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**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 over-predict 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<br><i>n</i> (%) | Females<br><i>n</i> (%) | Gender<br>Unknown<br><i>n</i> (%) | Total<br><i>n</i> (%) |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Gender / Sex<br>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 /<br>Ethnicity        |                       |                         |                                   |                       |
| Black / African<br>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 /<br>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-<br>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<br>Status     |                       |                         |                                   |                       |
| Dating several<br>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<br><i>n</i> = 186<br>[ <i>n</i> = 97] | Women<br><i>n</i> = 162<br>[ <i>n</i> = 94] | Men<br><i>n</i> = 99<br>[ <i>n</i> = 97] | Women<br><i>n</i> = 105<br>[ <i>n</i> = 94] | Overall<br><i>N</i> = 367 |
| Any mention of Gender                        | 77.42%<br>[80.41%]                        | 85.19%<br>[85.11%]                          | 65.67%<br>[65.98%]                       | 66.67%<br>[60.64%]                          | 83.92%                    |
| One Male and One Female Performer            | 46.24%<br>[51.55%]                        | 49.38%<br>[47.87%]                          | 45.45%<br>[45.36%]                       | 42.86%<br>[43.62%]                          | 55.59%                    |
| Female Performer(s)                          | 31.18%<br>[28.87%]                        | 41.98%<br>[38.30%]                          | 26.26%<br>[25.77%]                       | 24.76%<br>[25.53%]                          | 40.33%                    |
| One Female and Multiple Male Performers      | 11.29%<br>[13.40%]                        | 13.58%<br>[15.96%]                          | 10.10%<br>[10.31%]                       | 4.76%<br>[5.32%]                            | 13.90%                    |
| Multiple Male and Multiple Female Performers | 10.75%<br>[12.37%]                        | 11.73%<br>[11.70%]                          | 6.06%<br>[7.22%]                         | 11.42%<br>[6.38%]                           | 12.53%                    |
| One Male and Multiple Female Performers      | 9.68%<br>[14.43%]                         | 5.56%<br>[3.19%]                            | 3.23%<br>[6.19%]                         | 6.17%<br>[10.64%]                           | 11.44%                    |
| Male Performer(s)                            | 1.61%<br>[2.06%]                          | 13.58%<br>[14.89%]                          | 3.03%<br>[3.09%]                         | 6.67%<br>[7.45%]                            | 8.17%                     |
| Any Mention of Diverse Genders               | 3.23%<br>[4.12%]                          | 1.23%<br>[0.00%]                            | 1.01%<br>[1.03%]                         | 0.95%<br>[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)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 162)<br>[n = 94] | Men (n = 99)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 105)<br>[n = 94] |                   |
| Any Mention of Sexual Behaviors | 75.81%<br>[79.38%]        | 75.30%<br>[77.66%]          | 58.59%<br>[59.79%]       | 64.76%<br>[67.02%]          | 76.57%            |
| Unspecified Sexual Behavior     | 36.56%<br>[43.30%]        | 40.74%<br>[41.49%]          | 28.28%<br>[28.87%]       | 36.19%<br>[39.36%]          | 43.32%            |
| Oral Sex                        | 26.34%<br>[32.99%]        | 20.99%<br>[20.21%]          | 21.21%<br>[21.65%]       | 20.95%<br>[19.15%]          | 26.43%            |
| Vaginal Sex                     | 18.82%<br>[21.65%]        | 22.22%<br>[21.28%]          | 18.18%<br>[18.56%]       | 19.05%<br>[18.09%]          | 23.16%            |
