

An exploration of Canadian young men's experience of pornography consumption

Shaofan Bu

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

July, 2023

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselling Psychology

© Shaofan Bu, 2023

Abstract.....	3
Résumé.....	4
Acknowledgement.....	5
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	7
Background and Objectives.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Epistemological Assumptions.....	11
Theoretical Frameworks.....	15
Quantitative Findings on Adolescent Pornography Use.....	19
Qualitative Findings on Adolescent Pornography Use.....	29
Limitations of the Literature on Pornography.....	35
Research Questions.....	37
CHAPTER THREE: METHEDOLOGY.....	38
Epistemological Framework.....	38
Research Method.....	41
Methodological Coherence.....	43
Participants.....	44
Materials.....	45
Procedure.....	46
Trustworthiness and Rigour.....	48
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	52
Participant Definitions of Pornography.....	52
Early Education on Sex, Sexuality, and Pornography.....	53
Early Experiences of Pornography Viewing.....	56
Evaluation of Pornography During Early Consumption.....	62
Pornography Informed Early Beliefs About Sex and Relationships.....	64
Current Reflections on Porn Portrayals.....	81
Reflecting on the Influence and Impact of Pornography.....	85
Reflecting on the Relationship with Pornography Use.....	90
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	97
Journey Alone in the Development as Sexual Beings.....	97

Young People are Meaning-making Agents.....	102
Changes in Pornography Engagement Across Time.....	103
Pornography Consumption and Gender Performance.....	107
Contribution to Original Knowledge.....	110
Implications for Practice.....	111
Limitations	113
Future Research	114
REFERENCES.....	115
Appendix A	130
Appendix B.....	131
Appendix C	133
Appendix D	134
Appendix E.....	136
Appendix F	138
Appendix G	146

Abstract

With the increasing availability of internet access and internet-enabled devices, internet pornography has become easily accessible and widely available. As a growing number of youths consume pornography, research has steadily increased to examine the effects of consumption in recent years. Extant studies have primarily focused on the harmful effects of pornography consumption using quantitative measures. Young men's experiences with pornography consumption and their internal processes as consumers remain poorly understood. This study aimed to develop insights into how young men select, interpret, and make use of pornography. This study employed a feminist social constructionism and media practice model as its epistemology and hermeneutic phenomenology as its methodology. Fifteen male-identifying participants aged 18-25 with experience in pornography consumption were recruited. The young men described their pornography experience as way to claim agency in their sexual development in the absence of needed information from schools and families. As well, they described their consumption as being intimately connected to the development and expression of their gender and sexuality. The findings challenge risk-based discourse about pornography and young people and support a reconceptualization of the ways institutions can support young people in their sexual development.

Keywords: pornography, sexually explicit internet materials, young adults, Canada

Résumé

Avec la disponibilité croissante de l'accès à Internet et des appareils compatibles avec Internet, la pornographie sur Internet est devenue facilement accessible et largement disponible. Avec l'augmentation du nombre de jeunes consommant de la pornographie, les recherches se sont régulièrement multipliées pour examiner les effets de la consommation au cours des dernières années. Les études existantes se sont principalement concentrées sur les effets nocifs de la consommation de pornographie à l'aide de mesures quantitatives. L'expérience des jeunes hommes avec la consommation de pornographie et leurs processus internes en tant que consommateurs sont mal compris. Cette étude visait à mieux comprendre comment les jeunes hommes sélectionnent, interprètent et utilisent la pornographie. Quinze participants masculins âgés de 18 à 25 ans ont été recrutés et avaient une expérience de la consommation de pornographie. Cette étude a utilisé un modèle de constructivisme social féministe et de pratiques médiatiques en tant qu'épistémologie et une phénoménologie herméneutique en tant que méthodologie. Les jeunes hommes ont décrit leur expérience de la pornographie comme un moyen de réclamer une agence dans leur développement sexuel en l'absence d'informations nécessaires de la part des écoles et des familles. De plus, ils ont décrit leur consommation comme étant intimement liée à leur genre, à leur sexualité et à leur identité. Les résultats remettent en question le discours fondé sur le risque sur la pornographie et les jeunes et soutiennent une reconceptualisation de la manière dont les institutions soutiennent les jeunes dans leur développement sexuel.

Mots-clés: consommation de pornographie, jeunes hommes, santé sexuelle, Canada

Acknowledgement

The completion of this dissertation was only possible with the contributions and support of many individuals. First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my doctoral supervisor Dr. Ada Sinacore. Your mentorship and guidance profoundly shaped my professional and personal development. I want to thank you for the tireless hours you spent with me developing ideas, deepening understandings, and questioning biases and assumptions. You were supportive and kind and challenged me in ways that influenced who I am today. I will always look back fondly at the times I spent as your student. Your contribution to my development goes beyond the academic realm. Your dedication to scholarship, teaching, and social justice will always be a source of inspiration to me.

I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Chiaki Konishi and Dr. Tara Flanagan. As my dissertation committee members, you have generously offered your time and wisdom to help me develop and carry out my research. Your insightful feedback and empathic presence made my dissertation process meaningful and rewarding. Your scholarship, professionalism, and work ethics are the standards of excellence that I strive toward. Thank you.

I am grateful and appreciative of the 15 young men who shared their intimate stories with me. This study would not have been possible without them being generous with their time and courageous in their disclosures. I treasure the experience of having worked with them. This study was also made possible by the fundings provided by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec – Société et Culture.

Next, I would like to thank all members of the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab at McGill University. Obtaining a doctorate is a long journey that is, at times, quite challenging. I am fortunate to have had the support of my wonderful lab mates in this journey. My lab mates

provided me with academic advice, a space to problem solve, and most importantly, relationships that gave me a sense of belonging and care.

I would also especially thank my family for their support. I would not be who I am today and obtain this achievement without your nurturance, patience, and love.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background and Objectives

Pornography is one of the most popular forms of online content. According to Pornhub, a pornographic website founded in Montreal Canada, there were one million hours of pornographic video uploaded and 33.5 billion visits per year to that website alone (“2018 year in review”, 2018). Moreover, the ubiquity of high-speed internet and mobile communication devices have made it possible for anyone to access the vast pornography ‘database’ anywhere, anytime, with anonymity. In the context of increased availability and accessibility to pornography, research has demonstrated that more and more young men are consuming internet pornography. According to a Canadian national study, which surveyed students in grades 7 to 11 across all Canadian provinces and territories, 41% of students have intentionally watched internet pornography and 20% of the students watched at least once a month (Steeves, 2014). Findings such as this, have spurred a great deal of research exploring the impact of pornography on consumers’ attitudes, beliefs, and sexual behaviours.

To date, studies have consistently shown that adolescents and young adults are intentionally watching pornography to learn about sexual activity and sexuality, which means that pornography is fulfilling an educational role for many young viewers (Hare, Gahagan, Jackson, & Steenbeek, 2015; Rothman, Kaczmarzsky, Burke, Jansen, & Baughman, 2015). Scholars have raised concerns because much of the pornographies available on the internet commonly contain problematic themes such as violence, male dominance, and the objectification of women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). A content analysis of internet pornography revealed that 88% of analyzed scenes contained physical aggression, 47%

contained verbal violence, and the recipients of the aggression were almost always women (Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, & Liberman, 2010). Moreover, significantly more males access pornography relative to females (Chen, Leung, Chen, & Yang, 2013; Weber, Quiring, & Daschmann, 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). In Canada, between grades 7 and 11, 40% of boys watched pornography compared to 7% of girls (Steeves, 2014).

Research efforts to date have heavily focused on identifying the harm of pornography. These research endeavors often employ cross-sectional designs and assume a stimulus-effect relationship between pornography consumption and sexual behaviors (Attwood, 2011). This stimulus-effect model, along with the limitations of cross-sectional designs, often leads to correlational data that is difficult to contextualize. More importantly, the aforementioned model reduces the complex relationship between the audience and media to a unidirectional process of exposure and harm (Attwood, 2002). There is a paucity of understanding of young people's perspective on pornography. Specifically, their meaning-making process and the ways in which their specific contexts shape their engagement with pornography are not well understood. The aim of this study is to contextually examine young men's experience of pornography consumption. Specifically, how they select, make use of, and interpret pornography as well as the impact on their sexual well-being and relationships.

Definition of Terms

Prior to presenting the review of the literature, a series of relevant terms are first defined. These terms are: (a) pornography, (b) adolescents and young adults, (c) biological sex and gender.

Pornography. The word *pornography* is derived from Greek words of *porni* (prostitute) and *graphein* (to write), which originally referred to depictions of the lives of prostitutes (Jekins,

2017). Today, pornography has become a colloquial term used to describe a wide range of things, from Roman frescoes, to parts of Shakespeare's works, and hardcore porn on the internet (Attwood, 2002). Therefore, prior to examining empirical research on pornography, it is important to first define what it is.

In the empirical literature, pornography is commonly defined as material that "is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal" (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). While this definition is effective in capturing key characteristics of pornography, it is also a gross simplification of a complex media category. Pornography is a rich set of media texts that have many categories and genres that can be starkly different from one another (Tibbals, 2014). Therefore, in order to fully understand what pornography is, an examination of its categories, genres, and subgenres is needed.

According to Wosick (2015), pornography is often categorized by the explicitness of its content, presence or absence of plot, and the degree of objectification of the performers. In North American and European contexts, pornography is often sorted in to three categories: erotica, softcore, and hardcore. Erotica is often seen as suggestive, but not explicit. Rather than depicting explicit sexual intercourse or sexual organs, erotica often presents a stylized presentation of sexuality. Softcore porn is more explicit than erotica as it shows nudity and more explicit sexual situations, but genitalia and sexual intercourse are suggested, but not explicitly shown. Moreover, softcore porn usually contains some plot or narrative. Hardcore porn explicitly depicts nudity, genitalia, and sexual intercourse, contains little or no plot, and sometimes features violence and aggression. Due to its explicit nature, hardcore pornography is often the focus of research and public debate. In addition to these main categories of pornography, there are also hundreds of genres, subgenres, and niches that categorize types of sexual acts, performers'

characteristics (e.g., race, body-type, age), fetishes, sexual orientations, genders, and number of performers. These genres include amateur, interracial, gay/lesbian, trans, fetish, and feminist, to name a few (Woscik, 2015).

Rather than categorizing pornography based on content, genre, and intended audiences, Vandembosch (2015) divided pornography into three thematic categories: (a) affection; (b) dominance; and (c) violence. Affection-themed pornography depicts sexual activities where performers exhibit intimacy and affection toward each other (Vandembosch, 2015). It is typically characterized by the absence of violent or degrading acts (Bridges et al., 2010). Dominance-themed pornography portrays one sexual partner imposing their wish on the other with disregard for other's feelings (Cowan & Dunn, 1994). Violence-themed pornography portrays physical violence or forced sexual activities (Barron & Kimmel, 2000). This type of pornography is quite common in hardcore pornography, with 40% of the scenes depicting some kind of physical violence (Barron & Kimmel, 2000).

In sum, the different categories, themes, and genres suggest that pornography is not monolithic, but varied and multi-dimensional. While all pornographies contain sexual content with the intended purpose of sexual arousal, they differ by the degree of explicit content, theme, genre, and intended audience. In the literature, pornography is often used as a blanket term to represent all materials that are sexually explicit which makes cross-study comparisons difficult. In this document, pornography and porn are used interchangeably and refer to sexually explicit, hard-core materials used for the purpose of sexual arousal that is accessed via the internet in video format.

Adolescents and young adults. In this study, adolescents refer to people between the ages of 10 and 17. The lower limit is set to 10 because this is when puberty typically starts (Kail

& Cavanaugh, 2010). Young adults in this study refer to people between the ages of 18 and 25. The age range is such because many of the studies reviewed in this study recruited from university samples who are typically within this age range.

Biological sex and gender. Biological sex and gender are distinct categories. According to Johnson and Repta (2012), biological sex refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, and hormonal characteristics of a given species that is assigned at birth. Examples of biological sex categories include male, female, and intersex. Gender refers to different roles, responsibilities, limitations, and experiences provided to individuals in a given social context and is therefore performed. (Johnson & Repta, 2012). Gender as a construct includes gender identity and gender expression. Gender identity is a person's sense of being a man, woman, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. While gender expression is how those identities are expressed. Gender expressions can include outward appearances, body language, performance of gender roles, etc. A person's gender identity can be the same as their assigned sex (i.e., cis gender) or different (i.e., gender diverse). It is important to outline the conceptual difference between sex and gender as they are distinct concepts that have different implications when researching pornography.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review: (a) the prevailing epistemological assumptions in the research literature; (b) theoretical frameworks employed in the field of study; (c) quantitative findings; and (d) qualitative findings.

Epistemological Assumptions

Pornography is a polarizing subject that is often politicized. Heated debates about pornography unfold across moral, ideological, political, and religious lines. Despite claims of objectivity, researchers are not immune to the influence of personal values and socio-cultural

narratives about pornography (Attwood, 2012). Therefore, how pornography is framed and investigated is inevitably intertwined with personal and collective morality, ideology, and politics.

In their book *Pornography*, Linz and Malamuth (1993) summarized three ideological and moralistic positions that dominate the discussion about pornography. They are: (a) conservative/moralistic; (b) liberal; and (c) feminist. Each position inherently contains assumptions about the nature of pornography, hypotheses about the effects of pornography, and judgments about its cultural value. These assumptions and hypotheses in turn influence how research on pornography is framed and conducted.

Conservative and Moralistic Position

According to Linz and Malamuth (1993), the conservative/moralistic position is an authoritarian stance which views ‘truth’ as absolute rather than relative. This moralistic position is informed by the assumption that life is a struggle between selfish instincts, and self-discipline and communal values. As such, materials that publicly depict sexual activities are seen to encourage self-indulgence and promiscuity which undermines moral values. Therefore, under these assumptions, pornography is viewed not only as harmful, but morally wrong. This moralistic position sets up a binary discussion of pornography as either ‘good or bad’. Furthermore, since public depiction of sexual activities is deemed harmful, all types of pornographies would be considered the same because they all depict commodified sex. Scientific inquiry guided by these assumptions may focus on the causal relationship between pornography use and ill-effects such as sexual aggression, habituation to pornography, and promiscuity.

Liberal Position

Lintz and Malamuth (1993) posited that liberal stance on pornography is an extension of libertarian doctrine which assumes that people are rational beings who can individually make moral judgments and regulate their own behaviours. Furthermore, the liberal stance asserts that we are not only rational beings, but also sexual beings. Given that we are sexual beings with the capacity for rationality, the liberal stance does not assume an inherent danger in pornography, but rather considers it a natural expression of human sexuality. The liberal camp adopts the position that pornography can be socially beneficial as it is a vehicle to share ideas about gender, sex, and intimate relationships (Hald, Seaman, & Linz, 2014).

The liberal stance, therefore, does not judge pornography on a binary scale of ‘good or bad’, but highlights the role of rational consumers in interpreting messages in pornography. Studies that examine pornography under this framework may explore individual and group differences in the experience of pornography use, predispositions and predictors of pornography use, and the potential benefits of pornography (Linz & Malamuth, 1993).

Feminist Position

Linz and Malamuth (1993) outlined a third position—feminist. The feminist position does not adopt a moralistic stance, but rather a political one. The feminist position asserts that those with power in society have sway over what is disseminated as ‘truths’ or mainstream social narratives. These ‘truths’ in turn help maintain status quos, thus further solidifying the positions of those in power (Dworkin, 1974). Because power is unequally distributed in most societies, with heterosexual males holding relatively more power, the social narrative is centered around them. The feminist position, therefore, is that pornography is a tool to perpetuate male notions of what is an appropriate sexual relationship and sexuality (Linz & Malamuth, 1993). Feminist writers critiqued that women in pornography are portrayed as sex objects who enjoy violence and

rape and that women are reduced to dehumanized body parts for the pleasure of men (Dworkin, 2000). This feminist position sees pornography as not only a reflection of the power imbalance and oppression of women, but also a medium which promotes violence against them (Scott, 1991, as cited in Hald et al., 2014). From this perspective, pornography is conceptualized as a dangerous vehicle that needs to be restricted through political and legislative means. Research stemming from this standpoint may focus on establishing the causal relationships between pornography viewing and effects such as sexual aggression, sexist attitudes, rape myths, desensitization to violence, and discrimination (Linz & Malamuth, 1993).

However, this perspective does not represent the whole spectrum of feminist positions. Another position in the feminist camp identifies with the ‘anti-censorship’ or ‘pro-sex’ messages (McElroy, 1997). While these scholars agree that violence in pornography is problematic, they don’t agree with the notion that sexually explicit material is inherently harmful. Feminist writers such as McElroy (1997), argued that pornography is an expression of women’s’ sexual agency and a form of freedom of speech applied to the sexual realm. She went on to assert that pornography allows people to explore a world of sexual possibilities and break stereotypes about sex, so that each person can interpret sex individually (McElroy, 1997).

In sum, the discussion about pornography is inevitably imbued with ideologies, morals, and politics which determine how pornography is defined and conceptualized. Under different assumptions, pornography can be seen as morally wrong and harmful, a natural expression of sexuality, or a medium that promotes misogyny and violence toward women. Consequently, these epistemological assumptions influence the types of hypotheses and theoretical approaches employed to conduct research on pornography.

Theoretical Frameworks

This section reviews the types of theoretical framework commonly employed in research on pornography consumption. Surprisingly, over 80% of the studies analyzed did not explicitly state the use of any theoretical frameworks. The studies that presented theoretical frameworks used theories such as sexual script theory, social learning theory, cultivation theory, and the media practice model. This list of theories are similar to the ones identified in Hald et al.'s (2014) review of the field of pornography research.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) is one of the most influential psychological theories in the field of pornography research. The theory posits that learning occurs through vicarious observations of either reward or punishment following behaviours (Bandura, 1986). According to this theory, a key mechanism of learning is the visual observation of reward or punishment as a consequence of behaviours. One might be inclined to imitate a behaviour if a reward was observed and less likely to do so if punishment was observed. Under the premise of this theory, pornography serves as a learning environment where behaviours are learned vicariously through the actors and performers (Hald et al., 2014). For example, in some forms of pornography, women are shown to enjoy physical violence. The violent behaviour is shown to be rewarded by signs of enjoyment by the woman. The social learning theory is not solely about behavioural learning. Stereotypes, attitudes, and gender roles are also assumed to be acquired through this mechanism. (Hald et al., 2014).

Sexual Script Theory

Drawing from the social learning theory, Gagnon and Simon (1973) proposed the sexual script theory which is a psychological theory that is specific to sexuality. Sexual script refers to a

set of beliefs and attitudes about what sex is, how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do in those situations (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). Much like scripts used by actors, sexual scripts provide a manual about how to behave as sexual beings. Pornography has been theorized to influence the script construction as it offers a complete set of performance scripts from portraying what sex is, when a situation is considered sexual, and what to do during sex (Hald, et al., 2014).

Conditioning Theory

According to Hald et al. (2014), conditioning theory is another prominent framework that commonly informs research on pornography. This theory is based on the principles of classical and operant conditioning. For example, through classical conditioning, pornography viewing becomes paired with feelings of sexual arousal and orgasm. Pornography then becomes a conditioned stimulus that automatically elicits feelings of sexual arousal, thus increasing the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated. Operant conditioning is also proposed to be at work here. Pornography acts as the stimulus which is reinforced with the reward of sexual arousal and/or orgasm. Over time, this reinforcement increases the likelihood of future pornography consumption. Since frequent exposure to similar stimuli leads to a decrease in the strength of response, scholars such as Cameron and Frazer (2000) have theorized that pornography viewing overtime may lead to the consumption of more ‘intense’ forms of pornography. That is, sexual arousal may be initially achieved by relatively mild forms of pornography, but as habits form, stronger stimuli are required to achieve the same initial response creating a ‘slippery slope’ toward more problematic forms of pornography (Cameron & Frazer, 2000).

Cultivation Theory

In addition to the psychological theories that are commonly employed in pornography research, theories from media studies have also been influential. Cultivation theory, often used in media studies, asserts that consistent exposure to media, particularly biased or one-sided media influence our schemas and perceptions of reality. Messages received from media compete with and may overrule messages from other socializing agents such as schools and families (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Overtime, media exposure shapes the perceptions of reality. Consumers then adopt beliefs and attitudes about the world consistent with those perceptions further solidifying them. Along this line of reasoning, pornography viewing is theorized to lead people to ‘cultivating’ or adopting beliefs about sex and intimate relationships that is consistent with what’s portrayed in pornography (Doornwaard, Bickham, Rich, ter Bogt, & van den Eijnden, 2015).

