6.19%),  $p = .057$ . Women were also more likely to mention gender in their descriptions of pornography used alone than pornography used with a partner (85.11% vs. 60.64%),  $p = .005$ . In contrast to men, women were more likely to report using pornography featuring one woman and multiple men in their solitary than their shared pornography use (15.96% vs. 5.32%),  $p = .021$ . The same was true for women’s descriptions of pornography featuring one or more female performers (38.30% vs. 25.53%),  $p = .023$ .

## 7.2 Types of sexual behavior

Over three-quarters of participants (76.57%, see Table 3) mentioned sexual behavior in their descriptions of typical pornography use. When coding descriptions of sexual behavior, we sought out descriptions of actions that were identified as sexual by participants (e.g., “transsexuals having sex with sexually attractive females”), as well as those that mentioned specific sexual acts (e.g., “anal, blow jobs, solo girls masturbating”), and those that described actions involving genitalia (e.g., “penetrating the g-spot of a woman to make her squirt”). In doing so, we were careful to avoid inferences about sexual behavior in participants’ responses. For example, we did not code responses such as “amateur threesomes” or “Bondage, lesbian” as indicating sexual behavior. Instead, we choose to only include cases where participants made the presence of sexual activity clear. Nonetheless, many participants (42.77%) used vague or non-specific terminology when mentioning sexual behavior (e.g., “heterosexual and lesbian sex”).

**Table 3. Prevalence of the description of different types of sexual behavior in typically consumed pornography by gender and relationship context of use (solitary vs. shared).**

Content Viewed	Solitary Pornography Use		Shared Pornography Use		Overall (N = 367)
	Men (n = 186) [n = 97]	Women (n = 162) [n = 94]	Men (n = 99) [n = 97]	Women (n = 105) [n = 94]	
Any Mention of Sexual Behaviors	75.81% [79.38%]	75.30% [77.66%]	58.59% [59.79%]	64.76% [67.02%]	76.57%
Unspecified Sexual Behavior	36.56% [43.30%]	40.74% [41.49%]	28.28% [28.87%]	36.19% [39.36%]	43.32%
Oral Sex	26.34% [32.99%]	20.99% [20.21%]	21.21% [21.65%]	20.95% [19.15%]	26.43%
Vaginal Sex	18.82% [21.65%]	22.22% [21.28%]	18.18% [18.56%]	19.05% [18.09%]	23.16%
Anal Sex	19.35% [22.68%]	11.11% [9.57%]	13.03% [13.40%]	8.57% [8.51%]	17.71%
Other Sexual Acts	6.45% [6.19%]	17.28% [15.96%]	9.09% [9.28%]	11.43% [11.70%]	14.99%
Masturbation	10.22% [9.28%]	4.94% [5.32%]	2.02% [2.06%]	1.90% [2.13%]	8.17%
Orgasm / Ejaculation	7.53% [8.25%]	6.17% [8.51%]	5.05% [5.15%]	1.90% [1.06%]	7.36%

**Notes:** 1. Percentages within [ ] brackets indicate proportions of responses for the subset of participants who used pornography both alone and with their partner.  
2. Percentages in the “Overall” column reflect the mention of particular content in response to the question about solitary pornography use or shared pornography use. Consequently, these percentages can exceed the percentages listed in the other four columns.

Among more specific sexual acts, participants often reported the use of pornography depicting oral (26.43%), vaginal (23.16%), and/or anal sex (17.71%). For oral sex, participants were typically unclear about the gender of active and receptive partners, though we did notice an overall tendency for descriptions of fellatio to occur more frequently than descriptions of cunnilingus. Almost without exception, participants were unclear about the nature of anal sex they typically viewed in pornography (oral, digital, penile, with toys, etc.), with only a single participant indicating that they viewed acts such as “pegging” and “rim jobs.” Interestingly, a single participant also indicated that they did not consume pornography featuring anal sex (e.g., “Hardcore hetero sex, not anal”). Participants who specifically mentioned oral sex were more likely to mention vaginal sex,  $r = .36, p < .001$ , and anal sex,  $r = .22, p < .001$ .

Fewer participants mentioned the use of pornography featuring masturbation (8.17%) or orgasm/ejaculation (7.36%). Nearly all the descriptions of masturbation (90.00%) occurred in the context of pornography featuring women who were either solitary or partnered with other women. Responses that mentioned orgasm/

ejaculation were quite diverse in that they involved orgasm (e.g., “orgasms - men and women doing each other”), both male ejaculation and female ejaculation (e.g., “girls, alone, squirting”) as well as both internal (e.g., “creampie cumshots”) and external ejaculation (e.g., “Fellatio with ejaculation in the face of the smiling, enthusiastic female.”). Descriptions of male ejaculation were most common within this category of responses. Finally, a sizeable minority of participants (14.99%) mentioned sexual acts that did not fit neatly among the other categories of behaviors. Common responses of this type involved specific sexual positions (e.g., “various positions -reverse cowgirl, doggy style, missionary, whatever”), manual stimulation and massage (e.g., “Heterosexual and lesbian oral sex and fondling”), the use of sex toys (e.g., “fucking machines, toys (vibrators and dildos)”) and multiple-penetration sex (e.g., “double and triple penetration”) though some idiosyncratic descriptions were also evident (e.g., “girls trying to read during stimulation.”).

A few gender differences were noted in the descriptions of sexual behavior that were present in the pornography viewed by participants. Men were significantly more likely to mention anal sex (19.35% vs. 11.11%),  $\chi^2(1) = 4.49, p = .034$ , and marginally more likely to mention masturbation (10.22% vs. 4.94%),  $\chi^2(1) = 3.37, p = .066$ , when describing the content of their solitary pornography use than women. In contrast, for the content of solitary pornography use, women were more likely to mention other specific sexual acts than men (17.28% vs. 6.45%). No gender differences were evident in descriptions of the sexual behavior present during shared pornography use. Interestingly, many differences were also evident in men’s descriptions of their solitary compared to their shared pornography use, while fewer differences were found in women. Specifically, men were significantly more likely to mention any sexual behavior (79.38% vs. 59.79%,  $p < .001$ ), unspecified sexual behavior (43.30% vs. 28.87%,  $p = .002$ ), oral sex (32.99% vs. 21.65%,  $p = .013$ ), anal sex (22.68% vs. 13.40%,  $p = .049$ ), and masturbation (9.28% vs. 2.06%,  $p = .039$ ) when describing the content they used alone than the content they used with a partner. In contrast, women were more likely to report content involving orgasm and ejaculation when describing their solitary pornography use than shared pornography use (8.51% vs. 1.06%,  $p = .016$ ).

### 7.3 Number of performers

Over two-thirds of the respondents (67.30%,  $n = 247$ ; see Table 3) explicitly indicated the number of performers that were present in the media they used. Viewing preferences ranged from solitary performers to couples, to threesomes, to larger groups. Some responses in this theme made use of specific sexual or relationship terminology that designates the number of sexual partners involved (e.g., solo, couple, threesome, orgy, etc.), while other responses were included in this theme because they indicated the number of performers in other ways (e.g., “A man is having sex with a woman while also performing oral sex acts on each other”). In coding responses, care was taken to avoid inferences about the presence of multiple partners when the number of partners was not reasonably clear (e.g., “Girl getting licked”; “Bdsm rough sex male dominated”). As noted previously, descrip-

tions that mentioned the number of performers also frequently mentioned the gender and/or gender combinations of those performers.

**Table 4. Prevalence of the description of specific numbers of performers within typically consumed pornography by gender and relationship context of use (solitary vs. shared).**

Content Viewed	Solitary Pornography Use		Shared Pornography Use		Overall (N = 367)
	Men (n = 186) [n = 97]	Women (n = 162) [n = 94]	Men (n = 99) [n = 97]	Women (n = 105) [n = 94]	
Any Mention of the Number of Performers	59.68% [60.82%]	61.73% [59.57%]	54.55% [55.67%]	57.14% [57.45%]	67.30%
Couples	39.25% [37.11%]	43.21% [37.23%]	40.40% [41.23%]	38.10% [37.23%]	48.77%
Group / Orgy	15.59% [22.68%]	16.05% [22.34%]	13.13% [13.40%]	12.38% [12.77%]	17.71%
Threesomes	11.29% [16.49%]	12.96% [11.70%]	10.10% [10.31%]	17.14% [15.96]	17.16%
Solitary Performers	10.75% [8.25%]	6.17% [5.32%]	3.03% [3.09%]	2.86% [3.19%]	9.26%

Notes: 1. Percentages within [ ] brackets indicate proportions of responses for the subset of participants who used pornography both alone and with their partner.  
2. Percentages in the “Overall” column reflect the mention of particular content in response to the question about solitary pornography use or shared pornography use. Consequently, these percentages can exceed the percentages listed in the other four columns.

For the number of partners, the most common type of response within this theme described pornography involving couples (48.77%; e.g., “one male - one female”). The majority (83.24%) of the responses involving pornography featuring couples involved mixed-gender couples (e.g., “Heterosexual couples having sex”), though a large minority (40.33%) described female same-gender content (e.g., “Some stories have involved two women together”) and few responses (10.06%) mentioned male same-gender content (e.g., “male/male”). Fewer participants mentioned group sex (17.71%; e.g., “We have viewed very vanilla porn; group sex; BDSM; Gay and Lesbian; etc.”) and/or threesomes (17.16%; e.g., “3 some male on female”) and participants who mentioned the use of group sex pornography were somewhat more likely to report using threesome pornography,  $r = .22, p < .001$  (e.g., “Blow jobs, intercourse, anal, threesomes, orgies, etc.”). For descriptions of group sex, most of the responses mentioned orgies, gangbangs, or group sex (e.g., “group sex (many people having vaginal sex, oral sex, and/or anal sex)), so it was often difficult to know precisely how many performers participants were referring to or the gender combinations that may have been involved. When it came to responses involving threesomes, participants were often very specific concerning gender balance of the performers (e.g., “Threesome with one girl and two guys”) but sometimes simply

indicated that they viewed “threesomes.” Relatively few participants specifically indicated that they viewed pornography involving solitary performers (9.26%; “female solo, male solo,”). Of those that did, nearly all mentioned the use of pornography featuring individual women (91.18%) rather than single men (11.76%). Also of note, there was a clear correlation between participants who described viewing pornography featuring solitary individuals and pornography featuring masturbation,  $r = .59$ ,  $p < .001$  (“Solo female striptease and masturbation”).

No clear gendered patterns were noted when it came to descriptions of the number of performers in pornography that participants used. However, there was a tendency for both men,  $p = .078$ , and women,  $p = .049$ , who used pornography both alone and with their partner to be more likely to report groups of performers when describing their solitary (Men: 22.68%; Women: 22.34%) than shared pornography use (Men: 13.40%; Women: 12.77%).

#### 7.4 BDSM and rough sex

Some respondents (22.62%; see Table 5) described viewing sexual practices consisting of bondage, discipline, dominance/submission, sadomasochism and/or rough sex (e.g., “...things like submissive woman with dominant males being choked or slapped and spanked, sometimes in bondage (cuffs, rope, suspension)”). Although there are arguable differences between the practice and depiction of BDSM and rough or violent sexuality, there is clear overlap across these sexualities with respect to specific practices and individual interests (e.g., “Rough sex, light kink (spanking, hair pulling, light bondage), occasionally harder kink (heavier bondage/bdsm).”). Responses that were included in this theme were typically relatively vague, often simply indicating pornography featuring BDSM (e.g., “Bdsm type porn”). On the occasions where participants were more clear about the nature of the BDSM practices they viewed, examples of bondage and dominance/submission (e.g., “BDSM..bondage, role playing, power exchange”) were more common than examples of sadomasochism. Gender was not always indicated when responses mentioned dominance and submission, but when it was, male-dominant and female-submissive arrangements (e.g., “BDSM, male dominating female”) were described somewhat more frequently than female-dominant and male submissive arrangements (e.g., “stories about a woman dominating other women or men”), but both were in evidence in the responses. One participant explicitly indicated an avoidance of such material (e.g., “never any content that appears to be violent or abusive”).