| Anal Sex                        | 19.35%<br>[22.68%]        | 11.11%<br>[9.57%]           | 13.03%<br>[13.40%]       | 8.57%<br>[8.51%]            | 17.71%            |
| Other Sexual Acts               | 6.45%<br>[6.19%]          | 17.28%<br>[15.96%]          | 9.09%<br>[9.28%]         | 11.43%<br>[11.70%]          | 14.99%            |
| Masturbation                    | 10.22%<br>[9.28%]         | 4.94%<br>[5.32%]            | 2.02%<br>[2.06%]         | 1.90%<br>[2.13%]            | 8.17%             |
| Orgasm / Ejaculation            | 7.53%<br>[8.25%]          | 6.17%<br>[8.51%]            | 5.05%<br>[5.15%]         | 1.90%<br>[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)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 162)<br>[n = 94] | Men (n = 99)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 105)<br>[n = 94] |                   |
| Any Mention of the Number of Performers | 59.68%<br>[60.82%]        | 61.73%<br>[59.57%]          | 54.55%<br>[55.67%]       | 57.14%<br>[57.45%]          | 67.30%            |
| Couples                                 | 39.25%<br>[37.11%]        | 43.21%<br>[37.23%]          | 40.40%<br>[41.23%]       | 38.10%<br>[37.23%]          | 48.77%            |
| Group / Orgy                            | 15.59%<br>[22.68%]        | 16.05%<br>[22.34%]          | 13.13%<br>[13.40%]       | 12.38%<br>[12.77%]          | 17.71%            |
| Threesomes                              | 11.29%<br>[16.49%]        | 12.96%<br>[11.70%]          | 10.10%<br>[10.31%]       | 17.14%<br>[15.96]           | 17.16%            |
| Solitary Performers                     | 10.75%<br>[8.25%]         | 6.17%<br>[5.32%]            | 3.03%<br>[3.09%]         | 2.86%<br>[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)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 162)<br>[n = 94] | Men (n = 99)<br>[n = 97] | Women (n = 105)<br>[n = 94] |                   |
| BDSM and Rough Sex                   | 11.29%<br>[14.43%]        | 28.40%<br>[31.91%]          | 19.19%<br>[19.59%]       | 18.10%<br>[20.12%]          | 22.62%            |
| Media Type                           | 10.22%<br>[11.34%]        | 9.88%<br>[10.63%]           | 17.17%<br>[16.49%]       | 15.24%<br>[17.02%]          | 16.62%            |
| Narrative and Roleplay               | 11.29%<br>[11.34%]        | 15.43%<br>[17.02%]          | 15.15%<br>[13.40%]       | 7.62%<br>[8.51%]            | 16.62%            |
| Amateur or Professional              | 8.60%<br>[12.37%]         | 2.47%<br>[3.19%]            | 5.05%<br>[4.12%]         | 5.71%<br>[6.38%]            | 7.08%             |
| Age                                  | 8.60%<br>[7.22%]          | 2.47%<br>[4.26%]            | 3.03%<br>[3.09%]         | 1.90%<br>[2.13%]            | 5.99%             |
| Other Kinks and Fetishes             | 4.30%<br>[4.12%]          | 6.17%<br>[7.45%]            | 2.02%<br>[2.06%]         | 4.76%<br>[5.32%]            | 5.72%             |
| Body Attributes                      | 6.99%<br>[8.25%]          | 0.62%<br>[1.06%]            | 5.05%<br>[5.15%]         | 2.86%<br>[3.19%]            | 5.72%             |
| Force (Non) Consent and Exploitation | 3.23%<br>[4.12%]          | 6.17%<br>[8.51%]            | 3.03%<br>[3.09%]         | 2.86%<br>[3.19%]            | 5.45%             |
| Location                             | 1.61%<br>[2.1%]           | 4.32%<br>[5.32%]            | 2.02%<br>[2.1%]          | 3.81%<br>[4.26%]            | 3.81%             |
| Race / Ethnicity                     | 2.15%<br>[4.12%]          | 0.62%<br>[0.00%]            | 4.04%<br>[4.12%]         | 0.95%<br>[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 pornographic 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.

## Funding

This research was funded by an Insight Grant (PIs: Dr. W. Fisher & Dr. L. Campbell) provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (435-2013-1077).

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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...”