Media Practice Model

So far, the theories presented share the implicit assumption that there is a unidirectional process of pornography consumption leading to predictable effects or behaviours. Consequently, these perspectives do not frame the audience as active participants with unique backgrounds and meaning making capacities. However, consumers’ backgrounds and identities are crucial determinant of how media messages are selected and interpreted (Brown & Schulze, 1990; Ward, Gorvine, & Cytron-Walker, 2002). In some studies, bi-directional models were employed to account for this short-coming. The Media Practice Model (Brown, 2000) is an example of a bi-directional conceptualization. At the core of the media practice model is the reciprocal relationship between consumers and media (Brown, 2000). This model has three main tenets. First, consumers actively select and interpret what they view. Second, rather than a linear process of media affecting the passive consumer, the model assumes that there is a reciprocal

relationship. Third, what consumers choose to watch and how they interpret the material is influenced by identities such as gender, race, and age (Brown, 2000).

In sum, several psychological and media studies theories have been employed to study pornography use. While these theories differ in the hypothesized mechanism of pornography's influence, many share similar core assumptions. For example, social learning theory, conditioning theory, and sexual script theory assume a unidirectional relationship between pornography and effects. That is, pornography is the input stimulus which produces predictable outcomes in the viewers. In this way, unidirectional modelling reduces a complex media text, such as pornography, into a unidimensional 'stimulus' and simplifies complex interactions between viewers and pornography to an 'exposure-effect' relationship. Also, this unidirectional model frames viewers as passive rather than active meaning-making participants. As such, contextual factors such as age, gender, biological sex, and sexual orientation are not accounted for in studies using these frameworks.

In contrast, bi-directional theories such as the Media Practice Model, assumes a reciprocal relationship wherein participants actively choose and interpret what they watch, which subsequently changes their relationship with the consumed media (Brown, 2000). Moreover, bidirectional models emphasize contextual factors such as age, gender, and sexual orientation because these models recognize that the viewers' interaction with pornography is very much informed by their unique backgrounds. As such, bi-directional modeling not only frames pornography as a meaningful media text, but also conceptualizes the viewers as active meaning-making agents.

This review found that a preponderance of studies adopted a unidirectional model. This type of 'exposure-effect' outlook demonstrates a limited understanding of pornography as a rich

media category and de-emphasizes viewers as discerning individuals with unique identities. Further, unidirectional frameworks possibly reflect a conservative and moralistic stance which conceptualizes pornography as a single category of obscene and harmful content. When pornography is fundamentally assumed to be an undifferentiated category of harmful content, the methodological framework adopted in research, by extension, will also frame pornography as a 'stimulus' and seek to identify the ill effects that it produces. As such, the epistemological assumptions are intertwined with methodological frameworks which subsequently influence the types of research designs and findings.

Quantitative Findings on Adolescent Pornography Use

The critique of the quantitative literature was carried out according to the framework outlined by Coughlan, Cronin, and Ryan (2007). While research on young people's use of pornography is still in its nascent stage, there has been a proliferation of studies beginning around 2005 with about 65 articles published in the subsequent decade (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Across the studies reviewed, most used a cross-sectional design. Furthermore, most of the studies employed self-administered surveys about pornography use, with others using face-to-face administered surveys or telephone surveys. To date, quantitative studies have focused on the following areas: (a) prevalence of pornography use; (b) factors associated with pornography use; (c) pornography use and sexual attitudes; (d) pornography use and sexual behaviours; and (e) pornography use and social development.

Prevalence of Pornography Consumption

Prevalence rates of pornography viewing vary widely between studies. In the U.S., Ybarra and Mitchell (2005) conducted a national survey and found that 8% of those ages 10 to 14 and 20% of those between the ages of 14 to 17 intentionally watched pornography. This study

also found that males were significantly more likely to view pornography than females. However, rates are vastly different in another U.S. study. Sabina, Wolak, and Finkelhor (2008) reported that 93% of males and 62% of female undergraduate students retrospectively reported to have viewed pornography before the age of 18. In Canada, a national survey of students between grades seven to 11 revealed that 41% have intentionally watched pornography; and that boys are more likely to watch pornography than girls (40% vs 7%) (Steeves, 2014). International studies also revealed a wide range of prevalence rates. For example, in Taiwan, Chen et al. (2013) reported that 74% of males and 26% of females between grade 10 to 12 intentionally watched pornography.

The wide range of prevalence rates may be due to several factors such as varied time frame of exposure (e.g., lifetime, past six months), different age ranges of participants, and cultural differences. One of the most salient factors of wide differences in consumption rates is inconsistent definitions of pornography. A large variety of terminologies were found in the literature including *sexually-explicit media* (Brown & L'Engle, 2009), *X-rated material* (Ybarra et al., 2011), *sexually-explicit websites* (Beyens, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015), *online pornography* (Baker, 2016) and *sexually-explicit internet material* (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). Some definitions focused on the explicit content of the material. For example, Peter and Valkenburg (2016) defined pornography as “videos and pictures [that] typically depict sexual activities, such as masturbation and oral sex, as well as vaginal and anal penetration, in an unconcealed way, often with a close-up on genital” (p. 358). Other definitions emphasized the intended purpose of the material—to sexually arouse (McManus, 1984). Some studies had very specific definitions of pornography based on the presence of violent and degrading material (Romito & Beltramini, 2015), while other studies had broad conceptualizations that ranged from

erotica to hardcore pornography (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). Surprisingly, many studies did not explicitly define pornography at all (Beyens et al., 2015; Bleakley, Hennessy, Fishbein, & Jordan, 2008; Spišák, 2016). Due to the lack of nuance in defining pornography the prevalence rates vary widely across studies. Despite these varied prevalence rates, the literature consistently shows that a large percentage of adolescents and young adults are watching some type of pornography.

The high prevalence of pornography use among young people raises the question of what types of pornographic content they are watching. The data are quite limited in this regard as most studies did not nuance the types of images that adolescents were viewing. A now dated U.S. study surveyed undergraduates on what they've watched before they turned 18 and found that males and females respectively have watched heterosexual intercourse (94%, 74%), same-sex intercourse (69%, 55%), sexual activity involving more than two people (83%, 57%), sexual acts between people and animals (32%, 18%), rape or sexual violence (18%, 10%), and sexual pictures of children (15%, 9%) (Sabina et al., 2008). This finding demonstrates that young people are not only watching a wide variety of pornographic materials, but they also accessing problematic content.

In sum, research showed that a large percentage of adolescents and young people worldwide are viewing some type of pornography. However, prevalence rates vastly vary, in part, due to poor definitions of pornography. Also due to this poor operationalization, we have very little knowledge about the specific type of pornography adolescents are viewing. Based on our limited understanding, adolescents and young adults are viewing a wide variety of pornography including problematic and illegal content.

Factors Associated with Pornography Viewing

Factors associated with pornography viewing refer to demographic and personality characteristics of individuals that have been found to be associated with pornography viewing. These factors include biological sex, gender, age, and social development.

Sex and Gender. A consistent finding in the literature is that there are marked differences in pornography viewing behaviours between boys and girls. Relative to girls, boys access pornography in higher number (Flood, 2007; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007), access more frequently (Steeves, 2014), more likely to have viewed at an earlier age, and more likely to view more extreme images such as rape or child porn (Sabina et al., 2008). While a preponderance of studies emphasized biological sex differences in pornography use, little attention was paid to gender. This review found only one study that attended to gender and pornography use. A Dutch longitudinal study found that ‘hypermasculinity’ (i.e. endorsement of male dominance) and ‘hyperfemininity’ (i.e. endorsement of submission, objectification, and importance of physical appearance) predicted the use of violence-themed pornography (Vandenbosch, 2015). In terms of the relationship between sexual orientation and pornography use, the evidence is scant. One Dutch study (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011) and a Swiss study (Luder et al., 2011) found that adolescents who are not exclusively attracted to the opposite sex (attracted to the same sex or both sexes) reported watching more pornography than those who are exclusively attracted to the opposite sex.

Age and Development. Regarding age and its association with pornography use, the findings are inconsistent. While some studies found that pornography use increased with age (Sevcikova & Daneback, 2014; Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), others did not find such increase (Mesch, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). However, a recent study found that younger adolescents are more likely to view affectionate-themed pornography while older

adolescents are more likely to view dominance-themed pornography (Vandenbosch, 2015). In addition to age, pubertal maturation has been shown to be predictive of pornography use. That is, those who are more mature in their pubertal development are more likely to view pornography and do so more frequently (Beyens et al., 2015). Due to the limited number of studies that focused on developmental factors and the inconsistent findings, more studies are needed before any conclusions can be made.

Personality and Other Characteristics. Preliminary evidence suggests that characteristics such as sensation-seeking (Beyens et al., 2015; Luder et al., 2011; Sevcikova & Daneback, 2014), being less satisfied with one's life (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006), using substances (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), poor family functioning (Shek & Ma, 2013) and poor emotional bond with a care-giver (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005) are associated with more frequent use of pornography. Additionally, some evidence suggest that pornography viewers are more likely to exhibit low social integration and high social maladjustment. (Mesch, 2009; Tsitsika et al., 2009). For example, an Israeli study reported that adolescents who were measured to have higher degrees of social interaction and bonding were less likely to consume pornography than those who were measured to have lower social integration (Mesch, 2009). The same study found that as pornography consumption increased, the degree of social integration decreased and levels of aggressiveness in school increased. A Greek study similarly found that consumption of pornography was related to social maladjustment (Tsitsika et al., 2009). In an earlier U.S. study, a significant association was found between porn consumption and behavioural problems, depressive symptoms, and lesser degree of bonding with caregivers (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). Based on these findings, Peter and Valkenburg (2016) concluded that: "the typical adolescent pornography user is male, pubertally more advanced, sensation-seeker, with weak or troubled

family relations” (p.519). This conclusion is premature given that the research on predictors of pornography use is fragmented with many missing pieces. Notably, factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are often neglected. Also, such conclusions assume that young people are a monolithic group. Preliminary research have demonstrated that youths’ sexual behaviours vary greatly based on sex, gender, age, culture, sexual orientation, and religiosity (Hald, Kuyper, Adam, & de Wit, 2013). For example, in a U.S. study, Hennessy, Bleakley, Fishbein, and Jordan (2010) found that Black and Hispanic adolescents accessed pornography significantly more than White adolescents. Additionally, while White adolescents’ access increased with age, the rate of increase is significantly lower for Black and Hispanic adolescents (Hennessy, Bleakley, & Jordan, 2010).

Influence of Pornography on Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviours

In addition to prevalence and predictors of pornography use, there is a preponderance of studies that examined the impacts or influence on pornography on young people’s behaviours. This section summarizes findings on the influence of pornography use on attitudes, beliefs, and sexual behaviours of adolescents and young adults.

Sexual Attitudes and Beliefs

There is consistent evidence to suggest that pornography viewing is associated with certain sets of sexual attitudes and beliefs (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). To date, research in this area have focused on three domains: (a) permissive sexual attitudes; (b) gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs; and (c) perceived realism and utility of pornography.

Studies conducted in different countries (U.S.A., Taiwan, and the Netherlands) demonstrated that pornography viewing is associated with permissive sexual attitudes (Brown & L’Engle, 2009; Lo & Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2008). Brown

and L'Engle (2009) defined permissive sexual attitudes as positive feelings toward premarital sex, and this variable was measured using responses to items such as "sex before marriage is ok, if you are in love" (p. 137). Using longitudinal hierarchical regression, the study found that, for males, an increase in pornography viewing is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes two years later (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). This finding was confirmed by a longitudinal Dutch study which reported that higher levels of porn consumption at base line were associated with higher initial levels of permissive sexual attitudes; and increased consumption over time was associated with increase in permissive sexual attitudes (Baams et al., 2015). Studies also showed that there are potentially differences between males and females. However, these findings are inconsistent. For example, while Brown and L'Engle (2009) and Doornwaard et al. (2015) found that pornography viewing is associated with permissive sexual attitudes in boys but not in girls, Peter and Valkenburg (2010) found no such difference. It is important to qualify that permissiveness toward sex, as defined in these studies, is a relative concept that is bound with the researcher's socio-cultural contexts.

In addition to permissive sexual attitudes, research also found that pornography viewing is related to sexist and stereotypical gender-role beliefs. A Dutch study conducted by Peter and Valkenburg (2007) reported that higher consumptions of pornography increased the likelihood that both boys and girls would view women as sex objects. Beliefs about women as sex objects was defined as ideas about women that reduced them to physical appearance and body parts, and that women are objects to fulfill men's sexual desires (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). An interesting aspect of this finding was that female adolescents who consumed higher levels of pornography relative to their peers were more likely to adopt this set of beliefs than their male counterparts. This finding was supported by a U.S. longitudinal study which concluded that early exposure to

sexually explicit material predicted stereotypical gender roles for both males and females (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). Gender-role beliefs in that study were assessed using questions such as: “guys should always be ready for sex” and “it bothers me when a guy acts like a girl” (p. 137).

In addition to examining the relationship between pornography and sexual attitudes, a small number of studies also explored adolescents' attitudes toward pornography itself. Peter and Valkenburg (2010) set out to determine if consuming internet pornography would influence what they called social realism and perceived utility. Respectively, these terms referred to the extent to which pornography is seen as realistic and the extent to which pornography is viewed as informative and instructive. Using a three-wave longitudinal sample, Peter and Valkenburg (2010) found that more frequent use of sexually-explicit internet material predicted higher degrees of social realism and perceived utility. A Swedish study later supported these results by reporting that males who frequently view pornography are more likely to report positive and permissive attitudes toward it than those who view it less frequently or not at all (Svedin, Akerman, & Priebe, 2011).

Sexual Behaviours

Research on pornography and sexual behaviour have focused on the following three areas: (a) initial sexual experience; (b) risky sexual behaviours; and (c) sexual aggression. The evidence for the relationship between pornography viewing and initial sexual experience is inconsistent. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have found that frequent pornography viewing is related to a higher likelihood of having sexual intercourse (Atwood et al., 2010; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Manaf et al., 2014). For example, Atwood et al., (2010) surveyed 420 adolescents ages 13-14 and found that pornography viewing was strongly correlated with experience with sexual intercourse. However, there are studies that found no relationship

between porn viewing and initiation of sexual intercourse (Doornwaard et al., 2015; Luder et al., 2011). In regard to casual sexual experience, there is emerging evidence to suggest that it is also related to pornography viewing. A Taiwanese study and a Swedish study reported that pornography viewing is associated with more experience with casual sexual behaviour (Lo & Wei, 2005; Mattebo et al., 2014). Casual sexual behaviour in these studies ranged from holding hands and kissing (Lo & Wei, 2005) to experience with oral and anal sex (Mattebo, et al., 2014).

Regarding risky sexual behaviours, the evidence is mixed. An American study surveyed 433 adolescents who are primarily Hispanic and African-American and found that those who consumed pornography are more likely to engage in behaviours such as anal sex, sex with more than one partner, and using drugs and alcohol during sex (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). A Dutch study partially confirmed this finding when they reported that males who frequently use pornography are more likely to exhibit risky sexual behaviours (e.g., not using condoms during intercourse), but this association was not present for girls (Luder et al., 2011). More recently, a U.S. study concluded that more frequent viewing of pornography increased the likelihood of higher incidents of hooking-up (casual sex usually between uncommitted partners) and higher number of unique hook-up partners (Braithwaite, Coulson, Keddington, & Fincham, 2015). However, the findings on risky sexual behaviours and porn use are inconsistent. A cross-sectional Swiss study which surveyed 6054 adolescents found that pornography viewing is not correlated with a higher number of sexual partners or having sex before the age of 15. As well, a Dutch longitudinal study did not find any association between pornography viewing and unprotected sex (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011a).

Regarding the relationship between pornography viewing and sexual aggression the evidence is very limited. In a U.S. longitudinal study, Brown and L'Engle (2009) found that the

use of sexually explicit material including magazines, movies, and internet pornography were associated with the perpetration of sexual harassment (e.g., sexual touching of school mates without consent). Another U.S. longitudinal study identified that violent pornography use was associated with perpetration of sexual assault, but non-violent pornography was not (Ybarra et al., 2011).

In sum, there is consistent evidence to suggest that adolescents' pornography use is related to sexual attitudes and beliefs. Studies have identified associations between pornography use and permissive sexual attitudes, sexist attitudes, and less progressive gender-role beliefs. Regarding pornography viewing and sexual behaviour the evidence is often inconsistent. While some studies have demonstrated the link between pornography viewing and experience with sexual intercourse, casual sexual experience, risky sexual behaviour, and sexual aggression, many others did not. The inconsistent findings are in part due to definitional inconsistencies discussed earlier. More precise operationalization of the pornography would help produce more nuanced findings thus facilitating cross-study comparisons. Additionally, there is a lack of attention paid to mediators and confounders in the study of the relationship between pornography use and attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. That is, factors such as developmental stage, gender, and other dispositional factors needs to be consistently addressed to identify specific relationships between pornography use and outcomes in subgroups of adolescents. Without accounting for these mediators, the results produced are often crude; and when comparisons are made across these studies the results are often contradictory. Lastly, given the preponderance of cross-sectional designs and regression analysis, the directionality of the association between pornography consumption and outcomes is not clear. For example, does watching pornography contribute to sexist attitudes or are people with sexist attitudes more likely to seek out

pornography, or both? In this way, cross-sectional studies' findings often raise more questions than they address.

Qualitative Findings on Adolescent Pornography Use

In this review, only a small portion of the literature on adolescents' use of pornography employed qualitative methodologies. There are several qualitative findings that overlap with quantitative ones. For example, similar to quantitative studies, qualitative inquiries confirmed that adolescents are viewing a wide variety of pornographies (Hare et al., 2015; Rothman et al., 2015; Spišák, 2016), and there are biological sex differences in perception and viewing habits (Abiala & Hernwall, 2013; Scarcelli, 2015). However, while quantitative studies focused on objective measures of attitudes and behaviours, qualitative research focused on viewers' experiences and perceptions of pornography.

Pornography as Sex Education

Qualitative studies have consistently shown that one of the primary motivations for adolescents to view pornography is to learn about sex. Adolescents saw pornography as a safe and confidential space for them to learn about sexual activities and the mechanism of sex (Doornwaard, 2017; Hare, 2015; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013). In one study, participants described pornography as a 'manual for sex' wherein they learned about reproductive organs, masturbation, and ejaculation etc. (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015). Another study similarly reported that adolescents found pornography helpful in reducing anxiety about first-time intercourse, allowed a vicarious discovery of male desire, and helped them define 'normal' sexual behaviours (Scarcelli, 2015). Participants of a Canadian study reported that information they obtained about sex in school and other outlets is usually fear-based talk about risk mitigation (e.g., unwanted pregnancy, STIs), which made it difficult

for them to explore sexuality in a relatable manner (Hare, et al., 2015). Moreover, asking peers about sex would risk one becoming ridiculed as being ignorant (Smith, 2013). In the absence of the types of knowledge they are looking for, adolescents deliberately turned to pornography to satisfy their curiosity and desire for ‘real’ knowledge (Hare et al., 2015). Some adolescents highlighted their positive feelings toward amateur porn (a type of home-made pornography that is usually not professionally produced) because it exhibits realistic sex acts and a wide variety of body types (Hare, et al., 2014). As such, the findings suggest that adolescents perceive pornography as an important resource about sex and sexuality in the absence of a more satisfactory alternative. Smith (2013) also reported that participants who have limited sources of information about sex (e.g., parents who do not discuss sexual topics) used the internet pornography as a resource. In addition to education about sex, other commonly reported reasons for watching pornography include sexual arousal (e.g., masturbation) (Smith, 2013) and relief of stress and boredom (Doornwaard, 2017; Rothman et al, 2015).

Studies have also identified the role of pornography in the exploration of sexual attraction and sexual orientation. Participants from Arrington-Sanders et al.’s (2015) study shared that watching pornography helped them discover and/or confirm their sexual attraction. In that study, some participants described not being aroused by heterosexual porn but were attracted to gay porn. The attraction to gay porn gave them a clue that they might be sexually attracted to people of the same-sex (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015). Participants of a Canadian study similarly reported that:

SEIM [sexually explicit internet materials] provided [participants] with an inclusive, non-judgmental, and safe environment to freely investigate their various sexual likes and dislikes. By reflecting upon how they responded to or embodied varied SEIM content, the

participants gained an increased understanding of their sexual self and clarified how they perceived themselves to “fit” within the spectrum of sexuality (Hare, Gahagan, Jackson, & Steenbeek, 2014, p. 151).