**Table 5. Prevalence of the other content themes in typically consumed pornography by gender and relationship context of use (solitary vs. shared).**

Content Viewed	Solitary Pornography Use		Shared Pornography Use		Overall (N = 367)
	Men (n = 186) [n = 97]	Women (n = 162) [n = 94]	Men (n = 99) [n = 97]	Women (n = 105) [n = 94]	
BDSM and Rough Sex	11.29% [14.43%]	28.40% [31.91%]	19.19% [19.59%]	18.10% [20.12%]	22.62%
Media Type	10.22% [11.34%]	9.88% [10.63%]	17.17% [16.49%]	15.24% [17.02%]	16.62%
Narrative and Roleplay	11.29% [11.34%]	15.43% [17.02%]	15.15% [13.40%]	7.62% [8.51%]	16.62%
Amateur or Professional	8.60% [12.37%]	2.47% [3.19%]	5.05% [4.12%]	5.71% [6.38%]	7.08%
Age	8.60% [7.22%]	2.47% [4.26%]	3.03% [3.09%]	1.90% [2.13%]	5.99%
Other Kinks and Fetishes	4.30% [4.12%]	6.17% [7.45%]	2.02% [2.06%]	4.76% [5.32%]	5.72%
Body Attributes	6.99% [8.25%]	0.62% [1.06%]	5.05% [5.15%]	2.86% [3.19%]	5.72%
Force (Non) Consent and Exploitation	3.23% [4.12%]	6.17% [8.51%]	3.03% [3.09%]	2.86% [3.19%]	5.45%
Location	1.61% [2.1%]	4.32% [5.32%]	2.02% [2.1%]	3.81% [4.26%]	3.81%
Race / Ethnicity	2.15% [4.12%]	0.62% [0.00%]	4.04% [4.12%]	0.95% [1.06%]	1.91%

Notes: 1. Percentages within [ ] brackets indicate proportions of responses for the subset of participants who used pornography both alone and with their partner.  
2. Percentages in the “Overall” column reflect the mention of particular content in response to the question about solitary pornography use or shared pornography use. Consequently, these percentages can exceed the percentages listed in the other four columns.

Women were considerably more likely,  $\chi^2(1) = 16.30, p < .001$ , to mention BDSM and rough sex when describing their solitary pornography use than men (28.40% vs. 11.29%). In contrast, no gender differences in pornography featuring BDSM were evident when the content of shared use was described. Relatedly, women who used pornography both alone and with their partner were more likely,  $p = .019$ , to indicate the use of BDSM material when describing solitary than shared pornography use (31.91% vs. 20.12%). Participants who mentioned BDSM and rough sex were also more likely to mention force or non-consent (e.g., “Male on female hardcore some time non consenting or bdsm.”),  $r = .24, p < .001$ , the presence of narrative or roleplay elements in pornography (e.g., “Heterosexual videos, including some role play, hypnotism, and bondage.”),  $r = .20, p < .001$ , and threesomes, particularly those with one female and multiple male partners.



## 7.5 Media type

Some respondents (16.62%; see Table 5) described media types or sources of pornography when asked about the content that they viewed. Most of these participants explicitly mentioned viewing videos, movies, and films (e.g., “Generally it’s full movies, so they cover a full spectrum of scenes.”). While the others reported the use of cartoon depictions, still pictures, audio files, and written stories. Sources of pornography were less frequently mentioned but were often internet-based when identified (e.g., “I browse tumblr for images or gifs depicting rough sex and/or BDSM content”). Participants who described media types were also more likely to mention the presence of narrative and roleplay elements (e.g., “adult video with love story theme),  $r = .33, p < .001$ .

## 7.6 Narrative and roleplay

The same number of respondents (16.62%; see Table 5) described pornography featuring a narrative or a scene involving specific roles, scripts, or plots (e.g., “Heterosexual, role play, fantasy scenarios, amateur, lesbian.”), or specific mention of a lack of plot. The nature of the stories was sometimes vague (e.g., “Fanfiction (both male/female and male/male)”), but cuckolding was mentioned by several participants, as were themes of coercion (e.g., “where girl is kind of trapped and have no way out other than having sex with the guys”) and incest. Specific roles that were mentioned included wife/husband, boss/worker, father/daughter, mother/son, brother/sister, doctor, masseuse, college girls, schoolgirls, and fake porn producers. As outlined above, participants who described narrative and roleplay elements were more likely to indicate that the pornography they viewed involved BDSM and rough sex as well as the media type involved, but they were also more likely to mention themes of force, (non-)consent and exploitation (e.g., “control oriented stories”),  $r = .31, p < .001$ , specific locational elements,  $r = .29, p < .001$ , and age,  $r = .26, p < .001$  (e.g., “teenage porn, incest fantasy porn”).

## 7.7 Amateur or professional

A few participants (7.08%; see Table 5) mentioned amateur content or non-amateur content. Most of these responses referred specifically to amateur content without specific contextual information that could be used to distinguish between professionally produced amateur content (e.g., “Amateur heterosexual.”) and true amateur content (e.g., “Young Couples exhibiting their home made sexual activity”). Two individuals specifically mentioned the use of non-amateur content (e.g., “Usually one-on-one sex, professionals (not amateur pornography, lest we are now watching more “real” people).”). Men were more likely to mention amateur or professional content than women (8.60% vs. 2.47%) in their descriptions of solitary pornography use,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.01, p = .014$ , but no gender difference was evident in descriptions of shared pornography use. Participants who mentioned amateur or professional content in their descriptions of pornography were somewhat more likely to mention specific body attributes of performers (e.g., “Bbw amateur big

ladies”),  $r = .16$ ,  $p = .002$ , age (e.g., “amateur, older man younger girl”),  $r = .15$ ,  $p = .003$ , and group sex (e.g., “Amateurs, group sex, anal”),  $r = .15$ ,  $p = .004$ .

### 7.8 Age

Some respondents (5.99%; see Table 5) described the age of performers in the content they viewed. Among such participants, approximately two-thirds of their responses involved younger performers (e.g., “Men and women having sex, typically younger (legally of age) women.”). While most of the responses employed verbal descriptors indicating age (e.g., “young men and women engaging in sex” or “College three way (ffm)”) some stated specific age ranges (e.g., “unclothed pictures of women in their mid-20s to mid-30s”). Although no participants explicitly described the use of child pornography, some made it clear that they used legal materials to view (e.g., “legal teens”), while others provided ambiguous responses (e.g., “School-girl fetish”). The remaining third of the references involved middle-aged performers, often women (e.g., “Middle aged women” or “MILFs”). Notably, a small number of responses referred to pairings between younger and older partners (e.g., “younger men and older women”). Men were significantly more likely,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.01$ ,  $p = .014$  than women (8.60% vs. 2.47%) to mention age when describing the content of their solitary pornography use, though no gender differences in this tendency were noted when participants described their shared pornography use. In addition to narrative components, participants who mentioned age were also more likely to mention bodily attributes of performers,  $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$  (e.g., “BBW hetero intercourse, BBW lesbian sex, MILF/Older women”).

### 7.9 Other kinks and fetishes

A small number of responses mentioned non-aggressive or unspecified kinks or fetishes (5.72%; see Table 5). Relatively few responses of this nature were unspecified (e.g., “models of various fetishes”) as most provided very concrete examples, including lactation and pregnancy porn, sounding, foot fetishism, tickling, latex fetishes, watersports/urination, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. There were evident connections between participants who mentioned other kinks and fetishes and those that mentioned BDSM and rough sex (e.g., “BDSM, Latex Fetish, Punk and Goth girls, watersports, anal”),  $r = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ , media type,  $r = .14$ ,  $p = .006$ , and narrative elements,  $r = .14$ ,  $p = .006$ , in their descriptions of the pornography they used.

### 7.10 Body attributes

The same number of respondents (5.72%; see Table 5) indicated a particular aspect of a performer’s body type, body part, and appearance when describing the pornographic content they consumed. In many instances this involved women’s breasts (e.g., “Women with large breasts...”) though several participants mentioned materials with large-bodied women (e.g., BBW porn including female performing oral sex on male” or “voluptuous women, women masturbating”), or performers with large penises (e.g., “huge cocks.”). Idiosyncratic mentions were also made to hair

color, athletic bodies, “all natural” bodies, and attractive performers. As previously mentioned, participants who mentioned body attributes were more likely to mention age and amateur or professional in their descriptions of pornography.

### 7.11 Force, (non) consent and exploitation

Descriptions of pornography that involved aspects of force, coercion, and exploitation were similarly infrequent (5.45%; see Table 5). While a minority of responses made it clear that participants were viewing materials that involved consensual non-consent (e.g., “rape fantasies when it is explicit in the text that both characters do in fact consent”), most responses represented by this theme did not (e.g., “Male on female hardcore, some times non consenting or bdsm.”). Some responses in this category outlined more specific exploitative scenarios in which coercion took place (e.g., “I also like story which involve some kind of deal or situation of exploitation and someone is taking advantage.”) though most were relatively vague about these aspects of content. With that said, a few responses in this theme specifically indicated the use of pornography featuring consent outside the context of exploitative or coercive scenarios (e.g., “Male and female engaging in consensual sexual intercourse”). Participants who described pornography featuring force, (non) consent, and exploitation were more likely to mention narrative elements and BDSM and rough sex in their descriptions of the pornography they use.

### 7.12 Location

Few respondents (3.81%; see Table 5) described locations or settings in pornographic content they viewed. Over half the responses within this theme described public sex (e.g., “Group sex involving men and women stimulating each other, often in a public place.”). However, only some of these participants specified specific public locations such as beaches, party settings, and picnic areas. Some responses mentioned viewing pornographic content where actors were in a semi-public or private area such as a work office, bathroom stall, or dorm room (e.g., “glory holes, hidden cameras, couples trying to be quiet, secret sex, public washroom sex”). Participants who mentioned location in their descriptions of the pornography they used were also more likely to mention narrative elements, group sex (e.g., “male-female couple having sex in front of others at a party, group sex at parties, outdoor/public sex”),  $r = .17$ ,  $p = .001$ , and other sexual acts (e.g., “lesbian sex (using toys or oral sex), public sex ( vaginal or oral sex outdoors”),  $r = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### 7.13 Race

Very few respondents (1.91%; see Table 5) mentioned the race of performers or interracial sex when describing the pornography they used (e.g., “Interracial couples (my boyfriend is from India I am white), Caucasian couples”). A little less than half of the responses explicitly mentioned a specific race (ex. Caucasian, Asian, and Black), while most of the descriptions merely indicated that “interracial” content

was involved. Participants who mentioned interracial content were also somewhat more likely to mention anal sex in the pornography they described (ex. “Caucasian single male having oral and anal sex with oriental women.”),  $r = .14$ ,  $p = .006$ .

## 8. Discussion

A mixed methods analysis of the content of pornography that participants reported using alone and with their partner identified three dominant content themes and ten less frequent themes. When describing the content of their pornography use, most participants mentioned the number of performers involved, the gender of those performers, and the types of sexual interactions between or among them. Many other content themes were mentioned in participants’ descriptions, such as the presence of BDSM and rough sex, the depiction of narrative or roleplay elements, the use of amateur vs. professional content, and so on. Exploratory quantitative analyses revealed interesting differences in the content of pornography that was used alone and with a partner and suggested some gender differences, particularly for pornography used alone.

One of the most notable aspects of this study’s findings is that participants’ descriptions of the content of pornography tended to highlight the ordinary and mundane rather than the exotic or perverse. Reading the existing literature concerning the content of pornography can leave one with the impression that pornography is often violent and/or degrading and awash with fetishistic and paraphilic content (e.g., incest, age-play, urination, extremely large breasts, bukkake, etc.). Indeed, such sentiments appear to be echoed and amplified in public discourse and anti-pornography state resolutions, which frequently insist that pornography use inevitably results in the pursuit of more extreme forms of content for the sake of sustaining novelty (Burke & MillerMcPhee, 2020). Therefore, it seems easy for academics, elected officials, and laypeople to assume that pornography users must intentionally seek out fetishistic and paraphilic content because they are correspondingly “deviant” and/or increasingly habituated to mainstream content. While we are certainly not denying the existence of violent, fetishistic, or paraphilic content, or the use of such content among some of our participants, when we asked participants to describe what sort of content they used, such content were not major foci in most of their responses. Instead, there was a tendency for participants to describe individual differences in preferences for the number of performers that were present in a scene, the gender composition of such performers, and the nature of sexual interactions that were involved, when any were present. Across participants’ responses, the most typical pornographic scene seemed to involve mixed-gender couples engaging in oral sex, and to a slightly lesser extent, vaginal and anal sex. If the current findings are confirmed in subsequent research using other methodologies, they may challenge widespread and predominantly negative assumptions about the sexual desires of typical pornography users.

Interestingly, the most frequently described aspects of pornography content in the current sample correspond to some of the broad parameters of sexual configuration that have been outlined by Sexual Configurations Theory (see Gormezano et al., 2022; van Anders, 2015). Specifically, Sexual Configurations Theory has

argued that the notion of sexual orientation as a construct that organizes sexual attractions, identities, and behaviours solely around gender/sex is a very limited way to conceptualize diverse sexualities. It consequently suggests that researchers adopt an expanded scope of consideration when examining sexual interests that includes gender/sex as one of several dimensions (or “parameters”) of attraction, identity, and behavior. Other prominent dimensions have included a consideration of the number of partners and types of sexual behaviors that people prefer (Gormezano et al., 2022). These dimensions of sexual configuration (gender, number of partners, and sexual behavior) are identical to the most prominent features of pornographic content that were described by participants in the current study which reinforces the notion that partner number and sexual behavior are common parameters around which people organize and understand their sexualities.

We also find it striking that existing quantitative approaches to understand and organize the content of pornography into discrete dimensions or typologies often fail to assess interest in the most common kinds of content that our sample reported using. For example, Hald and Stulhofer’s (2016a; 2016b) analysis assessed sexual arousal to threesomes and orgies but not couples. Similarly, it assessed arousal to lesbian and gay, and bisexual materials but not mixed-gender materials (except for gangbang materials which typically involve one woman and multiple men). Concerning sexual behavior content, Hald and Stulhofer’s (2016a; 2016b) study was better in that it considered arousal to both oral and anal sex, but unfortunately, it overlooked arousal to vaginal sex. We can only speculate about how the inclusion of such content elements in their study may have impacted their resulting factor structure and taxonomization of pornographic content based on sexual arousal ratings. Future efforts to develop empirically derived content-related factors of pornography would do well to include a consideration of both commonly used (e.g., “couples,” “mixed-gender” and “vaginal sex”) as well as less typically used (e.g., “fist fucking,” “golden shower and enemas,” “fat girls”) types of content. Also, efforts to taxonomize pornographic content should explicitly consider reports of the content utilized by consumers rather than relying on content categories that are derived from investigator interests, lists on pornographic websites, or media prevalence estimates in content analyses. It is precisely this oversight on the part of researchers that data from “bottom-up” analysis can inform.

Some gender differences were evident in the content of pornography that participants reported using. Generally, gender differences were more prominent in descriptions of solitary pornography use than shared use. For descriptions of the content of solitary pornography use, men were more likely than women to mention anal sex, while women were more likely than men to mention materials with all female performers, all male performers, the practice of “other” sexual behaviors (e.g., specific sexual positions, manual sex, use sex toys, double penetration, etc.), and elements of BDSM and rough sex. Gender differences in pornography use featuring violent and rough sex have also been reported by Shor (2021). Moreover, gender differences in pornography use featuring anal sex, all male performers, and violent sex are mirrored by the gender differences in sexual arousal ratings for these materials reported by Hald and Stulhofer (2016a; 2016b). In their study, participants were asked to indicate how sexually arousing they found 27 different

genres of pornography to be. Within their heterosexual sample, men indicated that pornography involving anal sex was more sexually arousing than women, while women reported that gay pornography and pornography involving bondage and discipline were more sexually arousing than men. Hald and Stulhofer (2016a; 2016b) also found that women in their sample reported more sexual arousal to violent sex (e.g., “simulated rape, aggression, and coercion”) and sadomasochism but these differences did not reach significance in their study after a Bonferroni correction was applied. Given this evidence, it seems that male and female pornography users may be aroused by and consume somewhat different materials.

It will take time to fully describe and confirm gender differences in the pornography content used by consumers and to elucidate their implications. For example, if it can be confirmed that women who use pornography in heterosexual relationships are more likely to use female-only materials than men who use pornography, it may suggest that same-gender attraction is more common in women who use pornography than men who use pornography in heterosexual relationships. If this is the case, solitary pornography use may be one of the only opportunities for women with same-gender attractions to fulfill this aspect of their sexuality within otherwise monogamous heterosexual couples. While this has not been researched quantitatively, it supports the notion that pornography could benefit couples with discrepant sexual desires (Kohut et al., 2017), as existing research suggests that unmet sexual desires can present major challenges to sexual and relationship satisfaction of couples (Balzarini et al., 2021).

Similarly, if gender differences in use of violent pornographic content can be robustly confirmed this finding may also necessitate a rethinking of emerging theory in this area. Leonhardt et al. (2019), for example, have argued that use of paraphilic content like coercion and dominance/submission will be particularly likely to undermine relationships by jeopardizing factors like sexual communal strength, sexual communication, and sexual intimacy. If they are correct, it seems puzzling to us that women would be more likely to consume these “problematic” materials than men, and yet, unlike men, women’s pornography use seems to be unrelated to their relationship and sexual satisfaction (see Wright et al., 2017). In our view, Leonhardt et al.’s (2019) content-related theorizing concerning the effects of pornography on relationships cannot account for this pattern of findings.

We also found that the nature of the pornographic content seems to vary by social context of pornography use, with the content involved in shared use generally being described as more mono- and heteronormative than the content of individual use. By this, we mean that pornography used together was more likely to involve heterosexual couples engaging in vaginal sex than pornography viewed independently. Specifically, men were more likely to report using materials featuring oral sex, anal sex, masturbation, and amateur performers when using pornography alone than with their partner. Women, for their part, were more likely to report the use of materials involving group sex, orgasm and ejaculation, and BDSM and rough sex when using pornography alone than with a partner. While we are not aware of comparable research that can be used to validate or frame such findings, we speculate that differences in the types of content used alone and with a partner are rooted in the social dynamics of shared pornography use. Research

concerning communication and disclosure of pornography use remains limited but has been growing in recent years. While it seems that many people may be aware of their partner's pornography use (Kohut et al. 2017), a sizeable number of people hide some or all aspects of their pornography use, likely due to a combination of shame (Droubay et al., 2021) and concerns about negative reactions and judgment from partners (Galper & Tingage, 2023). Consequently, it seems plausible that some individuals may be less likely to share their more idiosyncratic sexual interests with their partners for such reasons and as a result, are more likely to view heterosexual couples engaging in more typical behaviors when viewing pornography with a partner. It is also possible that differences in pornography content between pornography used alone and with a partner could emerge because of a lack of overlap in partners' sexual interests. If one partner is particularly interested in pornography featuring anal sex while the other is particularly interested in pornography involving BDSM, then perhaps these partners would consume such materials while alone but negotiate the shared use of materials that involve overlapping interests such as heterosexual couples engaging in vaginal sex. Both explanations for differences in the content of solitary and shared pornography use are extremely speculative at this point and require further confirmatory research.

We have also considered how the results of this study could usefully inform the development of an improved conceptual taxonomization of pornographic content that could be employed in content analyses as well as studies of pornography use and exposure. While it is tempting to focus on the most prominent aspects of content that were mentioned by participants in their descriptions of their pornography use as the most "important" dimensions of pornographic content, we feel that this would be a simplistic mistake. Instead, thinking more holistically across the content themes identified in this study, as well as research findings from existing content analyses, we believe it would be more prudent and useful to differentiate between the following four domains of pornographic content: (1) the number of performers within a scene (e.g., solitary individuals, dyads, threesomes, and groups of various sizes); (2) the individual characteristics of each performer in the scene (e.g., gender, age, race, bodily attributes, roles, relative power, etc.); (3) the sexual (e.g., manual, oral, genital, anal sex, sexual positions, use of sex toys, etc.) and non-sexual behaviors (e.g., communication, body language, aggression, etc.) that are engaged in within a scene; and (4) the other remaining aspects of the scene or setting (e.g., point-of-view, location, props, lighting, explicitness, etc.). It may also be important to consider the medium of pornography consumption (e.g., text, photograph, drawings, video, animation, audio, VR, etc.) when documenting content because some media are better at facilitating certain aspects of content than others. For example, text can provide insight into the internal mental states of actors in a scene, which helps to clarify the depiction of motives and consent/non-consent. Drawings and animations are also uniquely useful for providing visual representations of impossible fantasies and perspectives (e.g., sex with mythical creatures, vore: the erotic consumption of people, cutaway views of penetration and/or ejaculation, etc.). Also, criminal and antisocial acts are easier to depict in text, drawings, and animations because no one is injured in their production and such media are sometimes afforded additional legal protections against prosecution.



While the taxonomic approach that we are proposing may not be perfect, we feel that it usefully organizes the themes that were evident in our sample but also provides an overarching framework that can nicely incorporate other aspects of content that exist but were not noted here (e.g., condom use / “stealth”<sup>2</sup>, cosplay, gym sex, smoking, “stuck” porn<sup>2</sup>, wrestling, etc.).

In reviewing our findings, it is clear to us that the results of the current study also have important implications for measuring pornography use. If variations in the content of pornography differentiate between unique antecedents and consequences of its use, and men and women are using different types of content, then it is not reasonable to expect that measures of men’s and women’s general pornography use (e.g., “How frequently do you use pornography in a typical month?”) should have the same patterns of correlation with other variables. Based on the current data, for example, we would speculate that women’s pornography use, as assessed by measures that are insensitive to content, should be more strongly correlated with interest in and experience with BDSM practices than men’s pornography use. If true, this would not necessarily mean that men’s pornography use was a less clear manifestation of their interests in BDSM or that men’s pornography use was less likely to shape their interests in or practice of BDSM than women’s pornography use. Instead, it may simply reflect a measurement issue in that general measures of pornography use are more indicative of the use of BDSM materials within women than men. This possibility could be tested and ruled out (or in) by specifically measuring the use of pornography featuring BDSM content. If that were done instead, we might find that there was no gender difference in the correlations between the use of BDSM pornography and interest in and experience with BDSM. Of course, the same logic could be applied to differences between solitary versus shared pornography use and potentially to other differences in who is using pornography and how pornography is being used. Consequently, we strongly recommend that researchers make more efforts to explicitly measure the use of content types that are most relevant to the theoretical focus of their work in addition to any general measures of pornography use they wish to employ.

It also occurs to us that there may be hidden challenges with interpreting the results stemming from measuring different types of content. Our data suggests that the depiction of certain elements of content logically (or empirically) constrain one another or are otherwise linked together. For example, we found a sizable correlation between using content featuring solitary performers and using content featuring masturbation. When performers are alone, they are restricted in the extent of partnered behaviors they can engage in. Similarly, themes of force, coercion, and exploitation may be linked to narrative elements and roleplay because narrative aspects of content may be necessary to some extent to disambiguate indications of non-consent in a scene using dialog and archetypical or symbolic roles (e.g., employer vs employee). We are not the only ones to note the clustering or co-occurrence

- 2 “Stuck” porn refers to a genre of consensual non-consent scenes in which one performer, typically female, becomes physically stuck in an absurd but compromising position (e.g., unable to remove their head or shoulders from a washing machine). Instead of helping, another performer, typically male, takes advantage of the situation by having sex with the person who is stuck.



of content themes in pornography. Vannier et al. (2014), for example, found that women in pornography involving MILFs (older women) tended to be portrayed as being more agentic, more in control over the sexual pacing, and having a higher professional status than women in pornography involving legal teens. Similarly, a subsequent analysis of teen and MILF pornography indicated that anal sex and facial ejaculations were more commonly depicted in the former than the latter (Shor, 2019). More recently, Seida and Shor (2021) conducted a content analysis, which found that depictions of aggression as well as depictions of affection are more common in same-gender (both same-gender male and same-gender female) than mixed-gender pornography. Nevertheless, we wanted to draw further attention to content clusters within pornography because it has implications for measurement. If certain types of content co-occur but are not entirely redundant with one another (e.g., FMM male threesomes and rough sex), then attempts to measure one content type (e.g., FMM threesomes) will be partially confounded with the measurement of another (e.g., rough sex). Going forward, we recommend that researchers interested in measuring the use of or interest in specific types of content be mindful of potential overlap between different content types.