Pornographies, therefore, are seen by many as a tool to explore and learn about their sexual interests and sexuality.

Additionally, because pornography presents a wide range of topics such as sexual pleasure, censored imagery, sexual acts or expressions that do not conform to dominant ideas of ‘acceptable’ sexuality (Hare et al., 2015), it was able to help de-stigmatize sexuality for many participants. For example, young adults in Hare et al.’s (2015) study shared that “SEIM helped them become more open to and accepting of sexual diversity, including sexual acts, desires and identities” (p. 154). The findings about using porn as education and a tool to explore sexuality complimented an earlier study by Peter and Valkenburg (2007) examining sexual uncertainty. They found that those who are uncertain about their sexual beliefs and values were more likely to turn to pornography. This further highlights the significance of pornography in adolescents’ sexual development.

Another finding identified by some qualitative studies is that adolescents take what they learn from pornography and attempt to incorporate it into their own sex lives (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Rothman et al., 2015). Participants reported that they often watched pornography with a partner, then attempted to re-enact what was portrayed (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015). While some reported that this improved their sexual intimacy, others reported being pressured by their partners to perform unwanted acts (Rothman et al., 2015). These results are consistent with another study which found that some females reported being pressured into anal sex by their male partners; and the main reported reason for having anal sex was that the males wanted to

copy what they saw in pornography (Marston & Lewis, 2014). These qualitative findings dovetail with quantitative studies that identified a relationship between pornography use and ‘risky’ sexual behaviours (e.g., Brown & L’Engle, 2009).

Adolescents’ Perceptions of Pornography

The findings about adolescents imitating sexual acts in pornography raise the question of the degree to which adolescents are passive viewers who simply copy and imitate what’s seen in pornography versus discerning individuals capable of critically evaluating it. The emerging evidence suggested the latter. Some preliminary evidence suggested that adolescents are able to critically evaluate the content and messages shown in pornography (Doornwaard, 2017; Smith, 2013). For example, participants in a Dutch study (ages 16-18) highlighted that pornography is fake and unrealistic as there is “a lack of emotion, the exaggerated looks and performances of the actors, the long duration of sex, and the submissive role of women in pornography” (Doornwaard, 2017, p. 1043). In the same study, both boys and girls stated that pornography is misogynistic because women are often objectified and portrayed as sex objects (Doornwaard, 2017). A Canadian study similarly found that participants were able to recognize that not all genres of pornography are authentic or appropriate and they were able to identify problematic content (Hare, Gahagan, Jackson, & Steenbeek, 2014). An earlier Swedish study also found that participants were able to identify potentially problematic content such as lack of intimacy in sex and male dominance during sex (Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tydén, 2006). Participants in another Canadian study even directly linked pornography to violence in intimate relationships (Lavoie, 2000). At first glance, these findings may suggest that adolescents possess the capabilities to evaluate what they are seeing in pornography. However, it is important to nuance that the participants in these studies were all above 16 years old. Some studies included

participants ages 20 and above (e.g., Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006). These findings indicate that while some older adolescents and young adults might be able to critically evaluate pornographies, we know very little, if at all, whether younger adolescents can do the same. While the quantitative studies identified age and pubescent stage as important moderators in the outcomes of pornography use, this review found no qualitative literature that examined how adolescents' perception and experience of pornography changed over time.

While some older adolescents and young adults reported being able to critically evaluate pornographic content and identify problematic themes, at the same time, they felt that they are immune to its negative influences. Cameron et al., (2005) conducted focus groups with 40 American adolescents ages 14 to 17. These participants voiced that some pornographies contain misogynistic content, but these messages in no way affect their personal attitudes. By their self-assessment, they felt that being critical of what they were watching rendered them immune to negative impacts (Smith, 2013). This perception of invulnerability is at odds with the quantitative findings which have demonstrated that pornography use is associated with attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. This is an important area for future research as this indicates a potential myth of immunity from messages in pornography among adolescents.

Sex Differences in the Perception of Pornography

The quantitative literature has consistently shown that there are significant biological sex differences in pornography viewing behaviours. Relative to girls, boys are significantly more likely to watch at an earlier age and more frequently, and access more extreme images (Vandenbosch, 2015). The qualitative literature complimented these findings by reporting that there are marked differences in how pornography is perceived among sexes. While both boys and girls were able to highlight positive and negative aspects of pornography, girls expressed

more ambivalence (Doornwaard, 2017). Girls, while recognizing that pornography is useful, also reported a level of distain toward pornography using words like ‘disgusting’ or ‘dirty’ to describe it (Scarcelli, 2015). Girls reported that using pornography is somewhat taboo and there is a level of shame and embarrassment that comes with viewing it (Smith, 2013). The taboo and shame maybe based on the social narrative that female autoeroticism is impertinent. Therefore, to remove the ‘aura of perversion’ girls in one study reported using pornography in same-sex peer groups (Scarcelli, 2015). Furthermore, watching pornography together with other girls also served as a form of social discourse to define what’s normal and what’s not regarding sexuality. That is, through watching pornography together, girls’ gauge what the group considers ‘dirty’ or ‘not good’ thus establishing boundaries between taboo and ‘normal’ (Scarcelli, 2015).

However, girls’ opinions about pornography use for boys are very different. Girls felt that boys are naturally more interested in sex and pornography was an appropriate way for them to explore sex and sexuality. As well, boys looking at porn is considered a natural expression of masculinity (Scarcelli, 2015). The narrative of taboo and shame is not present in the boys’ own accounts of pornography. Boys found porn exciting and arousing and actively looked for them (Doornwaard, 2017). These findings are corroborated by quantitative studies (Carrol et al., 2008; Mattebo, Tydén, Häggström-Nordin, Nilsson & Larsson, 2014) wherein boys were found to have positive attittudes toward pornography whereas girls had negative ones.

Overall, many of the qualitative findings are consistent with quantitative ones. Qualitative studies added to the literature by presenting more of the viewers’ experience and motivations. According to qualitative findings, pornography is seen by adolescents as an important tool for sex education that has positive and negative qualities. Additionally, qualitative studies suggest that older adolescents are being capable of critically evaluating pornography but

may have a false belief of immunity from pornography's influence. Lastly, boys and girls report different attitudes toward pornography consumptions which generally reflects the dominant gender-based script about sex and sexuality.

Limitations of the Literature on Pornography

A review of the literature revealed several limitations in its findings, epistemologies and methodologies. First, there is a lack of understand of young consumers' perspectives and experience of consuming pornography. To date, many of the studies relied on quantitative measure that examines the effects of pornography consumption which oversimplifies the user-text relationship and is difficult to contextualize (Attwood, 2005). As such there is a lack of understanding of how young consumers make meaning, interpret, and make-use of pornography within their unique contexts.

Additionally, there is a limited understanding about how adolescents' pornography viewing behaviours change over the course of their development. While there is some preliminary evidence that suggest pubertal maturation may be a moderating factor in pornography use (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013), there is a very limited understanding about how pornography's function, meaning, and implications change over time for consumers. Understanding the developmental trajectory is important given the concerning finding that older adolescents access more violent forms of pornography relative to younger ones.

Limitations in Methodologies

In addition to the shortcomings in epistemology, there are several methodological limitations. One of the recurrent methodological limitations is the poor definition of pornography. Research often employed broad definitions of pornography that did not adequately differentiate between the different categories and genres. However, as discussed earlier,

pornography is a complex media with many categories and genres that differ greatly in its content. For example, erotica in the form of magazines is very different than hardcore internet pornography in terms of the explicit content, implicit messaging, intended audience, and forms of access. Vague definitions of pornography not only make cross-study comparisons challenging, but also leave study findings difficult to interpret.

Next, an overwhelming number of studies reviewed employed cross-sectional designs which relied almost exclusively on self-administered surveys and regression analysis. This type of design is limited in that they can only reveal associations and correlations with no capabilities of establishing causal links. In this way, cross-sectional designs often raise more questions than they answer. Moreover, many of the studies did not incorporate any theoretical frameworks in their study design. As such, mediators and confounders are not systematically accounted for, thus making findings without much needed context and nuance. In light of these considerations, the field's heavy reliance on cross-sectional design needs further reflection.

Limitations of Epistemology

A major limitation of the literature is the use of the simplistic exposure-effect (EE) model by an overwhelming number of studies in the field. Peter and Valkenburg (2016) likened this model to the 'monkey-see-monkey-do' notion. That is, the exposure-effect conceptualization oversimplifies the interaction between consumers and pornography and assumes a linear and causal relationship between watching pornography and predictable effects. The endorsement of this simplistic model is reflected in that most of the studies reviewed adopted a cross-sectional design wherein pornography consumption is measured against outcome variables (e.g. attitudes, behaviours). The notion that watching media produces 'effects' on audience had widely been criticized by media theorists as a crude and limited conceptualization of media-viewer

relationship (Attwood 2005). Since viewers were mostly conceptualized as passive recipients, processes related to viewers' motivation, selection, and interpretation of pornography are largely left unexplored.

Furthermore, research to date has yet to employ a contextual lens wherein individuals' backgrounds and identities are systematically considered. As such, adolescents and young adults have been studied as a homogenous group without attention paid to contextual factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status etc. Gender had been consistently neglected despite initial evidence suggesting its importance in adolescents' pornography viewing experience (e.g., Vandenberg, 2015). This review found that studies rarely made the distinction between biological sex and gender of the participants. In fact, many studies used the two terms interchangeably.

Finally, there exists an assumption of harm in pornography research. This assumption may reflect a moralistic/conservative position discussed earlier. When pornography is assumed to be inherently and categorically harmful, methodological frameworks by extension will naturally adopt a unidirectional model, such as the EE, pose harm-focused research questions, and use quantitative measures to identify negative outcomes. In this way, moralistic positions and ideological values are intertwined with methodological frameworks which influence study designs and ultimately the state of the literature. While no research is value-free, when the discussion about pornography is restricted to a binary of 'good/bad' or 'pro/anti', it severely limits the discussion and makes it difficult to include different perspectives (Attwood, 2002).

Research Questions

A review of the literature revealed a few limitations. The most salient of which are: (a) lack of understanding of consumers' processes of selection and interpretation of pornography;

(b) emphasis on harms and risks; (c) overreliance on cross-sectional research designs; and (d) lack of attention to participants' contexts and social locations. Considering these limitations, this study seeks to explore the following research questions:

1. What are young men's processes of selecting, interpreting, and making-use of internet-pornography?
2. How do these processes intersect, if at all, with their social locations?
3. What are the impacts of pornography use on their sexual well-being and relationships?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to explore the processes of pornography consumption among young men within the context of their social locations (e.g., gender, race). Given that the objective requires descriptions of personal experiences and in-depth contextual analysis, a qualitative research design is employed. This chapter will present the research design in its foundational elements which include epistemology and research methodology.

Epistemological Framework

This proposed study will employ Feminist Social Constructionism (FSC) and Media Practice Model (MPM) as its epistemologies. Since social constructionism lays many of the foundational components of FSC, it is helpful to first present its main principles and then explore FSC's unique elements. Social constructionism posits that knowing is an active process wherein the sense information is transformed into conceptions and abstractions via language and social processes in a given context (Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, knowledge and reality are socially constructed via the mediums of shared meaning, language, and interpersonal processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). As such, the constructionist position counters the empiricist epistemology which asserts that knowledge and reality are discovered directly in an unmediated way

(Schwandt, 2000). Within the constructionist framework, grasping truth(s) means to achieve an understanding of socially constructed artifacts rather than discover certain objective facts

(Schwandt, 2000). Moreover, given the assumption of socially constructed realities, social constructionism posits that there can be multiple valid truths. Therefore, inquiries guided by this framework recognize that research is an inevitably interpretive process wherein the researcher attempts to make sense of participants' experiences through a subjective lens. In addition to the epistemological positions of social constructionism, FSC adds a nuanced position about gender, identity, and power. One of the fundamental tenets of FSC is that gender is a verb (Bohan, 1993). That is, gender is about actions, performances, and interactions and is context-dependant rather than a persistent internal attribute. Given that gender is performative, it is fluid and shifts with varying contexts, social interactions, and social structures (Sinacore & Enns, 2005).

Therefore, in order to critically examine gender, one must attend to the contexts in which it is performed and the power relations that dictate prevailing norms and mores. This constructionist perspective is also applied to other social locations. Identities such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, social economic status, etc., are all viewed as dynamic and must be understood within historical and social contexts (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). Therefore, applying an FSC framework is to critically examine participants' experiences in relation to their identities and the social contexts in which they are constructed and lived. To accomplish this goal, the role of the researcher must involve being critically aware of how certain prevailing social and cultural norms, perpetuated by power structures, serve to marginalize and silence various identities.

Feminist Social Constructionism is selected for this inquiry because its constructionist assumptions are well-suited to pursue a nuanced understanding of participants' experience of consuming pornography. First, the assumption that knowledge and reality are socially

constructed allows the researcher to set-aside the objective truth-seeking agenda and engage in a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants. These assumptions allow the participants' experience to be shared without being censored by the researcher's preconceived hypotheses or empirical agendas. Second, FSC's constructionist position on identities directs the researcher to attend to social cultural contexts and the implicit power relations that maintain them. This orientation to identities and power can lead to rich descriptions of participants' experience in their unique contexts.

Media Practice Model is the second epistemology adopted by this research. MPM was conceptualized out of a series of ethnographic studies about the relationship between adolescents and media conducted by Steele and Brown (1995). The model has three main tenets: (a) media consumption is a practice; (b) lived experience is central; and (c) identities and identity formation are crucial parts of media practice.

First, MPM posits that media consumption is a practice. This means that consumers negotiate their relationship with media by actively selecting, interpreting, and incorporating (or rejecting) what they watch into their lives and identity formation process. As such, MPM assumes a dialectical relationship between consumers and media. Consumers are positioned as active meaning-making agents that interact with media "armed with a sense of how the world is" (Steele & Brown, 1995, p. 557). Furthermore, the MPM model challenges the assumption that messages and meaning in media are fixed and influences passive viewers in an unmediated way.

Next, MPM emphasizes 'lived-experience' or 'lived-through-experience' which traces its philosophical roots to Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist writing and resonates with feminist standpoint theorists' idea of situated and embodied knowledge (Haraway, 1988). The notion of lived experience highlights that one's experiences are situated in personal, historical, and

sociocultural contexts. Therefore, experience can only be adequately understood in the context in which it is situated.

Lastly, identity formation is a key component of MPM. The model asserts that a young person's intersecting identities and media practice are mutually influencing (Steele & Brown, 1995). That is, one's unique intersection of identities plays a crucial role in the selection, interpretation, and application of media messages. This set of media practice will in turn play a role in the development of one's sense of self and identities. MPM's emphasis on lived experience and identities facilitates an intersectional approach wherein participants' intersecting social locations and contextual factors can be systematically explored.

MPM is chosen as the second epistemological framework because it complements FSC's broad constructionist assumptions with a specific model of conceptualizing the media-consumer relationship. Additionally, MPM's tenets place the consumer's internal processes at the forefront of investigation which aligns with this study's aim. Furthermore, MPM's emphasis on situated experience, context, and intersecting identities is philosophically congruent with the tenets of FSC.

Research Method

The goal of this study is to produce rich descriptions of young men's experience of consuming and interpreting pornography through a constructionist lens. Hermeneutic phenomenology is selected as the method to accomplish this goal given its orientation toward lived experience and focus on the situatedness of experience.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of subjective experience which is concerned with the question of 'what is this experience like?' (van Manen, 1997). This inquiry is focused on making sense of and creating meaning from experience that is lived through the individual's

subjective world (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Hermeneutic phenomenology consists of a series of activities which include investigating the phenomenon, reflecting on essential themes, and describing the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). It is important to qualify that hermeneutic phenomenology goes beyond a matter-of-fact description of experience. It emphasizes the situatedness of phenomenon. That is, a phenomenon can only be adequately understood through a given subject's social, cultural, and historical contexts (Lavery, 2003). Therefore, to explore lived experience is also to attend to the contexts in which they are situated.

Another key element of hermeneutic phenomenology is the centrality of subjective interpretations of the researcher. As Heidegger (1962) pointed out, we are inevitably situated within a set of historical contexts from which we interpret and exist in the world. Heidegger (1962) went further to assert that to be human is to interpret. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that researchers' pre-understandings of the world and their historical contexts inevitably shape the analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. This subjective stance, while seen as a flaw in positivistic designs, is an important tool in order to accomplish the goal of this research project. The interpretive element allows the researcher to be intimately immersed in the research data so that nuanced, subtle, and idiosyncratic descriptions of experience can be investigated.

Lastly, the interpretive process is achieved through the symbolic hermeneutic circle which moves from reading 'the parts' to reading 'the whole' of participants' accounts. Each reading of parts of the accounts influences the understanding of the whole, which in turn influences subsequent readings of the parts (van Manen, 1997). The metaphoric spinning of the hermeneutic circle increases the depth of understanding and engagement with the phenomenon.

The circle is ‘stopped’ when a sensible, rich, and coherent understanding has been reached (Laverty, 2003).

Methodological Coherence

An important consideration in designing qualitative research is methodological coherence, which refers to the degree that epistemological assumptions and research methods are aligned. Thus, in this study, it is important to consider the congruence of the philosophical underpinnings between feminist social constructionism, the media practice model and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Firstly, FSC assumes that there are multiple truths or realities, and these realities are constructed through individuals’ contextual experiences. These constructionist assumptions are well-aligned with those of MPM and hermeneutic phenomenology, both of which emphasize that experience is constructed in each context rather than an objective artifact. Next, common across FSC, MPM, and hermeneutic phenomenology is the centrality of contexts. Because all three theories assume that experience is socially constructed in contexts, they similarly posit that experience can only be adequately understood with those contexts accounted for. Next, FSC asserts that the pursuit of knowledge is a co-construction of meaning between researchers and participants. This assumption is echoed in hermeneutic phenomenology which centralizes the interpretive process and subjective meaning making of both researchers and participants. Lastly, FSC, MPM, and hermeneutic phenomenology are all oriented toward the exploration of lived experiences. Given the philosophical commonalities between FSC, MPM and hermeneutic phenomenology, employing them in tandem creates a coherent methodological framework.

Participants

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants for this study. For qualitative research, Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) recommend 8 to 15 participants. Following this recommendation, this study recruited 15 participants. Male-identifying participants between the ages of 18 to 25 were recruited for this study. The lower limit is set to the age of 18 due to ethical and legal considerations regarding speaking to minors about sexually explicit materials. The upper limit is set to the age of 25 because 18 to 25 is considered emerging adulthood, a distinct developmental period (Arnett, 2000). Also, in this age group, a large number of young males will have had some experience consuming pornography (Sabina et al., 2008). Another criterion was that participants have experience with pornography consumptions since adolescence. This criterion was put in place so that participants have adequate amount of pornography viewing experience to reflect on. Recruitment advertisements (Appendix A) were posted on websites (e.g., student forums, Kijiji), social networking platforms (e.g., Facebook), and McGill Campus. Participants were offered a twenty-five-dollar digital gift card as compensation.

Participant demographics. All 15 participants identified as cis-gender males. Twelve participants identified as heterosexual, two as questioning, and one as bisexual/pansexual. Regarding race, five participants identified as White, four as East Asian (e.g, Chinese, Korean), three as South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani), two as mixed race, and one as Black. Eight participants reported they obtained bachelor's degrees, four obtained high school diplomas, and three obtained master's degrees. All participants reported to be living in Canada at the time of the interviews. Eleven of the participants reported to be citizens or permanent residents of Canada. Four participants reportedly are international students.

Materials

Materials needed for this study included the informed consent form, contact information form, demographic information form, and interview protocol.

Informed Consent Form

The Informed Consent form (Appendix B) outlines: (a) the purpose of the research study; (b) data collection procedure and data use; (c) participants' rights; and (d) confidentiality and its limits. The goal of the consent form is to inform participants how their data are collected, used, and stored, the risks and benefits of participating, and their rights as participants. Participants that decide to join the study sign two copies of the consent form. One form was given to the participants, the other was kept by the researcher.