The correlations we identified in this study may be a function of more than just the overlap in commonly co-occurring types of content. The data analyzed in this study were provided in response to two open-ended questions, which allowed participants to answer with different levels of abstraction/specificity and in fundamentally different ways. At times, participants' responses seemed to describe the nature of a single scene that they typically sought out, at other times, it was clear that participants were describing a range of different scenes they used. However, in most cases, it was impossible to tell whether participants described one or several scenes in their responses. Consequently, certain correlations we identified in this paper might also reflect sexual content interests that commonly co-occur within individuals and which may or may not co-occur in actual pornographic scenes. The overlap between the use of pornography featuring group sex and pornography featuring public sex may not, for example, reflect the tendency for group sex to occur in public venues like parks, but rather, a psychological tendency towards exhibitionism and/or voyeurism on the part of consumers that inclines them towards group sex materials and public sex materials. This too has potential implications for measuring the use of specific content types because it is possible that even if two content types rarely occur or never do simultaneously, measuring the use of one content type (e.g., group sex) may still be empirically confounded with the use of another content type (e.g., public sex) due to shared antecedent factor that drives interest in both (e.g., exhibitionism/voyeurism).

## 9. Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. First, the data were collected in 2013 and viewing preferences have likely shifted to some degree over the last decade. Themes like pseudo-incest (e.g., stepsibling, stepparent relationships) and "stuck" porn, which seem nearly ubiquitous today, were much less common ten years ago. Relatedly, this study relied on a convenience sample of people who were involved in

predominantly mixed-sex relationships, and most of the sample is Canadian. For both reasons, readers should be cautious about generalizing the results of this study. With that said, several of the findings regarding gender differences in sexual interests and use of pornography correspond with results of other studies and may reasonably reflect general human tendencies for pornography use.

Another issue worth considering is that responses provided by participants varied in their level of abstraction/specificity, were generally quite brief, and likely represent only the most salient characteristics of pornography that participants used. These factors impacted the qualitative analysis that was conducted, which was more superficial than we had hoped it would be at the outset of this project, but also the exploratory quantitative analyses that relied on our coding of the emergent themes. We noted particular challenges when interpreting participants' responses when it came to the specification of partner number, and, as a consequence, our reported prevalence of such responses likely underestimate the number of responses indicating specific preferences in this regard. Similarly, questions about whether participants were describing one type of pornographic scene with multiple content elements or multiple different scenes with non-overlapping content features were hard to gauge most of the time. Such challenges likely undermined the depth and complexity of our analyses and potentially the validity of some of our findings. Semi-structured interviews that allow for follow-up and clarification questions would be useful for overcoming such problems in future research into this topic. Alternatively, an automated survey with well-developed branching logic for follow-up questions might be useful for obtaining more concrete details.

Lastly, it is possible that the specific wording of our open-ended questions, which explicitly emphasized performers and behaviors (e.g., "who is doing what to whom?"), may have affected the nature of participants' responses. Specifically, these instructions may have influenced the content that users reported regarding aspects like partner number, gender, and sexual behavior at the potential expense of characteristics like narrative or location. With that said, it is still interesting, and we believe meaningful, that when describing performers in pornographic content they consumed (the "who" and "whom"), participants overwhelmingly mentioned gender rather than age, ethnicity, body attributes, or social roles. Nevertheless, researchers seeking to apply similar approaches to assess the content of pornography use with open-ended questions would do well to inquire specifically about who was doing what, as well as when, where, and why they were doing so.

## 10. Future directions

Despite these limitations, we believe that the analysis of these data was useful and informative and highlights several avenues for future inquiry. For example, this study reinforces the need for more systematic and thorough inquiry into gender differences in the use of specific pornographic content. Also, the results of this study open some interesting directions for investigating the social dynamics of shared pornography use within relationships. How is it that partners decide what it is that they watch together? What role, if any, do disclosure concerns play? Is the extent of shared sexual interest a factor? What else might be involved?

The results of this study also reinforce the importance of measuring specific types of pornography while simultaneously suggesting some cautions that should be recognized while doing so. Researchers should remain cognizant of the possibility that the use of materials featuring one type of content may increase an individual's contact with other content types. These may occur for at least two reasons: the depiction of two different content types may commonly co-occur (e.g., single performers + masturbation); alternatively, an individual may be drawn to distinct types of content because of a common antecedent cause (e.g., consensual spanking and non-consensual exploitation because of dark personality traits). More research is needed to understand and map prominent constellations of comorbid exposure to different facets of content and to better understand the mechanisms underlying such connections.

## 11. Closing thoughts

Pornography content is likely important for understanding who uses pornography, the conditions in which it is used, and the consequences of such use on the users and those around them. While there are some exceptions (e.g., Davis et al., 2018; Malamuth et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2014), it seems that many researchers fail to measure the use of specific types of pornographic content in their work, and we feel that it is time for the field to change this practice. We encourage the community of pornography scholars to redouble efforts to incorporate measures of specific types of pornographic content in their empirical research. There remain major gaps in our understanding of what types of content are used most and least often, who is using different content types and why they do so, and what behavioral, psychological, and social contexts surround the use of specific content types. It is imperative that we fill these gaps if we want to understand how the use of different types of content might result in different kinds of psychological, behavioral, and social consequences stemming from pornography use.

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## Appendix A

### Codebook

**Number of Performers:** Responses explicitly indicating the number of performers in the media that they use. Do not code responses where you have to infer that more than one person is involved (e.g., “Girl getting licked”; “Bdsm rough sex male dominated”). Focus carefully on the total number of people described on the scene including bystanders. For example, “...male-female couple having sex in front of others...” should be treated as a threesome or group, as appropriate rather than a couple. This category is split into the following subcodes for coding. Note that

it is possible for individual responses to mention more than one sub-code, so consider each sub-code independently when checking responses.

- Single: A single individual. Do not assume that descriptions of plural women represent multiple instances of singular women (e.g., “Bondage, male dominating female, softcore women nude, artsy nude”).
  - E.g., “masturbation (solo woman)”
- Couples: Two individuals. Includes vague mentions of “heterosexual sex” which is assumed to mean heterosexual couple. Do not assume that descriptions of plural women with plural men represent multiple instances of couples (e.g., men are having sex with women). Do not assume heterosexual or lesbian/gay sex represents a couple. Mentions of “regular, vanilla, or straight sex” should not be coded as couples. Do not assume that a person is referring to a couple when they use the singular male and female as general descriptions of who is leading an activity (e.g., both male and female domination).
  - E.g., “one male - one female”
  - E.g., “Mostly f/f or m/m.”
- Threesome: Three individuals. Do not assume cuckolding is an act that involves three individuals. If the respondent does not specifically indicate three individuals, do not assume they mean three individuals.
  - E.g., “Threesome (at least 2 women, 1 male)”
  - E.g., “Male and female having sex. At times MMF of MFF”
  - E.g., “...women masturbating...while watching couple”
- Group Sex: Four or more individuals. Orgy’s and Gangbangs will also be considered as group sex. If the respondent does not specifically indicate group sex or four or more individuals, do not assume they mean group sex.
  - E.g., “group sex (many people having vaginal sex, oral sex, and/or anal sex)”
  - E.g., “orgies in sex clubs”

Gender/Sex: Responses that describe arrangements of gender/sex of the performer(s) in the content participants view. This category is split into subcodes that are largely designated by the gender/sex signifiers of “M” and “F.” In the subcodes below “MF” is used to reflect content with a single man/male and woman/female, “M+” is used to reflect content that is entirely male, involving one or more performers, and “F+” is used to reflect content that is entirely female, involving one or more performers. For threesomes, combinations of “M’s” and “F’s” reflect the presence of multiple performers of those genders/sexes. In cases where multiple males and multiple females are described, this will be represented by “M+F+.” If a code is ambiguous, such as when plural genders are used but its not clear if they are referring to watching multiple instances of a mixed gender interaction involving two people or a single mixed-gender interaction involving more than two people (e.g., “Men having sex with women.”) code assuming they are referring to a single instance with more performers (e.g., M+F+ rather than MF). Note that ambiguous responses like “men having sex with women” may represent viewing multiple instances of couples having sex, but it is impossible to disambiguate such responses from descriptions mixed gender orgies. Any mention of trans, intersex, or other non-binary genders, will be coded separately as “Gender Diverse” regardless of



whether or not the response is referring to content with a single or multiple performers. Modest inferences will be made for the following cases (or variations such terminology): responses that refer to “Gay Porn,” will be coded as an “M+” interaction; responses that refer to “Lesbian Porn” will be coded as an “F+” interaction; responses that refer to “Heterosexual Sex” will be coded as “MF” interactions; responses that refer to “Gangbangs” will be coded as FMM+; responses that refer to “Bisexual Sex” will be coded as “FMM+.” Responses that refer to “Threesomes,” “Group Sex,” “Orgies,” “Sex Parties,” or “Public Sex” will not be coded for gender, unless the gender is clearly indicated in another part of the response.

- **MF:** Responses that suggest a mixed gender/sex couple.
  - E.g., “I prefer situations where the girl is pleasuring the guy (oral, etc), or the guy is pleasuring the girl (oral)”
  - E.g., “Men having sex with women.”
  - E.g., “Heterosexual”
- **M+:** Responses involving a single male or responses that involve male-male interactions of two or more individuals.
  - E.g., “It varies according to my mood. M/M”
  - E.g., “gay pornography”
  - E.g., “men humping objects”
- **F+:** Responses involving a single female or responses that involve female-female interactions of two or more individuals.
  - E.g., “female on female sex
  - E.g., “Women having sex with other women
  - E.g., “Lesbian porn”
  - E.g., “Women masturbating alone”
- **FMM+:** Responses that involve threesomes or groups with a single female and two or more males, as well as descriptions of bisexual sex.
  - E.g., “It varies according to my mood. M/F/M”
  - E.g., “Generally sexual acts performed by multiple men on one woman.”
  - E.g., “Gangbang”
  - E.g., “Threesome, group, bisexual”
- **MFF+:** Responses that involve threesomes or groups with a single male and two or more females.
  - E.g., “MFF”
  - E.g., “group (3+) sex with a single male”
  - E.g., “one male and multiple female partners.”
- **M+F+:** Responses that involve groups of four or more individuals with multiple men and multiple women or cases where it is unclear about whether there are multiple men and women.
  - E.g., “I will often watch videos on orgy’s”
- **Gender Diverse:** Any and all responses describing transgender performers (or variations like transsexual, ladyboy, boi, hermaphrodite) regardless of whether or not other genders are mentioned in the interaction.
  - E.g., “Sexually attractive male-to-female transsexuals having sex with sexually attractive females”



- E.g., “trans\* women having anal sex and/or oral sex together (often in groups of more than two); and both cis and trans\*”

**Age:** Responses the concern how young or old performers are in the content participants view. Participants rarely provide exact numerical descriptions so much of this coding will be based on common genre descriptors like “teen” or “milf” or adjectives like “young” or “old”.

- E.g., “looking at nude women 18-40 years old.”
- E.g., “Men and women having sex, typically younger (legally of age) women.”
- E.g., “older man younger girl”

**Body Attributes:** Responses that describe a particular aspect/attribute of a performer’s body type, body part, and appearance. Examples could include big performers, voluptuous performers, thin performers, size of breasts, buttocks, penis, color of hair (e.g., blonde, brunette, etc.), attractive performers, and extent of pubic grooming. There are no subcodes for such responses.

- E.g., “ Bbw amateur big ladies”
- E.g., “bbc”
- E.g., “I mostly enjoy seeing very fit young men and woman engaging in athletic and vigorous tradition sexual paractices.”

**Race/Ethnicity:** Responses that describe the race of performers or mention interest in interracial sex. Examples could include Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic, German, and others.

- E.g., “Interracial. “
- E.g., “asian”
- E.g., “Caucasian couples”

**Narrative and Roleplay:** Responses that describe a stereotypical narrative or a scene which contains specific roles (i.e., relationships among real or imagined performers), scripts, plots between characters, or specific mention of a lack of plot. Examples include parody, gonzo, and couples porn/couples friendly porn, Incest, Teachers, Students, Coworkers, Service Workers, Cuckolding, etc. Note, while we will also consider couples porn as de facto “narrative” we acknowledge that it is not always narrative in practice.

- E.g., “variety of ‘gonzo’, prefer no particular story-line or acting.”
- E.g., “...boss/worker fantasies...”
- E.g., “with some story-like context (eg. sexy picnic, office scene etc)”

**Professional/Amateur:** Responses that indicate whether or not viewers prefer professional or amateur content.

- E.g., “Amateur heterosexual. Fake porn producers getting girls to perform on them”
- E.g., “Usually one-on-one sex, professionals (not amateur pornography, lest we are now watching more “real” people).”

**Force (Non) Consent and Exploitation:** Responses that explicitly/implicitly describe the presence of consent or lack of consent, the use of force, or some form of exploitation.. Examples could include consensual sex, CNC (consensual non-consent), rape, pressure, coercion, forced sex, hidden cameras, revenge porn, leaked videos/images, extortion or exploitation. There are no subcodes for such responses.

- E.g., “Male and female engaging in consensual sexual intercourse”
- E.g., “...rape fantasies when it is explicit in the text that both characters do in fact consent and a safeword is provided”
- E.g., “I like three sums or more. no force but story type content. I also like story which involve some kind of deal or situation of exploitation and some one is taking advantage. cuckold and swinger cpls. I like it natural not just straight to sex.”

**BDSM and Rough Sex:** Responses that describe sexual practices consisting of BDSM (bondage, discipline, dominance/submission, and/or sadomasochism) or rough sex (slapping, spanking, choking, etc.). Whether or not participants believe the practices are consensual or not.

- E.g., “...things like submissive woman with dominant males being choked or slapped and spanked, sometimes in bondage (cuffs, rope, suspension)”
- E.g., “...BDSM play”
- E.g., “Rough sex, light kink (spanking, hair pulling, light bondage)”

**Other Kinks and Fetishes:** Responses that mention an interest in kinks or fetishes or describe a preference for the use of the specific materials of costumes (e.g., rubber, silk, fur, latex, etc.), a focus on specific non-sexual body parts (e.g., feet, legs, armpits, etc.), or non-sexual acts (e.g., excretion, lactation, play with balloons, splashing, etc.). Things that describe BDSM practices should not be coded in the category unless it includes some element described above (e.g., woman in latex skirt getting spanked).

- E.g., “lactation and pregnancy porn”
- E.g., “models of various fetishes”
- E.g., “...sounding...”

**Type of Sexual Behaviors:** Responses that describe the presences of sexual behavior or generally, a specific type of sexual behavior, or actions involving the genitals, regardless of gender or number of performers involved. Examples could include general acts of anal, oral, vaginal, or more specific acts like double penetration, deep throating, swallowing ejaculate, fisting, face-sitting, the use of sex toys (e.g., dildo, fuck machines, strap-ons, vibrators), or a combination of these acts. Descriptions of specific sexual positions may be included (e.g., missionary, doggy style, cowgirl, scissoring, etc.). Subcodes include the following:

- **Anal Sex:** Responses that mention anal sex, butt play, rimming, pegging, etc.
  - E.g., “Males on female, anal involved.”
- **Vaginal Sex:** Responses that mention vaginal sex, coitus, (heterosexual) sexual intercourse, traditional sex, etc. Note that straight, heterosexual sex, or vanilla sex should not be coded under this category at they may imply combinations oral, vaginal, and/or anal sex .
  - E.g., “Any heterosexual intercourse, usually between only 2 people”
- **Oral Sex:** Responses that mention oral sex, cunnilingus, fellatio, head, blow jobs, going down, etc.
  - E.g., “facesitting...”
  - E.g., “...blow jobs and tit jobs...”

- Orgasm/Ejaculation: Responses that include any mention of orgasm or cumming, ejaculation, squirting, creampie, snowballing, felching, cum-swapping, facials, etc.
  - E.g., “girls squirting on girls”
- Masturbation: Responses that include any mention of masturbation or self-stimulation, regardless of how many people are in the scene.
  - E.g., “...masturbation (solo woman)”
- Other Acts: Responses that mention other specific sexual acts that are not mentioned within the above categories. Examples for other acts may include sexual positions, fisting, object insertion, double penetration, spit roasting, or breast play.
  - E.g., “girl on girl, mff, various positions -reverse cowgirl, doggy style, missionary, whatever”
  - E.g., “...fisting, pegging, double penetration, extreme insertions...”
- Media Type: Responses that describe the preferred media type or source of pornography. Examples can range from romantic novels, fanfiction, images, videos, Hentai, webcam sex, to specific web sources (e.g., Pornhub). Be careful not to interpret descriptions of narratives as examples of written work (e.g., stories about a woman dominating other women or men).
  - E.g., “online videos: men or women tying up and dominating women.; fanfiction / romance novels: heterosexual sex within committed relationships”
  - E.g., “...I also view a lot of random images on “stumbleupon” which just gives random websites in general, with no specific leaning towards one type or another.”
  - E.g., “I browse tumblr for images or gifs depicting rough sex and/or BDSM content, things like submissive woman with dominant males being choked or slapped and spanked, sometimes in bondage (cuffs, rope, suspension)”
- Location: Responses that describe preferred locations, settings, or events of pornographic scenes. Examples range from public, semi-public, to private. Specific examples include beaches, parties, bathroom stalls, glory holes, cars, kitchens, and others. There are no subcodes for such responses.
  - E.g., “...sex in beach, leaked honeymoon videos, dorm sex, oil massage etc.”
  - E.g., “...glory holes, hidden cameras, couples trying to be quiet, secret sex, public washroom sex, women trying to read during stimulation...”
  - E.g., “...soft public...”

## FULL PAPER

**Computer-generated rough sex: An empirical study about the interest in human and artificial sexually explicit media displaying rough and gentle sexual behaviors**

**Computergenerierter harter Sex: Empirische Untersuchung des Interesses an menschlichen und digitalen expliziten Medien, die grobes und sanftes Sexualverhalten abbilden**

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### Computer-generated rough sex: An empirical study about the interest in human and artificial sexually explicit media displaying rough and gentle sexual behaviors

#### Computergenerierter harter Sex: Empirische Untersuchung des Interesses an menschlichen und digitalen expliziten Medien, die grobes und sanftes Sexualverhalten abbilden

*Jessica M. Szczuka & Natalia Szymczyk*

**Abstract:** Computer-generated sexually explicit media is on the rise. While previous studies suggest that human sexualized stimuli are preferred compared to artificial ones, these studies did not consider the depicted sexual behavior as an influential factor. This, however, could be crucial because when individuals consume rough sexualized behavior, some tend to detach the humanity of the performers anyhow, raising the question about the significance of humanity within such sexualized entertainment media. To determine whether the explicitly stated interest in artificial and human sexualized stimuli depends on the displayed sexual behavior, a within-subject online experiment was conducted in the summer of 2022 with 274 heterosexual participants (152 men, 122 women). Further analyses with  $N = 68$  individuals identifying as homosexual ( $N = 39$  male and  $N = 29$  female) are included. A key finding from the research indicates that heterosexual individuals show a preference for computer-generated rough SEM compared to depictions involving humans. This study provides preliminary evidence suggesting that the portrayal of sexual behavior is pivotal in the acceptance of artificial sexual stimuli. It also delves into the potential of these materials as an extension for sexual satisfaction, yet it raises new questions that warrant further exploration.

**Keywords:** Digitized sexuality, computer-generated pornography, displayed sexual behavior, rough sex, anthropomorphization, objectification

**Zusammenfassung:** Sexuell explizite Medien werden immer häufiger am Computer generiert, anstatt tatsächlich stattgefundene Szenen fotografisch oder videografisch festzuhalten. Während frühere Studien darauf hinweisen, dass menschliche sexualisierte Reize künstlichen gegenüber bevorzugt werden, berücksichtigen diese Untersuchungen nicht das dargestellte Sexualverhalten als einen einflussreichen Faktor. Dies könnte jedoch entscheidend sein, da einige Individuen beim Konsum von grobem sexualisiertem Verhalten dazu neigen, die Menschlichkeit der Darsteller zu entkoppeln, was die Frage nach der Bedeutung der Menschlichkeit in solchen sexualisierten Unterhaltungsmedien aufwirft. Um festzustellen, ob das explizit geäußerte Interesse an künstlichen und menschlichen sexualisierten

Reizen vom dargestellten Sexualverhalten abhängt, wurde ein Within-Subject-Online-Experiment im Sommer 2022 mit 274 heterosexuellen Teilnehmern (152 Männer, 122 Frauen) durchgeführt. Zusätzlich wurden Analysen mit 68 Personen einbezogen, die sich als homosexuell identifizieren (39 Männer und 29 Frauen). Ein zentrales Ergebnis der Forschung zeigt, dass heterosexuelle Personen eine Präferenz für computer-generierte grobe sexuell explizite Medien gegenüber Darstellungen mit Menschen aufweisen. Diese Studie liefert erste Hinweise darauf, dass die Darstellung des Sexualverhaltens eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Akzeptanz künstlicher sexueller Reize spielt. Die Studie thematisiert das Potenzial dieser Materialien als Erweiterung der sexuellen Zufriedenheit, wirft jedoch neue Fragen zur zukünftigen Rolle der in sexuell expliziten Materialien dargestellten Menschen auf.

**Schlagworte:** Digitalisierte Sexualität, computer-generierte Pornografie, dargestelltes Sexualverhalten, grober Sex, Anthropomorphisierung, Objektifizierung

## 1. Introduction

Digitization has revolutionized the landscape of sexually explicit media (SEM) consumption, providing easy access to images and videos that can be consumed anonymously at a relatively low cost (Cooper, 1998; Döring, 2009). This however does not only affect the access to SEM, but also the content creation, which now enables the production of computer-generated sexual content in a wide range of genres and variations.

With the advent of new technological capabilities, it is crucial to examine the impact of computer-generated materials used for sexual gratification. Unlike human-depicting materials, computer-generated stimuli are not constrained by real-world conditions, allowing the depiction of more intense practices (Saunders, 2019). Initial qualitative studies suggest that this may be a specific advantage, as no individuals are harmed while allowing for the consumption of material that depicts rough sex practices (Forster & Shaughnessy, 2024). It is crucial to investigate how this development impacts the landscape of SEM. Specifically, it raises the question: are these computer-generated materials considered appropriate sexual stimuli?

Existing studies have on one hand explored human responses to artificial sexual stimuli and on the other, reactions to depicted sexual behaviors in SEM. However, it remains unclear whether the preference for human versus artificial materials is influenced by the specific sexual behaviors shown, as proposed by the Sexual Interaction Illusion Model by Szczuka et al. (2019). This potential interaction effect could offer new insights into the discourse on computer-generated sexual content and underscore a possible benefit of these technologies by enabling the creation of scenes that would otherwise cause harm during production. Previous studies have shown a preference for human stimuli over sexualized artificial stimuli, a tendency attributed to the comfort of familiarity and adherence to social norms (Banks & van Ouytsel, 2020; Szczuka, 2022; Szczuka & Krämer, 2017). However, the SIIM by Szczuka et al. (2019) suggests that demonstrated sexual behavior can significantly influence the acceptance of artificial beings as sexual stimuli. Yet, as demonstrated, sexual behavior has not been systematically varied in previous research, this study aims to help fill this research gap by examining the

reception of SEM portraying rough and gentle interactions, both with human and computer-generated personas.

With regard to rough SEM, research shows that exposure to SEM portraying human actors in rough or harmful content can lead to dehumanization of the characters portrayed, as viewers tend to separate the physical pain from the actors involved in order to reduce the potential cognitive dissonance (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Parvez, 2006; Taylor, 2022).