Contact Information Form

The contact information form (Appendix C) was used to collect participants' contact information including full name, phone number or email address. This information was collected so that the researcher, with consent, could contact the participants regarding transcript verification and communicate the result of the study. The form was kept separately from other information related to the study to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Demographic Information Form

Enrolled participants were asked to complete the demographic information form (Appendix D). This form collected information about participants' age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, level of education, and relationships status.

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E) was used to guide the interview process. The semi-structured format allows flexibility in drawing out participants' experiences

and at the same time ensures that the research agenda is fulfilled. Participants were asked to reflect on their process of selecting, interpreting, and making use of pornographic material. Participants were also invited to reflect on how their process of consuming pornography played a role, if at all, in their intimate relationships.

Procedure

Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board-II at McGill University (Appendix F). Upon receiving ethics approval, eligible participants were invited to contact the researcher, via phone or email. The prospective participants were invited to a brief phone interview to explain the study, confirm that recruitment criteria were met, and schedule a virtual interview. The interviews were conducted virtually in consideration of COVID-19 restrictions at the time of data collection.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Before the start of the interview, I explained the purpose of the study, outlined potential risks and benefits, and reviewed the terms of informed consent. After participants agreed to the terms of informed consent, they signed the informed consent forms. The interviews were conducted in English. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. I contracted a professional transcription service to transcribe the interviews. I signed a confidentiality agreement with the transcription service provider (see Appendix G). The transcriber did not have access to any identifying information of the participants.

To ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participants, digital files (e.g., audio recordings, interview transcriptions) were password protected and stored on the computers of the

Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab at McGill University. Identifying information (e.g., demographic forms) and interview data were kept in separate files. As well, participants were coded with pseudonyms to safeguard anonymity. Once interview transcriptions and verifications were completed, the audio recordings were permanently deleted from the lab computers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted following the steps of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). IPA's philosophical tenets highlight the social construction of experience, and its methods emphasize the careful exploration of participants' lived experiences. As such, IPA's epistemological underpinnings are congruent with those of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the essential methodology of this study.

Stage 1. After the interviews were transcribed, I, the researcher, verified them for accuracy and ensured all identifying information (e.g., place of employment, name of institutions) were removed. Next, I read and re-read the first transcript several times to gain familiarity with the data. After this initial round of readings, I began highlighting and annotating significant statements in the margins of the transcripts. Significant statements are segments of participants' accounts that I considered interesting and relevant to the research questions. Then, I looked across these significant statements to identify commonalities and highlighted emerging themes. Some themes clustered together to form superordinate concepts or major themes (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). This part of the process represents "a close interaction between [the researcher] and the text...drawing on [the researcher's] own interpretive resources" (Smith et al., 1999, p. 223). Given the interpretive nature of the research design, reflexivity is crucial. To practice reflexivity, I kept a field diary throughout the research process to reflect on my evolving

interpretive stance and on the influence of my assumptions on the data analysis. Additionally, I highlighted quotes to substantiate the rationale of each theme to ensure that my interpretations were grounded in the data. Moreover, two judges were invited to check the superordinate themes against the transcripts to ensure that they are representative of participants' accounts. These judges included my Ph.D. student colleagues at the Social Justice and Diversity Lab. In the case of disagreements between the judges and the researcher regarding the accuracy of the themes, they were discussed at a meeting until a consensus was reached. Next, I created a master list of the themes which contained all superordinate themes and their subthemes.

Stage 2. The next stage of analysis was to code the remaining transcripts followings the steps outlined above. A master list of themes was created for each interview transcript. Then, the master lists were read together, and a consolidated list of themes were created. The consolidated list of themes was not created purely based on their prevalence in the data. Factors such as the richness of passages and the way the themes help shed light on other aspects of participants' accounts were also taken into consideration (Smith et al., 1999)

Stage 3. The final stage of analysis was to write a narrative description that explained each theme. This description also illustrated similarities and differences between themes.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure quality and rigour of this study, a set of standards and procedures were applied. This study employed the set of standards articulated by Morrow (2005), which include sensitivity to context, credibility, dependability, and catalytic validity.

Sensitivity to Context

A major strength of the qualitative approach is that it facilitates the understanding of a given phenomenon and the interacting effects of context (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

One of the ways in which a qualitative study can attune to contexts of the participants is via its research design elements such as epistemology and data collection strategies (Wilkinson, Joffe, & Yardley, 2004). In this study, I selected FSC and MPM for my epistemological framework. Both theories emphasize the centrality of the social-cultural locations of participants. Another way to increase sensitivity to contexts is the researcher's on-going practice of reflexivity, particularly in the data analysis stage (Yardley, 2015). To accomplish this, I kept a field journal with which to record my reflections, emerging interpretation of participants' accounts, and pre-understandings and assumptions used during data analysis. This on-going reflexivity encouraged me to be open to the full spectrum of participants' experiences and reduced the risk of imposing my own meaning on the data.

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a qualitative study can be deemed credible if it produces accurate descriptions of a given phenomenon under study in a way that people who share that experience can recognize them. Key strategies used to establish credibility include using sound research methods, conducting verification and member checks, and keeping field journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure sound research methodology, I selected epistemological frameworks that are appropriate for the research questions, considered the methodological coherence of the frameworks, and selected a data analysis method that is congruent with the main methodology. In this way, there is a clear coherence throughout the study design.

Verification is another strategy that I employed to establish credibility. Two judges were invited to review themes that I generated. My doctoral supervisor also audited and reviewed any conclusions and interpretations made from the data. Additionally, member checking was used to

further strengthen credibility of this study. Member checking involved inviting participants to verify the accuracy of the data and the researcher's interpretations of the data. After the initial interview, the participants were given a summary of the interviews to review to provide feedback and corrections.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the clear and transparent explanation of the research process (Morrow, 2005). Dependability is established by providing detailed records of the research activities including data collections, data analysis, and influencing factors of data analysis. This is done so that others can examine and assess how the results came to be, thus enhancing trustworthiness of this study. In order to establish dependability, I kept detailed records of all research activities in chronological order so as to create a clear audit trail.

Catalytic Validity

Catalytic validity refers to the degree to which a given study enhances participants' understanding of their world so that they can choose to transform it (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In other words, research should not only be conducted for the sake of knowledge, but also produce value for those who participate in it. In this study, catalytic validity is established via its research design and methodology. First, hermeneutic phenomenology frames participants as co-investigators in the sense that they are invited to actively reflect on and make sense of their personal experiences. Next, the semi-structured interview method provided a structure which the participants could reflect and understand their pornography viewing experience. These design elements gave participants the opportunity to gain insight into their pornography consumption and its potential role in their intimate relationships. Some participants reported that the interview

process facilitated a self-reflection process that generated insights about their pornography consumption.

Reflexivity

Another strategy that enhances a study's rigour and trustworthiness is reflexivity. It is a practice wherein the researcher recognizes and reflects on their contextual and enmeshed position relative to the participants (Krefting, 1991). This is an important practice because the researcher's background and assumptions influence the way they organize, study, and analyze the findings (Agar, 1986). Therefore, "upon engaging in research, the researcher must continuously reflect on his or her own characteristics and examine how they influence data gathering and analysis" (Krefting, 1991, p. 218). In this section I will share my assumptions and political position about pornography as well as my reflexive process about how my identities influenced the way I interacted with the study.

First, my political stance toward pornography is similar to the liberal and feminist positions outlined in the literature review section. Specifically, I do not assume that pornography is inherently harmful. I take the position that pornography contains a wide range of media forms and genres that can be educational and liberating for those with sexualities that have been policed or silenced. However, what can be problematic about some forms of pornography is the ways in which they potentially contribute to maintaining and perpetuating inequities and power differentials in our broader social-cultural context (e.g., objectification of women). Therefore, to discuss pornography is to discuss our social-political climate related to gender relations and related power dynamics. Given this position, I think the focus of research and academic discourse should be trained on how to help young people develop as ethical, responsible citizens that can recognize, analyze and challenge inequities rather than solely focusing on policing their

porn viewing activities. These assumptions shape the way I develop the study and the ways in which I interpret the data.

Next, it was important for me to become aware and reflect on in what ways my gender and sexual identities influence the way I interact with the study. As a heterosexual cis-gendered male my lived experience mostly echoes the hegemonic heterosexual narrative related to sexuality. By hegemonic heterosexual narrative, I mean a system of values that dictates and enforces what is ‘normal’ and what is deviant’ in terms of sexuality and gender performance. In this way, I brought to the research an inevitable bias. For example, during some of the interviews with participants who are cis-gendered heterosexual males, they talked about avoiding gay and trans pornography. I did not follow up on these disclosures. In hindsight, this would have been a rich area of exploration. Upon reflection, it is possible that the lack of follow up could have been related to the shared cis-gender heterosexual narrative between the participants and me: that to be masculine is to reject things that are considered feminine or involving sexual intimacy with other males. Given experiences such as witnessing these disclosures, it was especially important for me to consistently reflect on the ways my lived experience shapes the ways I am asking questions and interacting with the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Participant Definitions of Pornography

This section presents terms related to pornography used by the participants. First, hard-core pornography is a term commonly used by the participants. They generally defined it as explicit depictions of genitals and sex acts. As well, porn was typically used by the participants to refer to internet-based pornography in video format. The term, hard-core, as used by the participants did not refer to the themes of the contents (e.g., aggression, dominance), but rather

the explicitness of the content. Next, professionally produced pornography was another term commonly used by the participants. They identified this type of pornography by its production value (e.g., lighting, editing), scripted scenarios, and appearances of professional pornography performers. Amateur pornography is another term that commonly appeared in participants' accounts. They defined this type of pornography as being produced independently and uploaded by content creators. They referred to this type of porn as featuring a home or intimate environment that apparently features non-professional performers. Amateur pornography was also defined by some participants by its attempt to portray what they perceived were realistic sexual experiences of real-life couples.

Early Education on Sex, Sexuality, and Pornography

The participants were asked to reflect on their family culture, attitudes, and education received related to sex, sexuality, pornography, and information presented at school related to the same. They reported that their families generally avoided the topics of sex and pornography. Conversations about those topics, if there were any, typically were moralistic and clinical. At school, participants reported that sex-education programs in which they participated generally focused on biological and clinical aspects of sex and emphasized risk prevention. Participants generally described not being able to obtain information about porn, sexual pleasure, and sexual intimacy from their schools and families.

Early Familial Attitudes Toward Sexuality and Pornography

Participants reported that topics related to sexuality and pornography was generally avoided and even considered taboo in some families. They reported that their parents did not bring up the topics related to sex or pornography. For example, John said, "I guess now that I think about it, it was never really talked about...ever I don't think... I mean it was avoided... I

didn't really ask any questions either.” Adrien reported that when it came to topics related to sex, his family “didn’t really talk about it.” He described a memory wherein his grandmother covered his eyes when a sexually suggestive scene was playing on the screen. For him, the silence and avoidance associate with sex-related topics contributed to a degree of his discomfort with sex and porn. He said, “because this topic is like awkward, and nobody talks about it too much...it's something forbidden kind of.” For Dylan, his family also did not openly discuss sex or pornography. Their implicit attitudes indicated to him that sexual experiences should be avoided. He said, “growing up I always liked movies and, you know...my parents would either shield my eyes or just tell me not to watch.” He also remembered that his father “caught” him masturbating and their conversation involved him being told “he shouldn’t do too much of that.” Ethan reported that while his family did not actively censor sexual content and even implicitly acknowledged his sexual curiosity, but the topic was never discussed. He said:

I've accidentally found porn on my dad's computer and stuff like that. My dad has talked about how he used to read Playboy and stuff like that, so he's figuring I know what he's talking about...My dad would make jokes about porn and stuff like that...I've never been talked to them formally about something like that.

Yan similarly talked about this phenomenon wherein his sexuality is like the elephant in the room that his family is aware of but did not talk about. He said, “They probably know I watch it. I know they know I watch it, but we don't talk about it ever.” Blake attributed the lack of discussion about sexuality to his family’s religious background. He said, “it's a Christian family so we're not really talking about sex and pleasure.” Yan attributed the forbidden nature of sex talk in his family to the culture of his country of origin. He said, “It's very taboo...it's mainly because of the country that I grew up in. Because in Vietnam it's a very taboo subject.”

Moralistic and Clinical Sex Talk. Some of the participants described having talks related to sexuality with their families. These talks were described to be framed by moral values and clinical aspects about sex. For example, for Ben, his family talked about sex from a religious perspective. They told him of “sex after marriage only. Otherwise, you are committing a sin.” Yan similarly described his parents as having a moral attitude towards sex such that if a younger person was to have sex they are “bad.” Blake remembered his mother educating him on the “logistics” of sex. He remembered it this way: “she just told me, you know, P goes, you know, V, you know, D goes in, P goes in V, that's it....” For Adrien, his family focused on contraception. He said, “the condom, like these kind of stuff, the safety and also like to be really aware because if I meet up with, let's say a girl and not to rush anything... the safety is first.”

Experience of Sex Education at School

The participants’ accounts of their experience learning about sex and sexuality at school reflected a sense of dissatisfaction due to the narrow focus on the clinical and biological aspects of sex. Their reports commonly indicated that their schools were not able to provide adequate amount of information to satisfy their curiosity about their bodies, sex, and intimate relationships. Ali reported: “I don’t think sex-ed was necessarily giving you a how to have sex guide. It’s very mechanical like how to use a condom, contraceptives, [these are] the stages of puberty. But it’s not like anything about actually having sex.” Advik commented narrow focus on sex related topics as well as the teachers’ discomfort with them. He described his experience this way:

“[sex-ed] happened in probably eighth or ninth grade. At that point in time the biology teacher kind of skipped it. They did not want to go through it. They just showed us the

pictures, the biology pictures and just run through it within like ten minutes just to escape the-, I don't know is it shame or..."

Ethan recalled that his sex-ed at school focused on the clinical and risk-based aspects of sex. He stated: "my teacher said if you wanted to leave knowing one thing, he wanted it to be use a condom." John reported that while his sex-ed program focused on the clinical aspects of sex, his experience and curiosities were related to sexual pleasure and the emotional aspects of being sexual. He said:

It came from a very biological standpoint... So the impression I'm getting is that the idea around sex is mostly about the clinical aspect like what the body is like, the functions of the body and preventing diseases and things like that...Men at that age, you know, you start to get urges or when, Especially because around that time [puberty], I guess that was the first time I had, ejaculated. I didn't fully understand it. I never felt those sensations or emotions before.

The participants were also asked to describe their experience of discussing pornography in their sex-ed programs. They consistently pointed out that these discussions were not part of their sex-ed programs.

Early Experiences of Pornography Viewing

The participants were asked to describe their initial experiences of porn viewing. Their reflections centered around the following themes: (a) curiosity leading to initial viewing; (b) reactions to first-time viewing; (c) early patterns of porn viewing; (d) evaluation of porn materials during early consumptions and (e) the role of peers in porn exploration.

Curiosity Leading to Initial Viewing

The participants were asked to describe the context that led to their first viewing of pornography. Their accounts consistently referred to the lack of information on topics such as sexual pleasure as an important factor that led to their initial exploration of pornography. This lack of information about sexual experiences occurred in conjunction with their pubertal experience of changing bodies as well as the excitement and confusion about discovering sexual aspects of their being. For example, Mike's account reflected a sense of curiosity about his sexual feelings which was not covered in his sex-ed program. The lack of information made pornography an attractive source of information for him. He said:

I think it was around that time in grade six we had a sex-ed class, and they discussed, not really the act of sex, more so the different organs... I think puberty was the big angle... but they didn't discuss the acts of it... Just my own curiosity, I guess [to view porn].

While he was curious about sex, he did not feel comfortable with pornography. He said, "I was not fully comfortable with pornography, and I didn't really know like even how to masturbate by that point." For Dylan, while his sex-ed program focused on the clinical aspects of sex, he found himself experiencing sexual arousal and desire which was not talked about in his class. This reportedly led to him turning to porn to explore and satisfy his curiosity about sexual arousal. Ben spoke about a similar experience wherein the sex-ed topic did not align with his curiosities about sex and intimacy. He said:

It was biology sex-ed. Just the way the teacher was talking about it. It was really plain and dry. I realized through porn it's more feeling and being intimate other than just the act of how to produce a baby.

The ages of the participants when they first viewed pornography ranged from 10 to 16. Most of them reported having viewed hard-core pornography via the internet in video format.

The participants commonly reported using their personal computers or smartphones to access porn. They found porn through keyword searches via search engines, online forums (e.g., Reddit), video platforms (e.g., YouTube), and porn websites. Also, several participants mentioned that their first-time viewing pornography was with peers. The role of peers in their porn consumption will be elaborated on in another section. Ethan described how he first accessed porn online. He said, “I was interested. I wasn't sexually into it I don't think...I Googled something... I think it was the first time that really got me interested, and I was like what if I searched this.” Ben and his friends also used search terms using internet search engines which led to a porn website. He remembered it this way: “one of my good friends just opened up a browser and typed in ‘porn and sex’ just to see what showed up. I think Pornhub is the biggest one, so it came up instantly. We were pretty fascinated of all these naked people doing.” Some participants also spoke about first viewing less explicit forms of pornography on the internet which led to them to be curious about and explore hard-core or more explicit forms of porn. For example, Le came across soft-core porn on while watching late night television which led to him to be “curious and interested” in learning about sex which he “continued to explore using the computer.” He described how he first found hard-core pornography: “I remember particularly Yahoo... there was something 18 plus or something. I just clicked into it...there was a link to a website. I first go into heterosexual one, and somehow could get into the gay one.” He also remembered searching about changes in his body which also led to him finding porn on the internet. John described first finding soft-core pornography which piqued his interest for other types of pornography (e.g., hardcore video porn). He described it this way:

I think it was on Google, you know, just searching. I had no idea what to expect... I guess after exploring or finding out about the softcore. I wanted to see what else was

there. I guess, again, it was the curiosity and then eventually finding more explicit videos.

I guess going through more sites, one thing led to another.

Adrien remembered discovering porn via an online forum. He reported:

It was general forum and there were many topics and one of the topics there it's about like sex life or something like that. We were like curious or something, so we just looked at it.

[It had] Pictures, videos, and like discussions [about sex].

Initial reactions to porn viewing

The participants were asked to describe their experience of viewing pornography for the first time. Their responses reflected a wide range of reactions including excitement, pleasure, discomfort, disgust, confusion, and shame.

Several participants recalled experiences of thrill, excitement, and pleasure after viewing porn for the first time. Ali remembered the sense of thrill and how stimulating porn was for him initially. He recalled: “[The] 11-year-old kid I was just like...this is crazy, I’ve never really just experienced anything like that before and then you know you just continue to use it’. Simon also reported feeling excited. He said, “Everything was really heightened...everything was just really new and really exciting. I'd never seen those things in real life either, so it was just like they felt very like secret and exciting.” For John, his first-time viewing was exciting and also paired with the experience of his first orgasm. He reported: “It was very thrilling. Especially because around that time... I guess that was the first time I had ejaculated. When that happened the first time it was kind of a surprise.”

While first-time porn viewing was an exciting and pleasurable experience for some participants others described having difficult experiences such as feelings of disgust, fright, and shame to name a few. For example, at age 13, Adrien’s first viewing involved unintentionally

coming across materials depicting masochism, male nudity, and violence via an online forum. Adrien described feeling “disgusted.” He also remembered being confused about what he saw. He said, “[it was] like a different world that I have no idea what's going on there.” His initial experience reportedly influenced his subsequent viewing experience for a few years. He said, “I still got the sense that it's disgusting, maybe because of my first sites were kind of like disgusting so maybe it influenced it.” Simon recalled that his first viewing of porn was pictures of heterosexual sex which left a feeling of disgust and confusion for him. He remembered it this way:

In the third grade or something and I looked up porn on the school computer. [I] look[ed] up these things without the teachers noticing or something and impress my friends... It was a few pictures, but they were really like, you know, hardcore like in their angles and everything I guess...for the rest of the day I felt like kind of weird in my stomach.... I just didn't understand it.

Other participants like Yan reported feelings of shame or guilt related to their first viewing. He described his reactions this way:

I wanted it to stop. I was just like woah, these things exist? I just didn't really feel like I should be looking [at] it...Growing up I was always like a good boy I think internally I want to keep that image kind of thing [away].

Exploration of Various Genres of Pornography

The participants’ accounts of their early porn viewing experience described a phase of exploration and discovery of various genres. They reported that curiosity, loss of novelty, and technology (e.g., algorithmic suggestions of related videos) facilitated their exploration and

discovery. Luiz spoke about the sense of curiosity propelling him to actively search for porn depicting different sexual themes and content. He said:

I was just curious... I think at the beginning I would just go back to the same videos but I think that was the beginning. It's so easy for kids to just go in Google and like type anything.

Ali, spoke about noticing that the types of porn that he watched evolved to be more “extreme” over time. He reported:

You just went to the next, the next, the next until you get to the point where like what am I doing? Situations like emulating rape or like situations emulating like gang bangs Just like more intense things that like you would probably not come across in real life.

Ben reported that website design is one factor that helped him explore and discover different types of porn. He reported that since his initial viewing, he has been “watching a larger variety [of porn].” He elaborated: “I watched more things, like recommended videos just keeps popping up and I go that looks interesting, I click on it and then I get fascinated. I get exposed to different positions and different types of people.” For Jia, he used the websites’ listed categories to discover and explore new categories of porn. He said, “I’ve seen all of it. Pretty much went through all the category on there just watching about what’s on there. I’ve just went down that list on the side of the site...” For Kan, curiosity, and a lack of sense of novelty led to him trying new genres of porn. He said, “Most of the hardcore scenes, you will find that it’s basically very similar...Once you watch a little bit more, you’ll find that there’s nothing new so you want to look for something new.”

Role of Peers in Pornography Exploration

In the participants' accounts of their early porn viewing experience, they consistently described the role of peers, particularly older peers, in their initial discovery of porn. Ali remembered being introduced to porn by a friend which led to him to explore porn independently. He reported: "I was in sixth grade... he was my friend and we used to go hang out and then he kind of like showed me like this website... then I started using it on my own." Advik also spoke about an older friend introducing porn to him. Additionally, he spoke about talking to his friend to make sense of what he viewed. He recalled: "my senior from school had told me there is something called porn...He told me about a website, he asked me to check it out...I thought why not give it a try." Advik remembered being "terrified" by what he saw on the website and turned to his older friend for counsel. He remembered it this way:

...I was terrified...I didn't want talk about it to anyone...then probably a month or two later when I spoke to the senior that actually gave me the link...he said it's a normal picture to look at... this is how it is.

Simon's introduction and exploration of porn happened in the context of him and his friends discovering and discussing sexual pleasure. He reported:

I'd had more conversations with friends and kind of knew more about what sexual experience could be. I knew what, kind of in vague terms, what masturbation was so I was like 'oh, that's something I want to try'...I'd heard names thrown around by older friends and then one day I was just like 'oh, I'm going to explore this on my own'... I think it was...Pornhub.

Evaluation of Pornography During Early Consumption

The participants were asked to describe how they evaluated the realism of porn portrayals when they first started viewing it. Many of the participants stated that they did not have the tools

to evaluate how realistic the portrayals were. Others reported using intuitions, common sense, and gut feelings to determine the realism of the portrayals. Azad said that porn “[was] the only source [of information] for sex. I guess in the younger mind, you didn’t really understand it as performance.” Ben similarly said, “I think it [was] realistic. I’ve never did it myself with anyone so it’s nothing to compare it to.” He also reported that he “didn’t know they were actors” and initially thought that “these high-quality videos were done at home.” For Ali, he remembered being a passive audience rather than a critical one. He said, “I wasn’t being critical or like looking at it from any type of way I was just like going with it.” Not having the knowledge to understand and contextualize what they were watching, some participants reported feeling distressed. For example, Ben reported: “At the beginning I wasn’t sure if the action were real, [the actor] being really aggressive... it just made me feel really bad.” Dylan shared that not being able to assess and understand what he saw at the time led to him to think that the simulated rape scene he saw was real. He said:

They have scenarios where the girl was invited to a van and they would do stuff, like quote unquote rape, but they were paid actresses. It was seemingly random participants, like you just invite a girl in and hey would you be on a video, and you’d be paid... At the time I thought they were real.

Other participants spoke about using intuitions or gut feelings to evaluate the realism of porn materials. Adrian described it as follows:

“you see something extreme or exaggerated or, you know, I get the sense of a feeling...a vibe from what I see... I didn’t know really much about it, I just could think about what can be real, what can’t be real.”

While Ethan reported being skeptical about the realism of the "portrayals, his skepticism was not based on facts or knowledge. He said, "I would question some of the stuff sometimes... like that doesn't sound right, I can't see that happening in my relationships or with people I know. I can't actually see this working." These questions often led to him to then "Googling real sex." Blake talked about using pieces of information he had learned to discern the realism of what he was watching. He said, "I heard about porn stars ... that's what they do... I only realized, really, how fake it was as I got older." John also tried to assess the porn via logical thinking and questioned the realism of what he saw. He said, "I think that back then ...I knew that people when they have sex they don't typically film themselves. If they do it's unlikely they'll film themselves... it's unlikely that they would like post it to the internet."

Pornography Informed Early Beliefs About Sex and Relationships

Participants' reports of their early interaction with porn consistently highlighted that what they saw influenced and contributed to their early understandings and beliefs about sex and intimate relationships. Their reports included impressions about the role of aggression in sex, gender relations, definitions of sex, and power dynamics in sex. For example, Advik spoke about how porn influenced his early understandings of aggression in sex. He said, "...choking, not the really hard kind, but the pleasurable [kind]...in the beginning I thought that was what they [women] desire and that's how the act works... a degree of aggressiveness, putting it wherever you want." Dylan reported that early on in his porn consumption he wrestled with the idea of aggression being acceptable during sex but not acceptable as a part of relationship dynamics. He said, "I believe in normal equal relationships but when it comes to sex you can be the one to dominate them." His account of early experiences with porn also contained descriptions of normalization of objectification. He reported that he used to have the impression that "she was

there to service the guys and they are to be used and to serve.” Luiz spoke about reflecting on the impact of porn on his sexual experience related to aggression. He said,

I do wonder whether, you know, watching porn has made me a bit more aggressive or a bit more dominant or a bit more coercive... I do wonder whether that's played a role in how I approached my sex life.

Participants also spoke about porn contributing to an objectified view of women.

Jia commented that porn viewing contributed to his “unrealistic” expectations of women’s physical appearance and his attention being trained to their external qualities. He said, “I definitely had unrealistic, I still do...I believe women should look that way or like be that way.” He also spoke about how these standards created unrealistic expectations in his romantic relationships. Mike’s reflection also highlighted that porn viewing played a role in his objectified view of women when he first started watching it. He spoke about porn emphasizing female physical attractiveness and presented them as “...things to be used to pleasure yourself as opposed to being people.” He also noticed the objectification of females was present in his peer group. He said, “the attitude that the videos portrayed, that was how it seems in high school... how guys talked about girls... it was like if they weren't attractive, then they didn't really have much value.”

Some participants also reflected on ways in which porn shaped their ideas about what good sex is. For example, Simon spoke about porn providing a formula for sex and “it's usually very long and then it usually starts with the girl doing oral sex and ends with the guy cumming... it did set kind of a pattern for me.” He elaborated that “I think the way I took it was like I need to make sure that girls in real life react like they do in porn.” Furthermore, he felt the pressure to “perform or to prove or something.” Yan similarly commented on porn shaping his impressions

about sex. He said, "...you are supposed to last for like 40 minutes and you're supposed to change positions a bunch of times and everyone feels perfect after it."

Lastly, some participants spoke about ways in which porn shaped their understanding about the role of sex in romantic relationships. For example, Ali said, "if all you're watching of other people is having sex... and the more that you watch that the more that you think like relationships are, you just have sex and that's the main thing."

Early Functions of Pornography Viewing

According to participants' reports, pornography served a number of important functions during the early phase of their consumption. These functions included learning about sex, sexuality, and relationships, as well as exploring their sexuality, sexual preferences, and pleasure.

Pornography as Sex Education

One of the major functions of porn that the participants spoke about was sex-education. The participants often reported that information they received from schools and families did not address many of the curiosities and questions that they had about sex and sexuality. Pornography, therefore, was one of the most accessible means to satisfy those curiosities given the lack of information. Participants commonly spoke about porn helping them understand the mechanics of sex and it also helped them define what sex is. Mike reported that porn was "sex education" for him early in his consumption because the sex education he received from family and school was lacking. He elaborated: "especially when it came to the actual act of consent, foreplay, how to pleasure a woman, you know, what happens when you're doing the act, what are some pitfalls? I kind of learned from pornography." For Luiz, watching porn helped him define

what sex is. He remembered watching porn portraying two females kissing which led him to be confused about the definition of sex. He said:

Because when you see like two girls making out... that's exciting...it's not really what sex is, right? You know that there's more to it.... like I'm a guy like how is that going to work... It's not just making out, right?

He went on to say that seeing hard-core heterosexual porn helped him define what sex is for him.

He reported:

Seeing hard-core porn was the first impression I got of like what having sex is... no one really sits down with you and tells you, hey, you know, when you want to have sex with a girl this is what you do... It is [porn] that you find out about positions... the logistics of it.

For Yan, porn transformed his understanding of sex from a clinical and biological perspective to include also romantic and intimate aspects. Additionally, seeing people posting and talking about porn online helped him break the “taboo” around sex. He said:

I think for me the one thing that porn teaches me is that it can be pleasurable because I thought of it as a clinical thing...It's not taboo, people are putting it out there and people are willing to talk about it and then I think that changes my point on sex itself.

In addition to learning about the mechanics of sex, some participants also spoke about porn helping them develop a sense of confidence and preparedness in future sexual encounters. For example, Kan, who reportedly has yet to be in a sexual relationship, hopes that he can “learn how to perform sex from these videos”, so that he can “learn to do the same thing” when he is married. Watching porn reportedly gave him a sense of agency because: “after watching so many video...I know how to perform sex and I know how sex goes.” Ben also spoke about porn

helping him feel more prepared for future romantic relationships. He said, “it's sort of educational in that I wouldn't be completely lost once I actually have a romantic partner... In a way it also prepares me for a relationship...[knowing] how to start an intimate relationship... I'm not as naïve as before.”

Imitating Porn Portrayals in Relationships. In addition to porn being an importance source of sex education, participants also reported imitating or incorporating porn portrayals into their sexual relationships with partners. For example, some participants spoke about porn informing their ideas about how they would have sex when they are in sexual relationships. Azad said, “looking at what's going on I can imagine myself doing the same things.” Le said, “I will try to copy this.”

Participants explained that porn is the only source for them to learn how to have sex, so it has a powerful impact on their imagined scripts about it. Ben said, “I've never did it myself with anyone so it's nothing to compare it to, mainly the videos I watched...” Participants also reported trying to perform what they saw in porn with their sexual partners. For example, Ethan reported “seeing different genres and then trying to incorporate that into [his] sex life.” Some participants noted the positive benefits of porn in expanding their sexual repertoires. Jia said, “I think it just kind of helped seeing like what we can try...I think it puts us a bit closer, too.”

Porn as Sexual Identity and Pleasure Exploration

Another important function that porn served for the participants was helping them explore their sexual identities and their expression. It is important to note that the accounts of participants who identified as questioning and bisexual primarily focused on porn helping them explore their sexual attraction and sexual orientation. The accounts of participants who identify as heterosexual centered around sexual expression and sexual preferences. Blake, who was

questioning his sexual orientation reported that porn helped him discover his sexual attraction toward males. He described his experience upon viewing porn portraying two men having sex: “I was aroused... I just never saw two men before...it helped me understand that I was probably bi... because I was attracted to other men, and I also liked women as well.” Ben, who identifies as questioning reported that porn is an important way for him to explore his sexual attraction and sexual identity. Porn reportedly plays a central role for him in this regard in part because he has not shared his experiences about his sexual orientation with family and friends. He described his experience this way:

Initially [I watched] heterosexual sex and like that was the most normal thing. After that, this Pornhub website has so many different themes. There's even gay sex between men, and there's lesbian sex, massage, close-ups, all those things. It kind of blew my mind... here are so many different positions. I never thought you could be that creative. And then also there's many different sexual orientations too. As I watched more then I thought to myself, what do I like? But growing up it was girls marry boys, and boys marry girl... it's exploration or self-discovering.

Ben also spoke about porn providing him with a sense of hope and self-acceptance. He said:

By watching those people... when they take off their clothes and you can see how, on screen, they can still have like a sex life, that's kind of encouraging... I think I'm still figuring it out myself, I'm not entirely sure which spectrum I identify with... I think watching these less traditional types of sexual relations opens up a new world to me, it doesn't have to be men with men-, men with women, and not just one person with another, like couples.

Le remembered feeling conflicted and unsure about what his attraction to men means in terms of his sexual orientation. Watching porn was a way for him to explore his sexual orientation. He said:

I think two or three years ago I'm [was] so confused about what am I. Sometime like I date a girl but the same time I watch gay porn. It actually makes me think maybe I'm bisexual, maybe I'm gay or maybe bisexual... I think I just searched it... does watching gay porn mean [that] you're gay...

He added that watching gay porn now is an act of self-acceptance and to “confirm” his sexual identity.”

Luiz, who identifies as heterosexual reported that porn was instrumental in discovering his sexual preferences. He specifically spoke about how seeing violence in porn helped him identify what his sexual preferences are. He said:

I guess you could relate that [porn viewing] to discovering your own body... like certain positions you might find that more exciting versus, violence... because there is really rough and violent porn out there, when I would see that, I would just be like I don't like that ... that definitely helped me gauge my tastes in real-life sex.

Mike spoke about exploring various genres of pornography helped him, almost by process of elimination, find what he likes and does not like sexually. He described it this way:

I tried just watching one woman pleasuring herself, and that wasn't a turn on. I tried watching ones that were more dominant or abusive, and I didn't really like that. I kind of explored it all and I realized that I just want to see a man, a woman that love each other.

In addition to exploring sexual pleasure and preferences, participants also described porn being instrumental in creating a view of sex that contains excitement, intimacy, and play. This is

reportedly in contrast to the clinical, moral, and religious contexts that sex is usually talked about in their lives. For example, John said:

Sometimes from my religion the way that sex is talked about sounds very robotic or technical. Then compared to what you see online or the kind of fun that I like that's consensual, you know, they're not afraid to or the idea of being open-minded so trying new moves or different positions.

Dylan spoke about porn as a way for him to reclaim and de-shame the sexual part of his being that's deemed inappropriate to explore by his family. He described it this way:

I didn't feel like I was doing anything wrong but they [parents] made it seem like [it]. I mean for sure I knew I wasn't doing anything wrong, and I just thought of it as natural and with the internet I can even search that other people were doing the same thing... I knew I wasn't supposed to feel that shame because I knew, you know, to my core I knew it was normal and that what they were saying was kind of bologna. They're my parents' conservative thoughts.

Azad spoke about porn facilitating a sense of sexual agency and independence. In other words, he can define and explore what sex is for himself. He said:

I suppose [as a] Catholic, sex has been something of societal thing rather than the personal thing. Society dictates [to] us what to do about sex. I see it as breaking off norms or saying that it's up to me. you know if I want to do it this way, I'm going to put it on then its that's up to me you are no one to tell me that I should or shouldn't.

Shame and Guilt Related to Pornography Viewing

While participants' accounts highlighted the usefulness of pornography, they also reflected on feelings of shame and guilt related to viewing porn. They commonly described a

sense that deriving pleasure from porn as bad or wrong. Family culture, religion, and societal norms were cited as sources of these feelings of shame.

Firstly, participants reported that the taboo nature of the topics of sex and pornography in their families contributed to implicit feelings of impropriety and shame. For example, Mike described feeling ashamed of watching porn and a fear of his parents finding out. He described it this way:

I still felt like ashamed of it and when I first started watching I was scared that they were somehow going to find out and I would delete my browsing history and I would feel like guilty initially... Because, you know, I figured they wouldn't approve.

Simon recalled his parents finding out about his porn viewing. The exchange led to him experiencing shame and also closed off the possibility of having discussions with his parents because he anticipated them being angry about his consumption. He remembered:

I know one time my mom looked up something on my computer and she accidentally discovered my history and then they had kind of a talk with me... they were like kind of mad...it was kind of common knowledge that you were supposed to hide that from your parents and if they found out it would be the worst thing in the world.

Blake similarly expressed feelings of fear about his parents' reactions. He said that if his mom were to find out it would be "catastrophic...shame... punishment, catastrophic events... World War three."

Other participants spoke about their feelings of shame being related to religious and moral values communicated to them by their families. For example, Ali reported:

We never really like talked about it [pornography] or it wasn't necessarily something people viewed as good. If you did it too much...in terms of the punishments you'll get smited. I guess also it kind of made you feel bad if you did like masturbate or watch porn. Ben, who identifies as Catholic, mentioned that pornography viewing creates an internal conflict and feelings of guilt for him. He said:

it's in The Bible, it's like sex after marriage only. Otherwise, you commit adultery, that's what my parents believe. I always have feeling guilt, should I be watching this, because of the religion. Because I know God's watching me. Hopefully it's not a sin that I'm committing because I'm trying to get more knowledge.

Other participants like Ali spoke about feelings of shame stemming from his reliance on pornography. He described it this way:

“it’s not healthy on your mind and like during certain days it’s all you can think about and that is not really you know good feeling for your body. Not for your body, not for your mind. I find myself not focusing on my work, that is where I feel guilty about it.”

Current experience of porn selection for consumption

The participants were asked to describe their process of selecting porn that they currently watch. Their accounts related to this process centered around (a) seeking feelings of intimacy; (b) rejecting violent content; and (c) the role of personal values and beliefs in porn selection.

Seeking Feelings of Intimacy Via Porn

Participants consistently expressed their preference for porn that portray what they perceive to be realistic sex and intimacy. Their descriptions of this type of porn includes materials that are not made by professional studios, but are “homemade”, and depict partners who are intimate with each other, interested in mutual pleasure, and showcase affection. The

terms they used to describe this type of porn included amateur, home-made, and self-created content. Blake described his preference of porn materials this way:

I like it when it's like a couple and they kiss and stuff ... I think that it's just better, I guess, than professional... they are not using a red light and yeah, like it's not like hardcore pounding, you know, all the time. It's like they actually communicate.

Ali similarly talked about disliking professionally produced porn and preferred “amateur porn.” He said, “...I did like more like amateur. Maybe a regular couple just having sex... I felt like it was a bit more normal... I just really don’t like that kind of like fake acting... it like takes you out of the experience.”

When asked to elaborate on the factors that contributed to their preference for the type of porn that is “amateur” and portray more affection, the participants explained that this type of porn provides vicarious feelings of intimacy and portray the types of relationship they wish to have. For example, Azad said, “People obviously naturally crave intimacy and naturally crave companionship. pornography sometimes offers like a quick glimpse into what that's like. Sort of that physical connection.” He explained that he was looking for more than just viewing the act of sex. He said, “I wanted sex to be something which is not purely physical, but it's something which is more intimate and psychologically satisfying as such.”

Dylan described what drew him to amateur porn as follows:

[I prefer] more intimacy between the partners...not doing this for show, but this is between them. I guess in a way I want to feel like I'm vicariously being the one watching and doing that... That's what I wanted to happen to me, that's what I would like to do, so I see myself in their shoes. When I come back from school or a lot of time to kill on my own in my bedroom, then that's all I have and just wanting intimacy, wanting some kind

of a connection with someone else. It may be not the outside world, but at least it was someone else.

Le remembered a time when he felt unsure about his sexual orientation and at the same time yearned for intimacy and connection. He reported that during this period of self-discovery and uncertainty, porn served as a conduit for feelings of intimacy. He remembered it this way: “If I cannot find someone to have an intimate [relationship] first, I just go to pornography... is something also actually a craving of someone.”

Furthermore, participants shared that were drawn to amateur porn because it reflected the types of sex and relationships that they experienced or imagined having in the future. For example, Blake shared: “[Porn] should be realistic. It's something that I want in real life... the homemade [porn] it's like intimate. That's just what I want to have in a relationship.” Adrian described his choice to watch more amateur porn as follows:

It feels more real and like more connection.” He went on to elaborate, “When I watch something which is like natural or kind of like homemade, it looks better. Because I can kind of like imagine me with my partner and that's kind of like the connection I was referring to before.

Ethan similarly described preferring amateur porn because it resonates with his lived experience of intimacy. He said:

When you're being intimate with somebody you like sex is better... I wouldn't want to just go off and have sex with a random person... [amateur porn] can almost emulate kind of an intimacy. Those appeal to me more than something where it's like far removed from my experience.