Consequently, consumers frequently dissociate humanity from the performers and instead contemplate real-world repercussions, such as adverse working conditions, physical discomfort, or psychological distress experienced by the actors (Döring, 2023; Grudzen et al., 2009; Jarke, 2022) only after consumption, if at all. With advancements in technology, creators can now design computer-generated characters to engage in actions such as hair pulling, choking, or spanking—unconstrained by the physical and ethical limitations that apply to human actors (Döring, 2023; Mosher, 1988; Rubin, 1998, 2006; Simon & Gagnon, 2003). As a result, computer-generated SEM often features more extreme sexual behaviors than those typically seen in real-life SEM (Forster & Shaughnessy, 2024; Saunders, 2019). In conjunction with the trend and interest in rough practices evident both within media representations and private domains (Döring & Poeschl, 2019; Holvoet et al., 2017), this raises the question of how rough sex is received in SEM when portrayed by computer-generated characters as opposed to real actors and whether perceived humanity is a crucial aspect of the acceptability of this SEM.

This empirical study, therefore, examines the influence of displayed sexual behavior (gentle vs. rough) as a crucial variable influencing people's interest in human versus computer-generated SEM. It sheds light on the role of human emotions and sensations in the explicitly indicated interest SEM and explores the potential social acceptability of computer-generated sexual stimuli within environments traditionally reliant on human-to-human stimulation.

### 1.1 Displayed sexual behavior: Gentle vs. rough SEM

SEM encompasses a broad spectrum of sexual behaviors ranging from gentle to rough content and, according to Mosher (1988), has a crucial role in sexual exploration as well as shaping individual sexual scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

Gentle sexual content, characterized by painless representations of individuals (human and artificial), includes dyadic, free, relational sexual activity referred to as “*vanilla sex*” (Rubin, 1998), which is motivated by relationships and emotional affection. While situational factors can render “*vanilla*” sexual practices non-consensual (e.g., recording without consent), thus involving elements of sexual violence, these practices generally reflect gentle sexual behaviors. In contrast, rough sexual content exhibits “aggressive consensual sex, [which] includes activities such as throwing a person onto the bed, ripping off clothes, pulling hair, spanking or choking” (Döring, 2023, p. 102). Although these sexual practices can be practiced with consent, rough sex practices can entail specific and increased risks of both a psychological and physical nature, such as temporary or permanent nerve damage due to incorrectly applied restraints (Döring, 2023; Herbenick et al., 2021; Her-



benick et al., 2023; Herbenick et al., 2024). However, as such rough sexual behavior has gained visibility and acceptance in media and pop culture (e.g., through mainstream depictions such as “Fifty Shades of Grey”; Taylor-Johnson, 2015), recent research shows that rough sex practices become statistically more common (e.g., Döring, 2023; Herbenick et al., 2021; Herbenick et al., 2023; Holvoet et al., 2017).

Despite the increasing interest in rough sexual practices, there is a prevalence of the gentle sexual form. This is also reflected in an analysis of motivations to have sex, as the expression of attachment and emotional affection, which is associated with more gentle practices, is among the strongest motivations to engage in intercourse (Meston & Buss, 2007). More importantly, there are consistent findings that suggest a general preference for SEM, which depicts sexual practices related to what can be considered “*vanilla sex*” (Hald & Štulhofer, 2016; Sharkey et al., 2022). McKee (2006) analyzed consumers’ reactions to pornography and highlighted that perceived enjoyment is a significant factor in the consumption of particular pornographic content which in turn is more strongly associated with less extreme practices. This observation leads to the proposition of the following hypothesis:

*H1: The interest in both human and computer-generated SEM displaying gentle sexual behavior will be higher than for images of rough sexual behavior.*

## 1.2 Ontological class: Humans versus artificial stimuli

Initial empirical studies comparing human and artificial stimuli in the domain of sexuality have shown a preference for humans or a recognition of artificial shortcomings (e.g., Banks & van Ouytsel, 2020; Dubé, Williams, et al., 2022; Szczuka & Krämer, 2017), leading Szczuka (2022) to question whether humans act as the “gold standard of sexuality”. Reasoning could involve not only familiarity with the human species but also authentic human qualities rooted in cautiousness, such as genuine romantic interest in others or motivation for personal growth within relationships. However, as these are all aspects that are particularly important in long-term interactions, they may not be as important in situations of sexual gratification (Szczuka & Dehnert, 2024; Szczuka et al., 2019). The SIIM, one of the few theoretically derived models in the realm of digitalized sexuality, advocates the acceptance of artificially generated sexualized stimuli when an interplay of displayed sexual behaviors and sexual and social norms evokes sexual arousal.

Nevertheless, especially introspective, more reflective or cautious processes triggered by the observation of artificial SEM yield not only increased acceptance but also potentially adverse effects on the assessment of such stimuli. Thus, for example, in a study comparing explicit and implicit responses to sexualized humans and robots (so ultimately also artificial sexualized stimuli) using either an affective priming paradigm or explicit ratings, Szczuka and Krämer (2017) empirically demonstrated that while implicitly there was no difference in attractiveness ratings, explicit ratings revealed significant higher attractiveness evaluations for humans. This suggests that disparities in explicit and implicit attractiveness assessments

were predominantly elicited by reflective deliberations. Possible reasons, in addition to those already mentioned, such as familiarity through a shared species, could be that sexualized interactions with non-human subjects (e.g., sexualized robots, chatbots, or voice agents) are often stigmatized in the media (Döring & Poeschl, 2019) and are discussed as a “last resort” for humans (Turkle, 2011). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was formulated:

*H2: The interest in SEM showing humans is higher compared to SEM depicting computer-generated sexualized scenes.*

### 1.3 Interaction between ontological class and displayed sexual behavior

Given the various theoretical explanations and empirical research findings leading to hypotheses regarding displayed sexual behavior (H1) and ontological class (H2), the inquiry into a potential interaction effect becomes pertinent. Research indicates that specific elements of pornography, especially those depicting rough sexual behavior, may be suppressed, detached, or shielded during reception (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Taylor, 2022). For instance, Antevska and Gavey (2015) conducted interviews with heterosexual men and observed a tendency among recipients to detach from the humanity of performers, particularly when consuming SEM portraying extreme sexual practices. Following the work of Kimmel (2005), the authors concluded that “Detachment appeared to characterize the kind of engagement that most of our participants had with pornography, including the kinds that depicted sexual violence” (Antevska & Gavey, 2015, p. 623). The act of avoiding connection with the people behind the performers in order to protect oneself from negative emotions or sensations can therefore be seen as a post-consumption strategy aimed at mitigating cognitive dissonance (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Parvez, 2006; Taylor, 2022). Although rough sexual practices are typically consensual and rarely result in physical harm, the intense physical experiences endured by actors and actresses when repeatedly filming such scenes can push them to their limits (Grudzen et al., 2009; Jarke, 2022; Parvez, 2006). Computer-generated content presents a notable advantage in this regard, as it allows for the visualization of extreme practices without subjecting real bodies to strain or risk. Consequently, it is worth investigating the extent to which computer animation may serve as a viable alternative or supplement to material that could potentially harm actors, especially since violent sexual practices turn recipients away from the humanity of the performers (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Parvez, 2006).

The significance of exhibited sexual behavior as a critical factor in the acceptance of artificial stimuli is also emphasized in the SIIM (Szczuka et al., 2019). This theoretical framework conceptualizes the positive and negative influences on individuals’ willingness to engage intimately with artificial entities. The authors specifically address the role of intense sexual practices, such as aggressive sexual behavior, which may appeal to some individuals due to internalized sexual scripts shaped by exposure to pornographic and sexualized content (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). This interest in intense sexual practices could extend to interactions with artificial counterparts. The authors suggest an interaction effect, proposing that such beha-

vivors might be more readily accepted when displayed by non-human entities. However, it needs to be underlined that, until now, no empirical research has investigated this form of interaction between ontological class and displayed sexual behavior. Given the uncertainty about the extent to which the ontological class of the stimulus (human vs. computer-generated persona) interacts with the displayed sexual behavior (gentle vs. rough) in terms of interest in SEM, the following research question arises:

*RQ1:* Will the interest in sexualized material of the ontological class (human vs. computer-generated persona) interact with the displayed sexual behavior (gentle vs. rough)?

#### 1.4 Influential factors: Age, gender, and sexual orientation

To better understand how interest in SEM varies based on the ontological class and depicted behavior, it is important to carefully consider various individual characteristics that may influence consumers' perceptions and preferences. In this context, age, gender, and sexual orientation emerge as crucial elements deserving attention. The control for participants' *age* is based on findings that indicate that the consumption of SEM decreases with age (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2023; Price et al., 2016). *Gender* relevance arises as women perceive potential misconduct in the production of SEM (Grudzen et al., 2009; Parvez, 2006), while some men adopt a strategy to dehumanize performers, especially in rough scenes (Antevska & Gavvey, 2015; Taylor, 2022). A meta-analysis suggests that *sexual orientation* may also impact the evaluation of depicted sexual behavior, given an association between non-heterosexuality and engagement in BDSM-related sexual practices (Brown et al., 2020). With regard to sexual orientation, the primary hypotheses and subsequent analysis were centered around heterosexual individuals, reflecting the literature's emphasis on this demographic. However, recognizing the importance of also exploring questions relevant to individuals identifying as more strongly or exclusively homosexual, we made the decision to collect data without imposing any restrictions based on sexuality. Subsequently, we conducted a separate analysis to address this sample.

## 2. Method

To gain first insights into the explicit interest in computer-generated and human sexualized gentle and rough images, an online survey was conducted in the DACH region (Germany, Switzerland, Austria). The study, approved by the ethics committee of the University of Duisburg-Essen, has its preregistration, data, code, and stimuli available on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/k76yj>).

## 2.1 Participants

To observe whether the interest in pornographic images of a specific ontological class (human vs. computer-generated persona) is affected by the sexual behavior depicted (gentle vs. rough), the sample size was planned to find an effect (mid-small) of  $f = 0.20$ . Cohen (1988) recommends using a baseline effect size of  $f = 0.20$  when prior studies do not provide effect sizes. This approach balances caution with reasonable expectations, especially in exploratory research or novel areas where specific effect sizes have not yet been established. With a power of  $1 - \beta = .95$  and an alpha level of  $\alpha = .05$ , a total of 202 subjects were needed. In total, 370 individuals over the age of 18 years could be recruited via the crowdsourcing platform Prolific in the summer of 2022. This large number is reasoned in the fact that both, heterosexual and homosexual individuals were aimed to be recruited. Due to failure in attention checks, too fast processing, and non-fit of the presented website (e.g., website for homosexual males but gender female), 28 participants were excluded. Of the remaining  $N = 342$  participants, 68 identified as not exclusively homosexual. These participants were analyzed separately in an exploratory analysis in Chapter 3.4 due to the otherwise imbalanced group sample sizes. This left a sample of 274 datasets from individuals identifying as heterosexual, which were analyzed in Chapters 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

Overall, the remaining sample of heterosexual individuals included in the main analysis consisted of 152 men and 122 women (total  $N = 274$ ). The age ranged from 18 to 72 years ( $M = 34.21$ ,  $SD = 11.31$ ).

The sample of the homosexual participants ( $N = 68$ ) was composed of  $n = 39$  men and  $n = 29$  women aged 19 to 49 years ( $M = 28.10$ ,  $SD = 7.22$ ).

## 2.2 Procedure

After an initial briefing and obtaining informed consent, participants provided their gender and age before completing standardized questionnaires (see measures part for details).

The second part of the study began with a mockup of a pornographic website designed especially for the study, depicting eight pornographic thumbnails with human or artificial personas. This was intended to set the frame that human and artificial pornographic content could actually be seen on one website. Moreover, it helped to ensure that human and computer-generated content was perceived as an equal offer, rather than artificial pornography being initially assumed as a fetish. Given the 2 (human vs. computer-generated persona)  $\times$  2 (rough vs. gentle) within-subject design of the study, the images on the website differed with respect to two factors. First, the ontological class of actors (computer-generated persona vs. human), and second, the images in terms of displayed sexual behavior (rough vs. gentle). Accordingly, all participants saw a) four images depicting rough sexual scenes, two of them with humans and two with computer-generated personas, and b) four images depicting gentle sexual behavior, whereby two also showed humans and two computer-generated personas. Due to the fact that the selected computer-generated images had a high level of realism, they were provided with a note ("This

video is a computer animation”) to ensure that they were perceived as computer animation. The computer-generated and human stimuli matched the characteristics of the displayed sexual behavior in that gentle images only include representations of persons not exposed to painful sensory expressions, which could be classified as vanilla sex, and contrary rough images with representations of rough and painful sexual activities (Rubin, 1998, 2006). Furthermore, participants viewed content tailored to their sexual orientation while maintaining consistency in image characteristics. Accordingly, a total of three website versions were aimed at either heterosexual/bisexual people (male and female actors), homosexual men (male actors only), or homosexual women (female actors only). The website (Figure 1) was displayed for at least 15 seconds.