Yan also expressed the importance of the overlap between his experience of intimacy and those being portrayed in porn. He said:

I get more arousal from the girls' facial expression...if she's not enjoying it, it's very visible and it just turns me off right away... it's more like feeling closer to the actual like previous experience that I've had... I guess it has a certain requirement of intimacy in it for me to actually watch it.

Lastly, participants noted that their viewing patterns shifted across time, from watching more professionally produced pornography to more “amateur” or “homemade” types. Blake reported, “I used to watch professional just like from like Pornhub. As I got older, I would go on Tumblr and some people post stuff, like homemade.” Dylan described shifting from professionally produced pornography to “homemade” because he was looking for more “realistic” and “natural” depictions of sex and intimacy. He reported:

I got my education there [professionally produced porn] for how real life is supposed to be like... and then the behind the scenes, it was all staged and done for money and so forth. So then that's when I slowly branched into the more realistic stuff, and it's more real and it's stuff I can get behind with... it's more natural, less forced and more realistic than what is shown in the hard-core professional videos.

Ben noted the shift in his porn viewing habits this way: “In the beginning I was consuming whatever came up, but now I'm selective. I'm more critical about what I watch, too, and more which genres I like, which I don't.”

Rejection of Porn Depicting Aggression, Domination, and Humiliation

Participants' reflections on their preference for amateur porn showcasing intimacy also highlighted their distaste for porn that portrays violence, aggression, and humiliation. They often

referred to porn featuring aggression as a counterpoint to their preference for depictions of affection and connection. They reported that aggressive and violent content that they viewed included portrayals of choking, slapping, hitting, name-calling, and forms of sexual humiliation. They described feeling discomfort, disgust, shock, anger, and feelings of injustice when viewing porn with aggressive content. The reasons for their distaste for violence and aggression included feelings of empathy for the party receiving the violence, offence of their ethical and moral values, lack of resonance in their own sexual relationships, and a departure from their values of intimacy and love. For example, Luiz talked about a feeling of “disgust” when remembering what it was like for him to view pornography that contained aggression. He also experienced “confusion and shock” that there are” people who enjoy that kind of thing.” Adrien also described a distaste for the same type of porn:

It just weird...it just felt, you know, like a different world that I have no idea what's going on there... it's too humiliating and disrespectful... one side is enjoying but the other side is suffering... that gave me a negative feeling.

Azad described feelings of disgust and anger. He said, “I really hated it. I really hated it...I couldn't watch it. I just couldn't bare the look of pain on the other persons face so... I just thought it was sick.”

The participants provided accounts of the reasons and meanings of their negative reactions. Adrien reported a sense of injustice and believed that the female performers were possibly exploited. For Advik, the aggression and violence offended his moral stance about violence being wrong. For Ben, seeing violence and aggression being portrayed in porn triggered a very personal association. He said, “It just made me feel really bad. It reminded me of some of my friends...here at the school, their parents hit, like domestic violence.” Ethan reported feeling

empathic for the performers when he came across aggressive content. He said, “I wouldn't want that, I try to put myself in the situation and I don't like that... it's not so much this actor is experiencing this, it's more so like I wouldn't want to experience this.”

Other participants reported that they avoid porn that contains aggression because it does not reflect their value and lived experience of sex and relationships. For example, Luiz said, “If it got aggressive or violent, I didn't like that... I guess I see sex as like an extension of love... I saw it as a sign that it's not like romantic or for love...I couldn't see myself doing that in reality, in real life.” Simon similarly reported that themes such as aggressions did not resonate with who he is as a sexual being. He said:

I'm not drawn to anything that's like very aggressive or demeaning because that's not how I am either so I can't really relate ...I'm not like extremely dominant sexually...I'm just a very chilled person in that department so I think like it just doesn't turn me on to see it.

Some participants reported having conflicted feelings about porn containing aggression. For example, Mike said that he finds porn containing dominance and aggression arousing and pleasurable, but at the same time he is aware that it “kind of like makes you objectify the woman more.” As well, he reported having feelings of shame related to viewing those types of porn. He said, “I would finish and then I would be like ‘this is horrible, why did I watch this?’... I think afterwards it would be disgust, shame, shock that I'm watching what I'm watching.”

Some participants, like Kan, reported that porn containing aggression and violence is dangerous for young people and its distribution should be controlled. He said, “I think should provide some filtration before everyone can access to it. The young people should not watch this. This is wrong. This is dangerous.”

Porn Selection as an Expression of Values

Participants' accounts of their porn selection processes commonly highlighted the role of their values and beliefs related to intimacy and relationships. They spoke about selecting porn that reflect their values about equity, empathy, consent, intimacy, and spirituality. As such, porn selection is not only a process of experiencing sexual pleasure, but also an expression of their beliefs. Additionally, participants commonly spoke about viewing porn that align with their values so that they experience a sense of congruence with their self-image and self-ideals. For example, Simon spoke about his values of equality influencing his choice of porn in an "unconscious" way. He said:

Violence makes me think about real life situations and, you know, maybe exploitations of like real women. it's not like, you know, a conscious choice, like I don't go into watching it with like kind of social justice issues in mind...subconsciously it does direct my choice.

Advik similarly reported values, equity and respect playing a role in his porn selection. He said:

I was brought up with mother and an elder sister...Having a younger sister around was a really great thing too. It influences your thoughts about anything in the world because she is always in the picture. I do understand a lot about the other sex just by her presence.

I've always seen the other sex as equal. I think that influences my watching habits.

Dylan reported that his value of equality is part of his attraction to porn that depicts empowered female sexual expression. He said:

I'm for gender rights and all that. I like to see the woman telling her story and I think that's pretty sexy. The simulated ones, the male's telling the story. They are the ones who are shooting the video, they're the ones who are dictating the scenario. What if a woman

is to direct it, what if a woman were to create a scenario herself? That's more of a turn on for me because I want someone that's more equal.

For Azad, his awareness of social issues such as gender-based violence and social oppressive forces influenced the way he approaches porn consumption. He said:

In India there were a few scandals where the girl was not aware of she was filmed... because of the reason that sex is quite a taboo in India so the family of the girl they resorted to suicide and the girl she was shamed, basically slut shamed... that made quite an impact on me. I usually don't like watching any porn which actually boosts these things.

Other participants described their religious and spiritual values as a factor in the porn selection process. For example, John, who identifies as a Catholic, said that he does not watch porn that contains aggression or violence because of his religious beliefs. He reported that treating others in a rough or violent way goes against his beliefs and values.

Participants also described their values related to sex, intimacy, and relationships as factors that influence their porn selection and preference. Adrien reported that he values emotional connection in sexual relationships, which for him involves partners communicating and treating each other as equals. These values that are related to sex shaped his preferences for porn that features intimacy and emotional connection, rather than "sex for the sake of sex." Luiz said his values related to intimate relationships influence the types of porn that he selects and enjoys. He said:

I'm a big believer in gender equality.... when I see like straight porn and the guy's like

dominating the girl, sometimes even like rape fantasies, I find it like so unappealing it just completely turns me off... I think that my definition of love is affection and like caring for the other and respecting the other... I think that translates in my sex life.

Finally, some participants shared that the types of porn that they viewed were informed by whether the porn type was congruent with self-image. For example, Ali said:

For me it's about treating people equally, no matter if they're man or woman. I feel like that [porn consumption] doesn't allow me to do that... [It] contradicts my values...I'm a musician, and art producer person and for me I feel like if I'm not in tune with like that spirituality, I guess I don't really feel like I can create as well either. I feel like the more genuine that you can be a person the more genuine that like the emotions pour through. I corrupt myself with things [porn consumption] that I don't think or deem valuable. The less I do that, the better that the things that I make are.

Current Reflections on Porn Portrayals

When asked to describe their current perceptions and interpretations of porn portrayals, participants identified a range of themes and interpretations. Their reflections ranged from discerning realism of sex in porn to more nuanced reflections such as the portrayals of consent, emphasis on male pleasure, and objectification of women.

Assessment of Realism

When speaking about assessing the realism of porn portrayals, participants such as John commented on the unrealistic portrayal of sex in pornography. He said, “they’re actresses and actors... I don’t know if it’s a good example... they have this energy, the stamina that a normal person wouldn't have.” Kan similarly commented that: “it's just performed by professional[s]...hardcore pornography actors usually make the activity too ideal. Yan

commented that professional hardcore pornography presents scenarios that he found to be “separated from real life.” He said that these “plumber and pizza delivery guys” scenarios are “extremely unrealistic.” Participants also described being able to evaluate what they were watching by thinking about contextual factors such as porn being an industry that aims to generate profit. For example, Ben thought about the fact that porn is a profit generating industry which contributed to his more critical thinking about porn materials that he was watching. He said:

People actually work in this area and earn a living...the directors try to make it realistic, but also try to exaggerate in a way to fulfill some people's fantasies the way they interact with each other...it's not actually a portrayal of real life.

Sexual Experience with Partners as Corrective of Porn Impressions. When discussing discernment related to porn materials, many of the participants described their early sexual experiences with partners as being corrective of some of the impressions from porn. For example, Yan said:

...when I was younger, pornography definitely acted as some kind of guidance... but in terms of actual relationship, I learned it's so unrealistic... my first partner was very nice and then we kind of just talked about things in terms body images and figuring some stuff out.

Luiz reported that his lived experience in romantic relationships helped him understand that communication and negotiating boundaries is a big component in sex which is not portrayed in porn. He said:

...for example, like anal sex. I think in porn it's portrayed as like so much simpler and straightforward. In real life it's not like that at all...I definitely had to correct those

expectations. It definitely helps when you have a sex life or a partner that you can speak to openly about what you like, what you don't like, you know what went right, what went wrong...

Simon reported that sexual experiences with partners helped him see that sex is less about performance, but more about play and emotional connection. He said:

I think before there was that transition at some point like maybe in late teenage years like realizing it's not a performance and it's play and interchange. I think like one thing that really helped was just starting to see more people, like to have relationships and sex with more girls... [I realized] how it could be a sacred union and then giving me just more respect for it in general... [It is] pleasurable to play and explore with a partner and not follow the exact routine that porn presents.

Consent in Pornography

In addition to being critical about the realism of how porn portrays sex, participants highlighted that consent is often not shown in pornography. For example, Ethan highlighted that consent is often “implied.” He said, “in porn there's always...a definite yes...they wouldn't have something where they'd say no.” He expressed concern that this inaccurately portrays sexual partners as being always willing and available for sex and may contribute to the occurrence of sexual assault. Others spoke about consent related to sharing sexual content. Azad reported being aware that porn videos can be filmed or uploaded without all parties' consent. He recalled “[a] few cases like that... where you know the girl was not told that her video or something was going to be uploaded... and the victims committing suicide.” He decided to “stick to only [the] kind of pornography which is kind of you know consensual.” For Advik, learning about consent and sexual assault shaped his view of pornography's portrayal of consent. He said:

There was this huge rape case that happened back in Delhi, India, that's one of the main influences in my life...It seems like porn was only teaching you how to have sex but [does] not [show] exactly what consent is.

Participants also noticed elements of coercion in porn. For example, Luiz observed that often in porn scenarios males are portrayed as being “dominant” and in a position of “authority” and “they coerce the female into doing it a lot of times... she just could not refuse him.”

Emphasis on Male Pleasure

Participants also reported noticing the emphasis on male pleasure in porn materials which they feel contributes to the objectification of women. Simon pointed out that: “[porn] caters very much to the guy.” Ethan’s reflections highlighted that female pleasure is often portrayed as not important and are secondary to those of the males. He said, “one of the themes is that sort of focusing on the male pleasure... they don't really care if the woman orgasms.” Mike’s reflections echo those of Ethan’s. He said, “it always seemed like it's for the male's pleasure only... her pleasure isn't really a part of the act, it isn't necessary...its kind of like makes you objectify the woman more.” Furthermore, participants highlighted that females are often both portrayed as in service of the males’ desires and pleasure, and without agency and sexual desires of their own. Ethan said, “in porn there's always a definite yes. It's never...something where they'd say no... she wants it all.” Luiz also noticed that males are often portrayed in a position of power, and females as “a toy to play with” and that the dynamic is more pronounced in heterosexual porn. He also noted that sexual communication about female pleasures and desires is “non-existent” in the pornography that he watched.

Reflecting on the Influence and Impact of Pornography

Participants were asked to reflect on the impact of pornography consumption on their lives. Participants reports predominantly focused on the challenging and difficult implications of pornography use. Their reflections centred around the following domains: (a) porn shaping sexual arousal, (b) objectifying self and others, and (c) social and romantic relationships. It is important to note that when participants spoke about their experiences, they often specifically referenced professionally-made, hard-core pornography. Many participants described having distinct experiences with non-professional pornography which is described in another section of the paper.

Concerns About Porn Shaping Sexual Arousal

Participants commonly reported being concerned that their sexual arousal patterns and fantasies would be influenced by the types and intensity of stimuli in porn. Dylan reported that he was “desensitized” to the content of porn over time. He described it as follows:

I started masturbating regularly at that age...it's so animalistic with the hard-core pornography, the professional ones, and maybe it's not the world that I know...I'm a tame person, I'm an innocent, docile person, and an introvert and it's just a little traumatic for me. As things went on, it's just a normal routine.

Other participants reported being concerned that porn may influence their brain circuits related to sexual arousal. For example, while reflecting on aggression in porn, Ali said, “you're training your brain...if I continually watch videos of this, is how I would eventually become, its going to change the way I feel about sex.” He is also concerned about the intensity of sexual stimuli in porn and that he is “not biologically programed to handle that much.” Ali explained that this is

why he is “trying not to watch porn at all” and “it’s something that [he] constantly fight[s].” Mike raised a similar concern about aggression being associated with sexual arousal. He said:

Over the years I have once again stayed away from professionally done porn...I've kind of realized how damaging it can be in, in many different ways and how it can affect relationships. [I'm]worried that let's say I watched so much that my neuro pathways went in that direction where I could only, you know, be rough with her or something like that.

In addition to concerns about aggression being associated with sexual arousal, Mike went on to share that he wants to watch porn that is “as close to reality as possible” because he does “not want to go down a rabbit hole where [he] can only get off to one specific type of pornography, and then actual sex doesn't really do it.”

Objectifying Self and Others

Participants’ reflections on the impact of porn commonly identified the idea that porn portrayals contributed to the objectification of the self and/or the other. In other words, for some of the participants, porn’s sole focus on sexual acts reduces human beings to body parts and objects of desire. For example, for Azad, porn viewing contributed to his focus on the “dimensions of the penis” and “the time you are performing” during sex. He elaborated that porn has distorted these perceptions of himself and sex. For Ali, he similarly reported an “objectifying mindset.” He said, “you're just thinking about more physical features of a woman rather than noticing more about things about that person.” He also discussed the challenge of becoming aware of and combating these mindsets. He said, “I’m trying to be genuine but like in my mind I’m already having all these [sexual] thoughts.” This objectifying mindset fueled by desires “contradicts” his wish to connect with the person on a more holistic level which for him “end up leading to anxiety.” Mike, among other participants, also noted that sexual scenarios in porn are

usually “divorced from intimacy and love.” According to Mike, porn usually depicts “one-night stands and casual sex”, which for him, contributes to “seeing a woman's value based off of how attractive she is...and not she is funny or smart or good at what she does, career-wise, that sort of thing.”

Porn and Intimate Relationships

Participants spoke about porn’s impact on their relationships in general. Their accounts centered around the impact on sexual satisfaction and influences on motivation to pursue relationships.

Sexual satisfaction. Participants highlighted both positive and challenging aspects of porn’s impact on sexual relationship and sexual satisfaction. Ali, for example, spoke about the ways in which porn impacted his level of sexual desires and arousal. He explained that his sexual arousal may have been conditioned through habitual consumption and masturbation.

Specifically, he said:

...I masturbated pretty much every day when I was younger so I thought that when I am in a relationship, I should have sex everyday...because my sex drive was just really high at the time, but it wasn’t really high, it was just preprogrammed to be high...I didn’t know what it was really because I had been watching porn for so long.

Similarly, Simon spoke about finding sexual experiences less pleasurable and exciting which he contributed to the consistent consumption of porn materials. He said:

...in periods where I am watching it a lot, it does create a sort of numbness...sex in general [in] real relationship become kind of less exciting... I think it’s just like an overload in the sense that if you eat a bunch of ice cream then the carrots going to taste less good. But if you have been fasting, it’s going to taste amazing.

Adrien echoed Simon's point of porn saturating sexual pleasure. He said:

"If I watch more then I find like real sex less intimate. Because you watch it by yourself and like do it by yourself then with your partner... you get the feeling, at least like your body tell you, that you are not interested too much."

Participants reported that watching porn while in a relationship has led to conflict with partners. Jia shared that having to hide his porn consumption from his girlfriend has led to arguments and feelings of shame in his romantic relationship. Simon also described porn playing a role in conflict with his girlfriend. He said, "...it was kind of taboo, like she didn't see why I would want to watch porn because I was with her...I think she just felt like dismissed...kind of unappreciated because she thought I needed something she didn't have."

While most of the participants' reports were related to the challenging impact of pornography, a small number of participants reported neutral or positive impacts on their sexual relationships. Luiz reported that: "I'm think it's neutral...it's not a bad thing to have it in my life." Ethan reported that he can talk about porn viewing with his partner and create a mutually comfortable space for it. He said:

With my partner...I don't find it that that she watches porn and...normally we watch it near each other...it might be hurtful to some people to ignore your partner and the go watch porn...if that ever happened, I'd definitely talk about it with my partner.

Jia reported that he watches porn with his girlfriend and it's a tool to enhance sexual intimacy.

Dylan spoke about porn helping him expand his sexuality. He said:

[Porn] increases your curiosity and your willingness to try things and to know what's out there... it helps me to learn what's out there at least anyway, because you don't learn this stuff in the textbooks and you don't learn it from your parents.

Porn and the Pursuit of Relationships. Several participants spoke about the ways in which porn influenced their experience of pursuing romantic and sexual relationships. Ben, for example, spoke about his experience of being shy and hesitant in pursuing romantic and sexual relationships. Porn, according to him, contributes to more reluctance in pursuing relationships. This is because “it's way easier to just go online and watch the video than pursue a real relationship.” Simon said that using porn for sexual gratification removes the “incentive” to meet potential partners. He said, “... [porn is] an easy safety net, like knowing I can just go and have an orgasm myself removed a bit of an incentive of like going out and being active...” For Ali, porn viewing temporarily satisfied his needs for intimacy. He puts it this way: “when you are releasing like your energy through [porn]... you don't really feel that urge or need for [intimacy]...you are not trying to form intimacy with girls anymore because you can just get that quick release at home.” For Mike, porn is a way to fulfill his intimacy needs without the risk of being rejected. He said, “I have pornography so why would I want to get a girlfriend and put the effort in... I already have this so... these girls on the screen aren't going to judge me.” Blake spoke about how porn plays a bigger role in his sexual experience because of difficulties related to mental health. He said, “I have really bad anxiety...so I don't invite people into my life...having a romantic partner is out [of the question].”

Dependency on Pornography

Upon reflection on their current relationship with porn consumption, many of the participants described being “dependent” or “addicted” to porn viewing. For example, Advik talked about being “addicted” to porn. He defined it as “something you want but don't need.” The high frequency in which he was viewing porn was another indication that he was addicted. Mike also described his viewing habits as an addiction. He said, “it was definitely an addiction. It

was something I needed to do every day.” In Ali’s reflection of his “addiction” to porn viewing he spoke about how factors such as stress and life circumstances contributed to him being “addicted” to porn. He said:

I suppose I used it as an escape mechanism for certain things which were going on in my life...so its usual stuff like the stress of school and other personal instances went about during that time ... So I used to actively seek it to the point that I got addicted to it.

He elaborated on the experience of developing a tolerance for the level of stimulation for porn.

He said:

You just don’t feel as excited about it as you used to before, but you still do it so it’s not a good feeling. Whatever happens my mind just wants to go to it and just browse through some porn it just started to lose its significance, but I still kept on doing it.

In addition to the experience of being “addicted” to porn, Ali also spoke about the emotional toll that the dependency was exacting on him. He described it this way:

It is just momentary, it never lasts, and after watching pornography I feel like you know worser than before because you know, you get that shock first of happiness for a while, after the happy you experience that dip and that makes things even harder.