**Figure 1. Pornographic website: Female-male, male, female (from left to right)**



Finally, the participants indicated their interest in sexualized images by individually scoring the rough and gentle stimuli (both human and computer-generated persona) presented on the website in quasi-randomized order.

All the pictures included were carefully selected based on an extensive search of various online platforms where artists upload photos and computer-generated images. We used keyword searches such as “loving couple sex” for the gentle condition and “rough” or “painful” for the rough condition to identify suitable images. In the next step, we contacted the artists to explain our research and requested permission to use and publish the images for scientific purposes. Consequently, the resulting website accurately represents what can be found on the internet, thus

ensuring high external validity. Following the definition of the terms *gentle* and *rough* in this study, the main difference between the two concepts is best reduced to whether or not the sexual behavior depicted involves painful acts. In this context, participants indicated whether they thought the video contained painful content (from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). The painfulness measure served as a manipulation check and a *t*-test revealed that rough ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and gentle content ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) differ significantly in estimated painfulness,  $t(343) = 46.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 3.73$ . Finally, the participants received a debriefing and their compensation.

## 2.3 Measures

In the following section, used measures will be explained in more detail.

### 2.3.1 Socio-demographics

The included socio-demographic variables were age, gender (male, female, or diverse), and sexual orientation (primarily homosexual, primarily heterosexual, primarily bisexual, others, later separated into two subsamples: exclusively heterosexual and rest). The sexual orientation was measured in reference to the Kinsey scale (Kinsey et al., 1948), but via three primary options in order to automatically select a corresponding stimulus category for the presented website (heterosexual: male-female, homosexual: male only, homosexual: female only).

### 2.3.2 Interest in sexualized images

Participants expressed their *interest* in computer-generated and human representations of rough and gentle sexual behavior by consciously evaluating each stimulus. They answered four questions regarding their willingness to watch (“Would you like to watch this video?”), potential arousal (“Would this video arouse you?”), as well as rated their habitual consumption of similar sexualized media (“Do you usually watch similar sexualized media?” and “Would you watch a similar video on a porn platform?”). The questions were asked to be rated on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Very much”. Since a reliability analysis revealed good internal consistency ( $\alpha_{\text{Computer-generated rough}} = .95$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{Computer-generated gentle}} = .96$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{Human rough}} = .96$ ,  $\alpha_{\text{Human gentle}} = .95$ ), the items contributed to a reliable dependent scale of participants’ interest in rough and gentle human and computer-generated sexualized stimuli (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Please note that this index represents the interest in such a video. It is composed of several factors that contribute to understanding whether this type of content is appealing, including the potential to be aroused, the willingness to watch, and the interest in similar content. This measure is deliberately designed to capture interest or an evaluated tendency, as the current study aims to investigate how consumers explicitly evaluate different categories of SEM that depict rough and gentle sexual behaviors with either humans or non-humans.

Table 1. Interest in explicit sexual images: Means and standard derivations

		CG-Persona					Human			
		Rough			Gentle		Rough		Gentle	
		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Total		342	2.29	1.04	3.15	1.09	1.84	0.98	3.43	0.99
Gender	Male (Heterosexual)	191	2.58	1.02	3.50	0.94	2.06	1.01	3.62	0.82
	Female (Heterosexual)	151	1.91	0.95	2.72	1.12	1.56	0.86	3.18	1.12
Sexual Orien- tation	Hetero	274	2.30	1.05	3.14	1.11	1.80	0.94	3.37	0.99
	Homo	68	2.26	1.00	3.20	1.05	2.00	1.12	3.67	0.96

Notes. CG = computer-generated. Range: 1 = “disagree strongly” to 5 = “agree strongly”.

3. Results

The hypotheses and research question were assessed using different mixed ANCOVAs with the participants’ mean interest ratings in SEM as a dependent variable and age as a covariate. H1 was explored via a 2x2 mixed ANCOVA, with ontological class (computer-generated vs. human) as the within-subject factor and gender (male vs. female) as the between-subject factor. H2 was similarly examined using a 2x2 mixed ANCOVA, this time with displayed sexual behavior (rough vs. gentle) as the within-subject factor and gender as the between-subject factor. For RQ1, a 4x2 mixed ANCOVA was conducted with the interaction of ontological class and displayed sexual behavior (comprising four conditions: computer-generated-rough, human-rough, computer-generated-gentle, human-gentle) as the within-subject factor and gender as the between-subject factors.

Please note: Although the study was initially designed as a 2x2 between-subjects design, each image simultaneously represented both factors: displayed sexual behavior and ontological class (human or non-human). This overlap resulted in a confounding of the independent variables, complicating the statistical analysis.

To address this issue, separate ANCOVAs were conducted to analyze the effects of the two factors independently. By separating the analyses, we avoided distortions in the results due to the interaction between the factors, allowing for a more precise examination of each factor’s impact on the data.

3.1 Results for hypothesis 1

Initially, the intention was to evaluate Hypothesis H1 using a 2x2 mixed ANCOVA, with an aim to understand the difference in interest between gentle and rough sexual materials across genders while controlling for age. However, upon assessing the assumptions necessary for conducting a mixed ANCOVA, it was found that



the data did not meet the criteria for homogeneity of variances, and the Box's Test indicated inequality in covariance matrices. Despite these violations, it was observed that age and gender did not significantly influence the interest levels in the preliminary ANCOVA results. Therefore, it was deemed justifiable to proceed with a paired-samples *t*-test, omitting age and gender from the analysis due to their lack of impact.

The paired-samples *t*-test indicated a significant difference in preference for SEM portraying gentle versus rough sexual behavior,  $t(273) = 19.22, p < .001, d = 1.16$ . Participants demonstrated a higher interest in gentle ( $M = 3.25, SD = 0.97$ ) compared to rough ( $M = 2.05, SD = 0.90$ ) sexualized scenes (human and computer-generated persona aggregated). Thus, the results confirm H1, suggesting that gentle sexualized material elicits more interest than rough material among the participants.

### 3.2 Results for hypothesis 2

Upon evaluating H2 with a mixed ANCOVA, all prerequisites were met. The main effect of ontological class was non-significant,  $F(1, 271) = .55, p = .458, \eta^2_p = .002$ , and similarly, no significant effect was found for the covariate age,  $F(1, 271) = .10, p = .756, \eta^2_p = .000$ . Consequently, the hypothesis that participants are more interested in human sexualized images than in computer-generated sexualized images (gentle and rough aggregated) must be rejected.

However, there was a statistically significant interaction between ontological class and participants' gender,  $F(1, 271) = 10.63, p = .001$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .038$ . To further investigate this statistically significant interaction, separate paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted for males and females. The results of the *t*-test for the male participants showed a significant difference in preference between computer-generated sexualized images and sexualized images depicting humans,  $t(151) = 4.82, p < .001, d = 0.39$ , with a higher preference for computer-generated sexualized images ( $M = 3.05, SD = 0.80$ ) than for SEM depicting humans ( $M = 2.80, SD = 0.63$ ). In contrast, the *t*-test for female participants showed no significant difference in preference for SEM depicting humans or computer-generated personas,  $t(121) = 0.00, p = 1.000, d = 0.00$ .

### 3.3 Results for research question 1

In addressing RQ1, which explored whether interest in sexualized material would vary by ontological class (human vs. computer-generated persona) and displayed sexual behavior (gentle vs. rough), the prerequisites for a mixed ANCOVA were again unmet. Consequently, paired-samples *t*-tests were employed as an alternative approach. The *t*-test for the overall sample showed significant differences: participants exhibited a stronger preference for gentle human-depicted images ( $M = 3.37, SD = 0.99$ ) compared to gentle computer-generated images ( $M = 3.14, SD = 1.11$ ),  $t(273) = -4.51, p < .001, d = -0.27$ , and for rough computer-generated images ( $M = 2.30, SD = 1.05$ ) over rough human-depicted images ( $M = 1.80, SD = 0.94$ ),  $t(273) = 9.95, p < .001, d = 0.60$ .



With the covariate age showing no significant effect but a marked gender effect noted in H2, gender-specific preferences were further investigated through separate paired-samples *t*-tests. While female participants' preferences mirrored those observed in the overall *t*-test, expressing a stronger inclination for gentle human-depicted images ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) over computer-generated ones ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $t(121) = -4.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.45$ , and a pronounced preference for rough computer-generated images ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) compared to human-depicted images ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ),  $t(121) = 5.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ , male participants diverged from this pattern. Although they aligned with the overall trend by showing a significant preference for rough computer-generated images ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ) over human-depicted ones ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ),  $t(151) = 8.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.68$ , this pattern did not hold for gentle SEM. In that category, they demonstrated no significant preference between human ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and computer-generated images ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ),  $t(151) = -1.50$ ,  $p = .138$ ,  $d = -0.12$ , indicating a departure from the distinct preference noted in rough content.

### 3.4 Explorative analyses: Individuals identifying as not exclusively heterosexual

Given the smaller sample size and the predominant focus of existing literature on heterosexual populations, the examination of the non-heterosexual sample warrants distinct scrutiny. Therefore, exploratory analyses were carried out for the non-heterosexual sample ( $N = 68$ ), comprising 29 women and 39 men, mirroring those performed or intended for the heterosexual sample, to delve into potential differences within this specific demographic.

H1 was explored using a mixed 2 (ontological class: computer-generated vs. human)  $\times$  2 (gender: male vs. female) ANCOVA, which, unlike the previous analyses, met all the assumptions required for this statistical approach. The analysis revealed no significant main effect for sexual behavior,  $F(1, 65) = 2.75$ ,  $p = .102$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .041$ , suggesting that within this sample, the type of sexual behavior depicted did not substantially impact interest levels. There were also no significant interaction effects between sexual behavior and the covariate age,  $F(1, 65) = 0.38$ ,  $p = .539$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .006$ , or between sexual behavior and the between-subject factor gender,  $F(1, 65) = 0.45$ ,  $p = .507$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .007$ , indicating that these factors did not modulate the interest in sexualized material for this group of participants.

Regarding H2 again a mixed 2 (displayed sexual behavior: gentle vs. rough)  $\times$  2 (gender: male vs. female) ANCOVA was used to analyze the effect of the ontological class in interest in SEM. Reassuringly, all prerequisites for this statistical method were met. The analysis revealed no significant main effect for ontological class,  $F(1,65) = 1.95$ ,  $p = .167$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .029$ , as well as no significant interaction with the covariate age  $F(1,65) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .310$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .016$  or the between-subject factor gender  $F(1,65) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .123$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .036$ .

To investigate if the interest in sexualized material of the ontological class will interact with the displayed sexual behavior, RQ1 was analyzed by a 4 (interaction: computer-generated-rough vs. human-rough vs. computer-generated-gentle vs. human-gentle)  $\times$  2 (gender: male vs. female) mixed ANCOVA. However, since the

requirement of sphericity was violated, a Greenhouse-Geisser correction of the degrees of freedom was carried out. The results show a significant main effect between the four within-subject factors,  $F(3,195) = 3.88$ ,  $p = .028$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .056$ . The planned comparisons indicated a notably greater preference for serene SEM portraying humans ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) when directly contrasted with rugged SEM featuring computer-generated personas ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). No other comparisons were significant. Moreover, there was no significant interaction between all factors and age,  $F(3, 195) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .359$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .015$ , or gender,  $F(3,195) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .387$ , partial  $\eta^2_p = .014$ . To conclude, sexual orientation does not seem to play a major role in the observed phenomenon.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study investigated the extent to which displayed sexual behavior can influence the interest in images displaying humans or computer-generated personas. Indeed, the results show that the interest depends on the displayed sexual behavior: gentle SEM are preferred if they show humans and rough content seems to be more interesting when it is computer-generated (see also descriptives in Table 1). However, significant effects are partly affected by gender and sexual orientation. The results will be discussed in the following.

With regard to the first hypothesis, claiming that participants would be more interested in gentle SEM compared to rough, the results confirm what is also found in previous studies (cf. Brown et al., 2020; Meston & Buss, 2007), but within heterosexual individuals only. People are interested in dominant sexualized practices which is in line with relevant literature (Döring, 2023; Herbenick et al., 2021; Holvoet et al., 2017) and can also be seen in the fact that the descriptive interest scores for displayed rough behavior are not conspicuously low (see Table 1), but gentle sexualized content, without any dominant or painful sensory impressions, was rated to be significantly more interesting.

The fact that this significant difference was not to be found in the non-heterosexual subsample aligns with findings from a scoping review by Brown et al. (2020), which notes that previous studies have indicated a higher percentage of non-heterosexual individuals engaging in BDSM practices.

Surprisingly, the interest in an ontological class, i.e., human and computer-generated stimuli ( $H2$ ) was different for heterosexual men and women, while women had no significant preferences, the calculations revealed that the heterosexual male participants overall rated the computer-generated SEM to be more interesting. In line with the results of the heterosexual women, homosexual individuals showed no difference in the preference for an ontological class in computer-generated SEM, with no gender effects.

Based on previous research in the area of artificial sexualized stimuli (e.g., voice assistants, Szczuka, 2022, chatbots, Banks & van Ouytsel, 2020 or robots, Dubé, Williams, et al., 2022), explicit evaluations consistently showed that humans were preferred, or at least that shortcomings of the technologies were recognized. However, this study adds a new perspective to this finding, as it also varies the depicted sexual behavior, which previous studies did not. Consequently, the finding suggests

that ontological class per se does not play a prominent role. Firstly, this result questions Szczuka's (2022) assumption of the human species as a gold standard for sexual stimuli. Secondly, it underlines the importance of the displayed sexual behavior within the SIIM (Szczuka et al., 2019) as an important influence to the question of whether people want to engage in a sexualized interaction with an artificial stimulus. The results suggest that non-human characters may possess a unique appeal in the realm of sexuality, particularly influenced by their exhibited behaviors. This appeal may encompass sexual practices that derive from sexual and/or societal norms. While it needs to be clarified that the model conceptualizes more around interactive technologies, it provides valid positive and negative influences on the question of whether an artificial stimulus can create sexual arousal. In this context, it might seem more realistic that 2D creations on the computer screen that are presented for sexual gratification only and do not represent a social persona with unique features such as a name, characteristics, or a back story (compared to, for instance, sexualized robots or voice assistants) do not trigger reflections on aspects such as the violation of social norm. These aspects might be more pronounced in long-term interactions with artificial entities in comparison to mere sexual gratification, especially in a non-interactive context (Szczuka & Dehnert, 2024). This is also in line with a study conducted by Banks and van Ouytsel (2020) who investigated reactions to a sexualized chatbot and found that here aspects related to ontological class mainly highlighted their lack of abilities as a problem (e.g., (In)Authenticity or (Non)Interactivity), rather than the mere fact that the bot was not another human being.

The analysis of RQ1, and therefore the interplay of ontological class and displayed behavior, however, also adds another layer to the discussion, as this preference in computer-generated SEM might be explainable by the fact that rough content was included in the calculation, which was shown to be significantly preferred in the computer-generated form by both, heterosexual male and women.

The results of RQ 1 revealed the interesting interplay between ontological class and displayed sexual behavior: for the heterosexual participants, both female and male, the computer-generated rough content was significantly preferred over the rough content showing humans.

The context of the study is more similar to a cautious, reflective moment participant had compared to the goal-oriented situation people experience when they watch pornography for the primary purpose of sexual gratification. Thus, it can be likened to the discoveries made by Antevska and Gavey (2015), as well as Taylor (2022), who revealed that the portrayal of the human situation tends to occur, if at all, during a more contemplative phase subsequent to the attainment of sexual gratification. Antevska and Gavey (2015) found that detaching the humanity from actors was especially prominent for rougher SEM and consequently would be associated with questions that "sought to problematize features such as gendered dominance/submission dynamics, sexual violence, and acts that can be read as sexually humiliating or degrading toward women" (p. 615–616). With computer-generated rough SEM, this process of detachment seems unnecessary, as there are no actors that could face the negative repressions that can occur within the production of rough SEM (Döring, 2023; Grudzen et al., 2009; Jarke, 2022; Parvez,

2006). Computer-generated rough SEM could consequently serve as an alternative to human depictions with no need for detachment or post-consumption reflections on ethical dilemmas. What is especially interesting about computer-generated SEM is that contrary to human material, in which especially women are frequently objectified, here, the material itself (besides the content that can still objectify CG women) needs to be anthropomorphized. This is also reflected by the manipulation check and the descriptive statistics in Table 1, showing that CG rough content was indeed evaluated to be rough, meaning something that is inherently connected to human qualities as Döring (2023) describes rough sex practices to be associated with “Control or dominance (e.g. holding, restraining) and with pain (e.g. hitting, biting)” (p. 103). CG depictions, therefore, seem to activate some form of human-like evaluation processes but still being rated to be differently based on the presented sexual behavior. Qualitative future research needs to address whether this interpretation holds true and whether these are cautious reasonings.

The results give reasons to reflect differently about an argument that is frequently discussed the other way around in the realm of digitalized sexuality: humans might not generally prefer sexualized humans based on their familiarity and shared species (Szczuka & Krämer, 2017), but also use CG material that depicts scenes that could be associated with negative repressions towards humans as a substitute to prevent their own species from harm.

Interestingly the results are in line with results from a qualitative study by Forster and Shaughnessy (2024), who found that participants explicitly expressed the protection mechanism as a potential benefit in the consumption of computer-generated pornography. The authors conclude that CG material “could offer sex workers a creative outlet free from potential exploitation or abuse.” (p. 7). The combined results suggest that this protection mechanism is a potential benefit of the technology. However, it is essential to investigate whether this remains valid when consumers are in a state of sexual arousal and, therefore, less reflective.

It needs to be addressed that a gender effect could be found; heterosexual women preferred the human material in the gentle condition, while this significant difference was not to be found within heterosexual males. This is, however, completely in line with a study done by Parvez (2006), who did a qualitative study on how males and females differently enjoy pornography. One recurring theme was that females put an emphasis on authenticity: “Most of the women initiated discourse about their dislike of fake bodies, fake plots, and fake pleasure.” (p. 617). One significant discovery within this study was the importance to female consumers of perceiving whether the portrayed woman derived enjoyment from the depicted scenario. In regard to the findings of the present study, one could argue that this is not the case with computer-generated images, which consequently makes this kind of material less attractive to women.

Regarding participants identifying as non-heterosexual, the descriptives (see Table 1) reveal the same pattern as with the heterosexual participants: within the gentle content, humans are preferred over computer-generated content, while this changes for the rough scenes. There is however not a consistent significant difference within this pattern, compared to heterosexual individuals. Interestingly, non-heterosexual participants indicated higher means compared to heterosexual individu-

als in all categories except for the computer-generated rough sex scenes, which may suggest an overarchingly higher interest in sexual material. This may also have to do with the fact that the website presented was tailored to the indicated sexual preferences of the participants and the fact that only matching material was presented, other than on mainstream platforms. However, more specific research needs to be done to sufficiently address whether there is a systematic and theory-related difference in the reaction to computer-generated or human SEM in relation to the depicted sexual behavior.

#### 4.1 Implications

The results are the first to address the question about the role that humanity plays in the interest in SEM. The data indicates that within rough content, there might be a chance to accept CG substitutes for a dilemma free consumption. Further research needs to address: are the results grounded in good intentions, or does this result reflect on a cautious decision to choose arousing, but less pain-associated content?

Nevertheless, the study underlines that the depicted sexual behavior heavily influences the acceptance of artificially created content and that future studies in the realm of how digitalized intimacy should consider this as an important variable of influence. Furthermore, it challenges the assumption that humans are the “gold standard” for sexual satisfaction. However, this raises new questions, particularly in an era of digitalization where video-generative AI has the capability to generate videos upon simple commands (such as SORA, a text-to-video generator developed by OpenAI). Given the abundance of training data from major pornography platforms, a robust training database can be easily established. The study’s findings suggest that, at least for women, there is a preference for human actors in gentler sexual content. However, what implications does this have for the future of pornography, considering the data indicates no effect of ontological class in preferences for gentle material among heterosexual males and non-heterosexual individuals?

In terms of the discussed reflex to prevent actors from harm, it is important to mention that there is research that demonstrates that there are performers who enjoy working on pornographic scenes (including the production of rough material) and consider themselves and their work as self-determined (Jarke, 2022; cf. Parvez, 2006), there is, however, also research which demonstrates that especially rough content can be associated with intense physical experiences.

Future research needs to address these raised questions by implementing appropriate measures, meaning investigating both explicit (e.g., self-report or interviews) and indirect reactions (e.g., sexual arousal). This study serves as a preliminary investigation, preceding an in-depth eye-tracking study that explores visual behavior towards gentle and rough CG and human SEM.

In general, the acceptance of computer-generated rough SEM may also trigger the old media-psychological question of media effects and violence, as especially CG material can show more extreme sexual practices as the production is not limited to any real-world conditions (Forster & Shaughnessy, 2024; Saunders, 2019).

This, in turn, raises additional interdisciplinary inquiries, such as legal considerations (e.g., for depictions that are meant to demonstrate rape) regarding whether or how the production of such material should be restricted. It needs moreover be kept in mind, that CG content can face similar criticism compared to SEM depicting humans, such as the danger of reproducing sexist stereotypes.

However, it is important to also underline the potential of CG Rough SEM. Future studies should explore the potential for computer-generated SEM to allow users to act out fantasies that might otherwise be associated with undesirable or negative consequences for the individuals involved.

## 4.2 Limitation

The main limitation is also a strength of the study; it is a self-report study that might be biased by more cautious processes, ranging from mentioned reflections about the working conditions and the potentially associated pain. It could, therefore, also be affected by mechanisms associated with social desirability and the wish to adhere to sexual and social norms. Research has, however, already shown that the comparison between explicit and implicit measures can be worthwhile, as automatic reactions might result in different results compared to self-report (Szczuka & Krämer, 2017), which, in the end, provides a more holistic understanding of topics within the realm of digitalized sexuality. An eye-tracking study was already conducted with the same material to get a deeper understanding of visual attention processes.

Moreover, it needs to be stated that the sample of homosexual individuals might not be sufficiently large to detect smaller effects. However, as we found it important to include the subsample composed of individuals who do not identify as exclusively heterosexual, the decision was made to still report the calculations. Table 1 also offers a summary of numbers that may serve as inspiration for future research, with a particular emphasis on non-heterosexual literature and samples.

This study is the first to empirically investigate preferences in computer-generated SEM in conjunction with depicted behaviors. Previous research has suggested that various personality traits can explain differences in preferences for certain types of SEM. Specifically, studies have indicated that traits such as openness, novelty seeking, and sexual sensation seeking are associated with a greater propensity for rougher content (Burch & Salmon, 2021; Gerymski, 2017) and non-human material (Dubé, Santaguida, et al., 2022). Future research should, therefore, aim to investigate the predictive power of these personality traits in determining preferences for different types of SEM.

## 5. Conclusion

Technological advancements enable the exploration and expansion of sexuality, with both humans and artificial entities serving as stimuli for sexual satisfaction. Although previous studies focusing on ontological class (i.e., human versus artificial stimuli) highlighted humans as the “gold standard of sexuality” (Szczuka, 2022), the current study emphasizes the significance of the depicted sexual beha-

viator. A key finding of the study is that heterosexual individuals show a preference for computer-generated rough SEM over material featuring humans. This phenomenon may align with research suggesting that people often dissociate the humanity of actors, particularly in contexts involving rougher SEM. The empirical study highlights the potential of rough CG SEM to serve as an appropriate extension to rough SEM depicting humans and raises important questions about the role of humanity within these materials

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## Conflicts of interest/competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## Availability of data and material

<https://osf.io/k76yj/>

## Code availability

<https://osf.io/k76yj/>

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