Blake spoke about the impact of his porn dependency on various areas of his life. He stated:

“...anytime I was bored I would watch porn... It was getting very unhealthy, like I was neglecting other parts of my life... I was just like neglecting my homework... also watching more porn than TV.”

Reflecting on the Relationship with Pornography Use

Participants accounts contained reflections about their current and ideal relationship with pornography consumption. In other words, participants described their current attitudes and

evaluations and concerns of their pornography use and in what way they would like that to be different. They also described wishing to limit or eliminate pornography viewing to reduce its negative impacts and their reliance on it.

Limiting or Eliminating Porn Viewing

When speaking about their relationships with pornography, some participants described being reflective of the degree to which they are impacted by or reliant on porn. They reported to be concerned about porn distorting their perceptions of sex and their decency on it. For example, Simon described experimenting “with just like stopping for a while... experimented with just like seeing what would happen if I didn't and seeing my like libido increase a bit or my interest in like actual relationship increase.” He realized that “sex in general and real relationships become kind of less exciting.” He reported regulating his porn viewing so that it wouldn't negatively impact his relationship. Other participants also described working toward limiting or stopping porn viewing. Adrien reported that because he is aware of the negative impacts of pornography, he regulates how much he watches. He said:

Because I'm aware that it plays a negative role, that's why I don't watch it that much. I don't think it's really good for the health... it's like going for satisfaction, trying to get the satisfaction, there is some negative things in it trying to get a lot of satisfaction.

Mike reported that he specifically tries to not watch “professionally-done” porn because he believes it is “damaging...in many different ways” and how it affected his relationships. He reported that professionally produced, hard-core pornography distorts ideas about intimacy and negatively shapes his sexual arousal. Mike also described experimenting with abstaining from pornography and masturbation all together to reduce the negative impacts of porn on his life. Ali talked about a similar experience of trying to reduce the impact of porn viewing by reducing his

consumption due to concerns about sexual arousal and ideas about relationships being distorted. He described deciding to stop watching certain genres of porn because he was concerned about its impact. He said, "There's a point where like I needed to like stop watching this...it's gone too far. I guess I had some realization like that isn't what I would probably want in real life." He also spoke about wanting to reduce the impact formed by long-term porn viewing. He specifically talked about wanting to address the "objectifying mindset" toward women. He said:

You are training your brain; I mean whether its consciously or subconsciously no matter what it's going to happen... so I'm trying to lessen that association I guess as much as possible...you have the more frequency of sexual thoughts about people...more frequency of like this objectifying mindset.

He has therefore adopted the aspiration to stop watching porn or abstain from watching porn that contains aggression.

Some participants talked about limiting porn consumption due to their perceived dependency on it. For example, Azad said:

It was really good and then afterwards it went another direction I just start to depend on that... to the point that I just don't want it anymore, but I just find myself doing it. It's something I'm actively trying to get out of.

Other participants spoke about a preventative or a moderated approach to porn viewing. For example, Ben regulates how much he watches and plans to stop watching all together in the future because does not want to become reliant on it. Dylan similarly views it as a matter of moderation and control. He said:

It gets the job done and I don't see it as damaging or unhealthful to your health. There's also always a limit. If you watch too much, it's taking away your free time, it's not

healthy, but I think [our] sexual nature... we should embrace that part. You should moderate it.

Participants who identify as being religious spoke about their religious beliefs informing their goal to reduce or eliminate porn viewing. For example, Ben, who identifies as a Catholic said that he wants to “eventually stop using [porn] entirely...because still I think part of my heart, I think I'm committing a sin.”

Reflecting on Experience as a Porn Consumer

Some participants reflected on their experience of being a consumer of pornography and concerns about how performers are being treated in the industry. For example, Adrien described feeling a sense of injustice when he encountered scenes wherein the performers were humiliated or subjected to violence. He said:

It makes me feel like it's not fair, like there is a reason behind that...Money maybe it's from the woman's side she needs money, or this is just one example and from the men's side maybe he's a violent man or he just wants to express his violence, so he does it through this action.

Other participants spoke about feelings of shame related to consuming pornography because in their view, some porn contains problematic messaging, such as the objectification of women and lack of consent. For example, Luiz said:

I think nowadays I'm a little more self-aware of how damaging it can be sometimes how, you know, the porn industry, there's a lot of things I've seen that make me almost ashamed of being a consumer of porn. I think ideally, I would like to decrease how much I'm consuming, maybe even remove it.

Mike similarly described feelings of shame when he watches hard-cord porn that he considers problematic. For him there is a strong feeling of self-disgust. He said:

It's right after I've finished, then I would be kind of horrified or disturbed by it... I don't know it kind of like makes you objectify the woman more because she's just being thrown around... like by her suffering it kinds of makes it better for the man which is something that I don't really like... I think afterwards...it would be disgust, shame, [and] shock that I'm watching what I'm watching.

Mike goes on to describe thinking about the performers and their experiences of the scene. He said:

Afterwards I would think more of the actual person, the girl and her experience and if she's enjoying it... just feeling sympathetic towards people and seeing they're going through. I try to get inside of their head as opposed to just seeing them as a bunch of body parts and orifices which is something that I think happens a lot on pornography.

Some participants like Simon thought about the experiences of the performers as it relates to current social issues relates to treatment of women in our society. He said, "I just get a bit turned off...like that doesn't belong there...like violence and sex... it makes me think about real life situations and, maybe exploitations of women."

Porn Viewing as Emotion Modulation

Participants were asked to comment on the role that porn plays in their lives in general. Their accounts centered around the phenomenon of using porn to modulate emotional and psychological states. These emotional states typically included challenging emotions such as loneliness, stress, sadness, and boredom. For example, Luiz said that porn "was just very relaxing and like a way for me to vent my anxiety and just escape from reality and just kind of

relax, I guess. The more stressed I am, the more I'll watch it.” Advik reported that porn used to be a very important way to cope with difficult feelings and for him to feel relaxed. He said:

It was mostly boredom and stress. It was nice to have a medium to, as I said lose myself.

It was just this pleasure that I get from masturbating after watching porn was a moment that I used to value a lot. I used to value it a lot because it used to help me focus on studies.

Dylan reported that porn was his way of coping with challenges related to negative self-concept.

He described it as follows:

If I feel down or bored, I want some kind of [positive feeling] of myself and so forth.

Now I might watch it more often. I feel down and I say, okay, well, maybe this will cheer me up or, hey, maybe this will make me feel that I'm not what I make myself out to be.

Participants' descriptions of using porn to modulate emotions also contained feelings of ambivalence about the “unhealthy” aspect of this process. For example, John said, “I feel like it's not the healthiest way to take care of, you know, feeling stressed out...maybe there's more healthier approaches.” Ali compared viewing porn as a means of modulating emotions to the act of using drugs. He said:

It very much was like oh I'm bored or I feel like bad...it almost acts like whatever the same way that you would use drugs. you're trying to be more mindful so you're not using it as a crutch for your emotional experiences.

Other participants, like Azad, were concerned they were using porn to avoid difficult feelings.

For Azad, this avoidance not only leaves the original emotions unaddressed, but also contributes to his dependence on porn. He said:

I go for pornography and all when I am feeling down and depressed... if I'm supposed to feel down or depressed because of something and if I just don't feel it, I just go to pornography right away...you get that shock first of happiness for a while... in a way I'm delaying what I'm supposed to feel by watching pornography...it just started to lose its significance, but I still kept on doing it for I suppose I got obsessed with it or something.

Pandemic and Porn Viewing Habits

The interviews were conducted in 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. The participants were invited to reflect on the impact that the pandemic has had on them and their porn viewing habits. The participants commonly reported an increase in their porn viewing frequency during the pandemic. They pointed to stress, isolation, and distress related to disruption in routine as contributors to their increased porn use. Yan, for example, reported a higher frequency in porn viewing because he had “nothing else to do” due to the lock down. Simon similarly reported that due to boredom during the pandemic, his viewing frequency increased to “almost every day, and maybe twice a day sometimes.” Luiz highlighted that social isolation was a factor in his increased viewing. He said, “just because I’m home more... because the pandemic has made it harder to hang out with friends and get in touch with friends... when I’m hanging out with friends, I watch less porn.” John reported that in addition to not being able to see his girlfriend, the stress related to his job during the pandemic contributed to increased viewing frequency. He said, “because COVID affected my job...I didn’t know what to expect at [that] moment so that also increased the stress...I’m sure it gave me more of an urge to [watch] more porn.” Dylan reflected on the experience of using pornography to gain feelings of intimacy when he was separated from his partner due to public health restrictions. He described it as follows:

During the pandemic, it has played a role in that, because I can't do it in other forms, so this would be kind of seeing how I used to do it and how I used to do it with her, kind of missing the old days, Yeah, that's replaced that.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

In the current literature on pornography consumption, there is much emphasis on identifying specific associations between pornography viewing and sexual behaviours, particularly harmful ones (Attwood, 2011). Given that much of these efforts are quantitative in their methodology, employ ‘stimulus-effect’ models, and focus on relatively narrow sets of experiences, it is often difficult to nuance and contextualize these findings (Attwood, 2011). This study attempted to address these limitations by taking on a constructionist approach to capture the context and meaning of young men’s porn viewing experiences. The results revealed that young men’s porn consumption is a process laden with meaning related to gender performance, sexual identity formation, sexual pleasure, and the pursuit of intimacy. As well, participants’ accounts highlighted that they are active consumers engaged in meaning-making in their development as sexual beings. Additionally, the results of this study highlighted that the young men’s experiences of and relationship to pornography changed over time in significant ways. Implications for education and future research are also discussed in this section.

Journey Alone in the Development as Sexual Beings

One of the unique contributions of this study is to situate young men’s experiences of pornography consumption within the context of their sexual development. A contextual view of their experience allows for a better understanding of the meaning, intentions and implications of pornography use in their lives. One aspect of this context is in their early adolescence. Young people find themselves filled with sexual desires, fantasies, bodily changes, and romantic ideas

and they have yet to develop the language and concepts to understand them. As they attempt to make sense of their sexual experiences, their families and schools respond with awkwardness, avoidance, shaming, and attempts to contain their sexuality. This is exemplified by parents shielding their eyes during movie scenes depicting sex, shaming their children, or punishing them for watching pornography, and schools focusing on risk-based conversations while excluding discussions about sexual pleasure and intimacy. As such, youths are placed in a conflicting position in terms of sexuality. On one hand, there is a general avoidance of seeing youth as sexual beings, while on the other, their sexuality is dangerous and needs to be contained (Mulholland, 2013). In this study, participants' accounts consistently reflected a sense of disappointment at the refusal to be recognized as sexual beings and the loss of opportunity for guidance and mentorship. The implications of this phenomenon for these participants were twofold. First, they relied on themselves to make-sense of their sexual experience and pornography consumption. Pornography thus served as an important outlet for agentic self-discovery. Second, the participants internalized the risk and shame-based narratives about sex, sexuality, and pornography.

Porn As a Way to Claim Agency

Within the context of avoidance and containment of young men's sexualities, pornography fills the vacuum as a potent form of media to learn and explore all things related to sex. Consistent with the extant literature, this study found that pornography served as an important form of sex education for young men (Hare, Gahagan, Jackson, & Steenbeek, 2014; Rothman et al., 2015) in that participants accessed it partly to satisfy curiosities about sex and to obtain instructions on how to have sex (Albury, 2014; Smith, 2013). The result of this study adds to the literature by revealing that attempts to learn about sex were not simply about obtaining

information, but about a broader meaning: claiming agency in sexual development. Furthermore, the results challenge the notion that their sexuality needs to be contained. Agency, as articulated by Mulholland (2013) in the context of youths' sexuality, refers to the freedom to choose, to explore and build skills. By intentionally accessing pornography, young people challenged the notion that they are asexual, and that sex and pleasure are dangerous for them. In other words, pornography viewing served as a counter-narrative space wherein they could explore their sexual selves and experience sexual pleasure which subverted the shame and risk-based narratives about sex. This notion of agency and empowerment is further demonstrated by the narratives of participants who identify as questioning or bisexual. Supporting the existing literature, this study found that pornography is an important source of sex-related information for same-sex attracted people (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Kubicek, Beyer, Weiss, Iverson, & Kipke, 2010).

Kubicek et al. (2010) found that information offered in schools related to diverse sexual orientations are mostly absent. The same study revealed that sexuality-diverse youths don't usually reveal or discuss their sexual orientations with their families until a much later age. As such, sexuality diverse youths not only have to contend with the lack of information relevant to them, but also have to deal with potential isolation and marginalisation (Anhalt, 1998). The findings of this study suggest that for sexuality-diverse young men, accessing pornography was not only a valuable way to explore their arousal, sexual attraction, and sexual identities, but also a powerful tool to challenge the hegemonic heterosexual narrative of what is sexually 'normal' and 'acceptable'. Through viewing pornography, they were able to connect with and explore parts of their sexuality that are made to appear abnormal through the silence of schools and their parents. As well, their viewing of pornography facilitated counternarratives to the heterosexual, social and religious discourse that sex is between a male and a female and that intercourse is the

only real way to have sex. In this way, sexuality diverse people's pornography consumption in part facilitated a transition from a state of confusion and isolation to a more integrated sense of self-acceptance and community.

Internalized Shame and Risk-based Narrative About Porn and Sexuality

Other implications of young people's journeys in their sexual development are the feelings of shame and guilt related to pornography viewing and to a certain degree their sexuality. A unique finding of this study is that feelings of shame are especially pronounced during young men's early phases of consumption, and the feelings reappear in their later relationships with pornography consumption. This finding supports some existing research which found that young people internalize risk-based talk related to pornography that manifests as feelings of shame (Spišák, 2016) but it is inconsistent with studies finding that there is a great degree of normalization of porn use among young males (Setty, 2022). The disagreement amongst the findings could be in part due to the age difference of the participants in these studies. The age of the participants in this study are similar to those in Spišák's (2016) study and about 10 years older than those in Setty's (2022) study. The culture and narrative related to pornography among young males could have shifted in the last decade. The specifics of these discrepancies are beyond the scope of this study, but an interesting area for future research.

The findings of this study illuminated that vague risk-based discussions about pornography and sexuality from schools and families which don't directly engage youths potentially contribute to the internalization of a reductionistic and shame-based understanding of porn and its consumption. That is, while participants spoke about the usefulness of pornography, it was often framed as a monolithic media form that encouraged lust, produced harm and was potentially addictive. This monolithic, risk-based discourse about porn fails to recognize the

complexity of this media form which has many genres, and varying degrees of risk. The current study showed that this phenomenon was especially pronounced early on in young people's pornography access. Additionally, the consumption of pornography often accompanied a sense of deviancy and guilt, as well as a sense of confusion about why watching porn is so bad. This shame-based narrative about porn acted as a barrier for young people to talk about and make sense of their experience of pornography with adults, which left them having to rely on themselves to figure out what in porn is problematic and why. An example of this was that early in their pornography consumption, participants relied on their gut feelings and common sense to assess the realism of what they were watching.

Furthermore, participants had difficulty making sense of some parts of their sexuality brought out by their pornography viewing experience which often contributed to a moralistic (i.e., good vs bad) view of themselves. For example, some participants spoke about being aroused by porn portraying aggression and subsequent feelings of shame about their arousal. Their shame reflects a moralistic view of their sexual arousal where they saw themselves as bad for being aroused by something that is deemed deviant. However, the meaning of their arousal is complex and requires self-reflection, and can help develop a rich subject for erotic discourse for these young people that can be constructive in their sexual development. In the absence of the space for critical engagement with these experiences, it is possible that the vague shame-based narrative of pornography becomes internalized as a sense of badness, and negatively shapes their self-concept. Scholars like Mulholland (2013) have pointed out that the privileged expert voice, used by child protection organizations, educators, scholars, and health care workers, over-emphasises the connection between pornography and harm. While the risks of pornography are present and warrant serious discussion and further research (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016), without

creating spaces for young people to talk about and make sense of their porn viewing experiences, broad and unspecific risk talk can potentially contribute to internalized feelings of shame and increase a sense of isolation during sexual development.

Young People are Meaning-making Agents

The results of this study demonstrate that young people make active attempts to interpret and think about pornography with the resources that they have. This is consistent with many studies that have highlighted youths as active meaning-making agents in their interactions with pornography (Hare et al., 2014; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Smith, 2013). For these participants, active engagement was first demonstrated during their early adolescence when they attempted to determine the realism of what they were seeing. For example, some of them picked up on the lighting effects as being like those used in movies which indicated to them that pornography was a production. They also made use of the internet, in attempt to find more information about their curiosities and questions about pornography. Later in their development, their reflections became more sophisticated. They were able to critically think about and identify themes such as male dominance, objectification of women, problematic portrayals of consent, as well as the impact of pornography on their sexuality, relationships, and emotional health. They also became more acutely aware of the risks and harms of pornography on a personal level and employed active efforts to mitigate and contain those risks. In this way, young adults were not only meaning-making agents but also stewards of their own sexual wellness.

Adding to the literature is the finding that young people's meaning-making capacity developed over time. While the participants critically engaged with pornography as young adults, they were ill-equipped to do the same in their early adolescence. For example, their assessments were primarily focused on how realistic porn portrayals were and employed mostly hunches and

guesses. These results suggest that there is period during development when young males may be more susceptible to the influence of certain types of pornography. This is substantiated by participants' retrospective accounts that described porn as having influenced ideas about power dynamics in sex, and contributed to an objectified view of women, and a skewed understanding of aggression in sex and relationships. These findings are consistent with the extant quantitative research on the same topic (Flood, 2009; Koletic, 2017; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007).

In sum, the results highlight that young people are not simply 'exposed' to pornography as passive audiences. They engage with and employ resources to interpret and decode pornography. However, they do need support in their meaning-making process, especially during early adolescence when their critical thinking capacities and knowledge about pornography is lacking.

Changes in Pornography Engagement Across Time

According to the literature review conducted for this study, there is a paucity of research that examines the qualitative changes of young people's engagement with pornography over time. There are a number of longitudinal studies that examined some of the temporal aspects of pornography consumption. For example, Koletic's (2017) systematic review of these longitudinal studies shows that these studies primarily focus on changes in the contents consumed, sexual behaviours, and the role of various moderators and antecedent such as age and biological sex, beliefs, and attitudes toward sex. These longitudinal studies were partly conducted to establish causal links between pornography use and behavioural outcomes given the ostensible ethical concerns with employing experimental designs (Koletic 2017). As such, there is little understanding of the subjective meaning and qualitative changes related to pornography consumption that takes place across young people's development. The findings of this study

address this gap in the literature by contributing to an understanding of the qualitative changes that occur in young people's engagement with pornography.

According to the findings of this study, there are three aspects in which young people's experiences of pornography change over the course of development. They include: (a) a change in how they think about and assess pornography, (b) a change in pornography preferences, and (c) a change in their relationship to pornography. As the discussions about these changes unfold, the argument is made that pornography consumption is intimately tied to the development of participants' self-concept. That is, a choice to consume specific types of pornography is an expression and reflection of their developing personal, sexual, ethical, and moral identities.

The first aspect of change identified in this study is the stance from which young people engage with pornography. During their initial exploration of pornography, the participants' primary intention was related to satisfying curiosities about sex. They were primarily engaging with pornography on a content level and were concerned about the realism of pornography. For example, their accounts of early consumption reflected a preoccupation related to what sex is, how does sex work and whether porn portrayals were realistic. As they continued their exploration, pornography access became part of a routine for self-stimulation, pleasure, and learning. They also began to explore various genres of pornography, some of which they found pleasurable, repulsive, and or a mix of arousal and shame. At this stage, their relationship with pornography had an additional moralistic dimension. That is, their engagement with pornography took on a good/bad, normal/deviant perspective. The themes that the participants thought about were related to 'am I bad for watching porn?' and 'what does it say about me when I am aroused by certain genres of pornography?' As the participants matured into young adults, their engagement with pornography shifted into the realm of constructing and maintaining self-

concepts. That is, they became more aware of the risks and impacts of pornography, started assessing the role pornography played in their lives and relationships, and worked toward congruence between their ideal selves and pornography consumption habits. For example, participants identified the role of pornography in modulating their emotional states and appraised if this type of use was in line with their self-image. The above findings has resonates with the biographical phases of pornography use articulated by Hardy (2004). The findings of this study compliments Hardy's (2004) work by adding realism, moral, and self-concept dimensions to young people's pornography use.

Another aspect of pornography consumption that shifted overtime for the participants was the type of pornography that they chose to watch. Research on this topic is quite limited as only one study was identified in the literature which examined this topic in the last twenty years. Vandebosch's (2015) longitudinal study showed that younger adolescents are more likely to watch affection-themed pornography, while older youths and young adults are more likely to watch dominance-themed pornography. As well, Zillmann (1986) argued that older youths watch dominance-themed pornography because they become de-sensitized to pornography and will seek out more extreme forms. Inconsistent with these understandings, the current study found that as young people matured, they intentionally turned away from professionally produced pornography that contains aggression and dominance. They preferred pornography that portrayed emotional connection, and intimacy, and materials that resonated with their lived sexual experiences. They consistently spoke about pornography viewing as a way to approximate feelings of intimacy and emotional connection. This finding is buttressed by their reports that social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to them viewing more pornography to experience feelings of connectedness. In this way, pornography viewing took on the role of

fulfilling emotional needs for the participants. Furthermore, participants' accounts suggested a trajectory of pornography preference shifting from open exploration to more intentional selection of specific types of pornography. When participants initially accessed pornography, they had little knowledge of the various genres of pornography and their own preferences. They consumed whatever their friends shared and what came up on google searches. Their curiosity, along with technological features on pornography websites such as algorithmic suggestions, led to a period when they explored a wide range of pornographies. This exploration helped them learn more about their own sexual preferences as well as their sexual identities. In this way, their porn preferences were no longer guided by curiosity, but by their growing sense of sexual and personal identities. As well, they became increasingly aware and concerned about the ethical and social dimensions in which pornography was situated. These included gender relations, power dynamics and sexism. These developments contributed to them actively choosing to consume pornography that reflected who they were in terms of sexual preferences, personal values, religious beliefs, moral and ethical values, and self-image. In this way, their pornography preferences were no longer simply an experience of sexual pleasure, but also a reflection of their self-image and self-expression.

The final aspect of change that occurred across time for the participants was the relationship they have with pornography. When they first discovered pornography, it was understood as a source of stimulation and information about sex. In this way, their relationship with pornography was unidirectional. That is, pornography was an external set of stimulation that they sought out. As their consumption continued and became more regular, their experiences of pornography informed and helped construct their senses of sexual and personal identity. Some noticed that they were drawn to people of a certain body type, race, biological sex etc. Some also

found themselves aroused or repulsed by certain themes, sex acts, and relationship dynamics. These experiences acted as feedback in their journeys to learn about themselves and construct their identities. As such, their relationships with pornography began to take on a bi-directional quality wherein their experience of pornography informed the construction of identities which in turn was expressed through their pornography selections.

Taken together, the results of the study highlight that young people's pornography viewing experience changes over time and has implications in the development of identities and self-concept. For the participants, pornography consumption changed from a unidirectional relationship to a bidirectional process involving the construction of self-concept and self-expression.

Pornography Consumption and Gender Performance

Scholars have pointed out that young people's interpretation and engagement with pornography is situated within broader socio-cultural contexts, particularly gender (Garlick, 2010; Kimmel, 2005). For example, Attwood (2005) posited that pornography is "used as part of the performance of gender identities within peer groups... to provide resources for the different ways in which girls and boys perform and display gender" (p. 80). Consistent with this notion, Scarcelli's (2015) study found that boys normalize the consumption and sharing of pornography because it is congruent with the masculine narrative of being sexually curious and readily aroused. The same study found that girls' private consumption of pornography is deemed deviant which is reflective of the traditional feminine narrative of being sexually reserved. Consistent with the extant literature, the findings of this study suggest that the ways in which young people think about their pornography consumption are informed by and are performances of gender

narratives. Adding to the literature, the findings identified more nuanced aspects of the relationship between pornography consumption and the performance of masculinity.

First, pornography consumption served to bolster participants' sense of masculinity. One of the main motivations for viewing pornography during participants' early stages of consumption was to learn the mechanics or the how-to's of sex. They viewed pornography, in part, to learn about how to act during sexual encounters, to understand the different sex positions, and discover ways to pleasure sexual partners. In other words, sex was initially conceptualized as a set of performances in which one needs to develop competencies and pornography was an effective way to do so. Kimmel (2005) argued that a performance-based view of sex is a notion derived from traditional masculine ideals of work and achievement where sexual pleasure becomes a job to become good at. In this way, sex is viewed as a disembodied task and sexual bodies as instruments to carry out the goal of orgasm (Kimmel, 2005). Along with this performative-notion of sex, also comes with the assumption that males are responsible for the pleasure of their sexual partners (Smith, 2013). Within this context, the findings of this study suggest that pornography viewing is a way to strive toward masculine ideals of being competent and good performers of the act of sex. As such, learning through pornography and knowing what to do during sex is about both curiosity and a way to strengthen a sense of masculinity.

Another unique finding of this study is that the relationship between pornography consumption and the performance of masculinity is not static, but changes over time. As discussed above, early consumption of pornography served to bolster a sense of masculinity for the participants. However, as they matured into young adults, their accounts reflected a sense of ambivalence about the threat that pornography consumption poses to their masculinity. Specifically, they were concerned about pornography negatively impacting their capacity to form

intimate relationships and its negative impact on sexual satisfaction in those relationships. Taylor and Jackson's (2018) study highlighted that being able to find sexual partners and have sex with them is one of the core expressions and aspirations of masculinity. The same study argued that pornography (which is usually privately used) is, in contrast, experienced as unmasculine and has a 'lonely loser' connotation. Therefore, having control over one's sexual arousal and protecting one's capacity to engage in sexual relationships is a central preoccupation in the performance of traditional masculinity (Garlick, 2010). With this context in mind, participants' concerns over the loss of sexual self-control and negative impacts on intimate relationship can be understood as anxiety about the erosion of masculinity. As such, their efforts to regulate, and in some cases, to eliminate their pornography use can be interpreted as their way of preserving essential aspects of their masculinity.

Another unique contribution of this study is the finding that young men's conceptualization of intimate relationships, reflected in their accounts of pornography consumption, directly challenges some traditional masculine narratives about sexual intimacy. Scholars like Kimmel (2005), who has written extensively about masculinity, argued that traditional masculine narratives socialize boys to detach emotions from sexual expressions, and as a result, sexual pleasure is often pursued as an end in itself. Lofgren-Mårtenson and Månsson's (2010) findings support this notion. Their study found that relative to females, males are far more open to pursue sex for the sake of pleasure rather than emotional connection. The results of the current study are not consistent with the extant research. Participants' accounts demonstrate a rejection of portrayals of sex that are devoid of emotional connection and intimacy. They reported yearning for a sense of connectedness with their partners and sought out pornography to approximate experiences of closeness and bonding. Additionally, as young adults, they found

pornography that does not portray emotional intimacy to be less arousing, and instead sought out pornography that was made by supposed real-life couples. These findings reflect a rejection of important aspects of traditional masculine identity and behaviours.

Contribution to Original Knowledge

The findings of this study make several unique contributions to the literature on young people and pornography consumption. First, the findings suggest that young people's consumption of pornography is their agentic attempt to explore and discover aspects of their sexual identities when faced with the juxtaposition of avoidance and containment of their sexualities. The attempt to avoid and contain young people's sexuality partly manifests as risk-based talk about pornography that prevents them from having useful discussions about pornography with adults and also contributes to feelings of shame and guilt about their sexuality. Next, echoing the literature, this study found that young people are capable of critically thinking about pornography, are aware of the harms, and actively try to protect themselves from risks. Additionally, this study extends the current understanding of young people's pornography use by identifying qualitative changes in their thinking and relationship with pornography. Specifically, their way of engaging with pornography evolved from learning about sex and determining realism of pornography to gradually considering ethics, morals, values, and self-concept. In this way, their pornography consumption shifted from a unidirectional information gathering to a bi-directional process of identity development and self-expression. Lastly, this study identifies the relationship between gender performance and pornography consumption and the changes that occur across time. Specifically, the findings highlight how pornography consumption serves to bolster a sense of traditional masculinity for young men early on in their development, but as they develop, they become increasingly concerned about the threat porn poses to their

masculinity. Lastly, the study highlighted young people's desire and yearning for emotional connection and intimacy which counters the traditional masculine narrative about sex and relationships.

Implications for Practice

Pornography is often framed as harmful and risky to young people's sexual well-being (Flood, 2009). This framework positions pornography as a harmful medium to which young people are exposed which contributes to problematic attitudes and behaviours. Young people are assumed to be especially vulnerable because their critical thinking capacities are not fully developed (McKee, 2009). As such, the discourse around pornography and young people has focused on examining its risk, and ways to reduce harm. These 'privileged expert voices' (Mulholland, 2013) often leave young people's perspectives side-lined (Spišák, 2016). This study took a constructionist approach that focused on young people's experiences of pornography, their meaning-making processes, and their relationships to pornography. The findings of this study contributed to a growing reconceptualization of young people's relationship to pornography that has implications in sexuality education and broader social discourse about pornography.

First, findings of this study suggest that pornography consumption is part of young people's journey to explore, understand, and learn more about sexual aspects of themselves. It is a process that informs and interacts with various aspects of their identities. As such, their consumption of pornography is a meaningful and constructive process. However, they are often left to figure out this journey independently because the information they seek is often absent from schools and families. As well, they are often presented with vague risk-based talk that contributes to feelings of shame. Within this context, pornography is a potent source of self-

discovery. Therefore, it would be more helpful to young people for social institutions to explore ways they better provide support in their development as sexual beings rather than solely examining how pornography harms them.

Additionally, findings of this study suggest that young people are not a monolithic group. Their experiences differ based on contextual factors such as age, sexual orientation, gender identities etc. Participants' accounts suggest that the way they use and interpret pornography is uniquely based on their gender and sexual identities. In the absence of inclusive conversations about sexual and gender diversity in schools and homes, pornography at times can be one of the only sources of self-discovery. As such, the risk-based and exposure-effect conceptualization of pornography consumption contributes to young people's feelings of shame and deviancy when they are attempting to explore of their sexual and gender identities. This can further contribute to feelings of alienation and marginalisation, especially sexuality diverse people. Therefore, future research about pornography needs to attend to the intersection between gender, sexual orientation, and pornography consumption.

Finally, findings of this study revealed that pornography consumption does contain risks which highlight the need for intervention. Specifically, pornography shaped participants' ideas about sex and relationships early in their pornography consumption. However, it is important to highlight that young people's foci in pornography changes across time. Participants in their early adolescence were mostly preoccupied with assessing the realism of the different types of pornography. As the participants matured, their ethics, morality, values, self-concept and social and cultural context became part of their engagement with pornography. Therefore, it is important to not infantilize young people as a passive audience being exposed to pornography. They need to be recognized as critical agents who read and interpret the pornography text. As

well, they are aware of harms of pornography and actively think about power dynamics and social discourses about sex.

Given that pornography consumption is an active and meaningful process that is situated within young people's identities and social contexts, discourse about pornography consumption needs to expand beyond protecting young people from harm. Discussion and education about pornography need a shift toward a person-centred, sex-positive sexual health education that focuses on self-expression, self-acceptance, pleasure, and diversity in sexuality (Schalet, 2011). Furthermore, talks about pornography need to be infused with education about power dynamics, gender relations, equity, and social cultural contexts to support the ways young people engage with pornography. This notion echoes works by scholars such as Goldstein (2020) whose research supports a movement from sexuality education focusing on individualistic decision-making and media literacy to incorporating discourses of sexuality that attend to ethics, social responsibility, and power dynamics in our society.

Limitations

The findings of this study need to be examined with the consideration of its limitations. First, the participants are heterosexual cis-gendered males except for three who identified as questioning or bisexual. As such, the experiences of gender and sexuality diverse populations are not well represented in this study. Next, participants and their families generally have post-secondary educations and are located within one band of the social economic spectrum. Therefore, the findings of this study are reflective of people within certain intersections of social locations and may not be transferable to other populations. Next, given the sensitive nature of the topic of this study, there may be a degree of self-selection bias. That is, individuals who are more comfortable discussing pornography and had the opportunity to critically reflect on their porn

consumption experience may be more likely to have participated. Therefore, the narratives presented in this study may not have captured the diversity of experiences of pornography consumption. Also due to the sensitive nature of the topic, face-to-face interviews may have impacted the content and process of participants' disclosure. Lastly, parts of participants' accounts were retrospective of their experience during adolescence. As such, it is possible that their recollection may not have fully captured their experiences at that time.

Future Research

The findings of this study highlight the complexity of young people's experiences of consuming pornography and the way it is situated within contextual factors such as age, gender, and sexual orientation. Gender and sexual orientation are revealed to be key contextual factors. Therefore, it would be important to conduct studies that focus on the intersection of gender and sexual orientation and pornography with a focus on gender and sexuality diverse populations. The findings also highlight the dynamic changes of young people's engagement with pornography across their development. While the results provided a cursory view of the major changes, future research can build on these findings and explore the nuanced way in which sexual development, self-concept, and pornography consumption interact.

Lastly, the findings of this study demonstrate the benefits of having methodological diversity in pornography research. The constructionist approach adopted by this study provided a nuanced and multi-dimensional description of young people's pornography consumption that adds depth and context to extant literature. As such, future research should consider adopting diverse methodological approaches to enrich the discourse related to pornography.

REFERENCES

- 2018 year in review (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review#age>
- Abiala, K., & Hernwall, P. (2013). Tweens negotiating identity online – Swedish girls' and boys' reflections on online experiences. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(8), 951-969.
doi:10.1080/13676261.2013.780124
- Agar, M. (1986). *Speaking of Ethnography*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Albury, K. (2014). Porn and sex education, porn as sex education. *Porn Studies*, 1(1-2), 172-181.
doi:10.1080/23268743.2013.863654
- Anhalt, K. (1998). Developmental and adjustment issues of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents: A review of the empirical literature. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 1(4), 215. doi:10.1023/A:1022660101392
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emergin adulthood: A theroy of developmentl from the late teens through the twneties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.55.5.469
- Arrington-Sanders, R., Harper, G. W., Morgan, A., Ogunbajo, A., Trent, M., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2015). The Role of Sexually Explicit Material in the Sexual Development of Same-Sex-Attracted Black Adolescent Males. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(3), 597-608.
doi:10.1007/s10508-014-0416-x
- Attwood, F. (2002). Reading Porn: The Paradigm Shift in Pornography Research. *Sexualities*, 5(1), 91-105. doi: 10.1177/1363460702005001005
- Attwood, F. (2005). What do people do with porn? Qualitative research into the comsumption, use, and experience of pornography and other sexually explicit media. *Sex Cult Sexuality*

and Culture : An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, 9(2), 65-86. doi:10.1007/s12119-005-1008-

7

Attwood, F. (2011). The paradigm shift: Pornography research, sexualization and extreme images *Sociology Compass*, 5(1), 13-22. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00356.x

Atwood, K. A., Zimmerman, R., Cupp, P. K., Fongkaew, W., Miller, B. A., Byrnes, H. F., . . .

Chookhare, W. (2010). Correlates of precoital behaviors intentions, and sexual initiation among Thai adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 32(3), 364-386.

doi:<https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1177/0272431610393248>

Baams, L., Overbeek, G., Dubas, J. S., Doornwaard, S. M., Rommes, E., & van Aken, M. A. G.

(2015). Perceived realism moderates the relation between sexualized media consumption and permissive sexual attitudes in Dutch adolescents. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(3), 743-754. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0443-7>.

Baker, K. E. (2016). Online pornography – Should schools be teaching young people about the risks? An exploration of the views of young people and teaching professionals. *Sex Education*, 16(2), 213-228. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1090968

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social fundation of thoughts and action: A social cognitive theory* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barron, M., & Kimmel, M. (2000). Sexual violence in three pornographic media: Toward a sociological explanation. *Journal of sex research*, 37(161-169). doi:10.1080/00224490009552033

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social contruction of reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Beyens, I., Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2015). Early adolescent boys' exposure to Internet pornography: Relationships to pubertal timing, sensation seeking, and academic

- performance. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 35(8), 1045-1068.
doi:10.1177/0272431614548069
- Bleakley, A., Hennessy, M., Fishbein, M., & Jordan, A. (2008). It Works Both Ways: The Relationship Between Exposure to Sexual Content in the Media and Adolescent Sexual Behavior. *Media Psychology*, 11(4), 443-461. doi:10.1080/15213260802491986
- Bohan, J. (1993). Regarding gender: Essentialism, constructionism, and feminist psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 17(1), 5-21 doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1993.tb00673.x
- Braithwaite, S. R., Coulson, G., Keddington, K., & Fincham, F. D. (2015). The Influence of Pornography on Sexual Scripts and Hooking Up Among Emerging Adults in College. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(1), 111-123. doi:10.1007/s10508-014-0351-x
- Braun-Courville, D. K., & Rojas, M. (2009). Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Sites and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45(2), 156-162. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.12.004
- Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman. (2010). Agression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis update. *Violence Against Women*, 16, 1065-1085. doi:10.1177/1077801210382866
- Brown, D. (2000). Adolescents' sexual media diets. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 27(2), 35-40. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/S1054-139X(00)00141-5
- Brown, J., & Schulze, L. (1990). Effects of race, gender, and fandom on audience interpretation of Madonna's music videos. *Journal of Communication*, 40, 88-102. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1990.tb02264.x
- Brown, J. D., & L'Engle, K. L. (2009). X-Rated. *Communication Research*, 36(1), 129-151. doi:doi:10.1177/0093650208326465

- Cameron, D., & Frazer, E. (2000). On the question of pornography and sexual violence: Moving beyond cause and effect. In D. Cornell (Ed.), *Feminism and pornography* (pp. 240-253). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Camic, P., Rhodes, J., & Yardley, L. (2003). Naming the stars: Integrating qualitative methods into psychological research. In P. Camic, J. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 1-15). Washington, DC: APA Books.
- Chen, A.-S., Leung, M., Chen, C.-H., & Yang, S. C. (2013). Exposure to Internet pornography among Taiwanese adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 41(1), 157-164. doi: 10.2224/sbp.2013.41.1.157
- Coughlan, M., Cronin, P., & Ryan, F. (2007). Step-by-step guide to critiquing research. Part 1. Quantitative research. *British Journal of Nursing*, 16(11), 658-663. doi:10.12968/bjon.2007.16.11.23681
- Cowan, G., & Dunn, K. F. (1994). What themes in pornography lead to perceptions of the degradation of women? *Journal of Sex Research* 31, 11-21. doi:doi:10.1080/00224499409551726
- Doornwaard, S. M., Bickham, D. S., Rich, M., ter Bogt, T. F., & van den Eijnden, R. J. (2015). Adolescents' use of sexually explicit internet material and their sexual attitudes and behavior: Parallel development and directional effects. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(10), 1476-1488. doi:10.1037/dev0000040
- Dworkin, A. (1974). *Woman Hating* New York, NY: E.P. Dutton.
- Dworkin, A. (2000). *Scapegoat : The jews, israel, and women's liberation*. New York, NY: Free Press.

- Flood, M. (2007). Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 43(1), 45-60. doi:10.1177/1440783307073934
- Flood, M. (2009). The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. *Child Abuse Review*, 18(6), 384-400. doi:10.1002/car.1092
- Frith, H., & Kitzinger, C. (2001). Reformulating sexual script theory: Developing a discursive psychology of sexual negotiation. *Theory & Psychology* 11(2), 209-232.
doi:10.1177/0959354301112004
- Gagnon, J., & Simon, W. (1973). *Sexual conduct: The social sources of human sexuality*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Books.
- Garlick, S. (2010). Taking control of sex? Hegemonic masculinity, technology, and internet pornography. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(5), 597. doi:10.1177/1097184X09341360
- Goldstein, A. (2020). Beyond porn literacy: Drawing on young peoples pornography narratives to expand sex education pedagogies. *Sex Education*, 20(1), 59.
doi:10.1080/14681811.2019.1621826
- Grebner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1994). Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in the theory and research* (pp. 17-41). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Häggström-Nordin, E., Sandberg, J., Hanson, U., & Tydén, T. (2006). 'It's everywhere!' Young Swedish people's thoughts and reflections about pornography. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 20(4), 386-393. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6712.2006.00417.x
- Hald, G. M., Kuyper, L., Adam, P. C. G., & de Wit, J. B. F. (2013). Does Viewing Explain Doing? Assessing the Association Between Sexually Explicit Materials Use and Sexual

- Behaviors in a Large Sample of Dutch Adolescents and Young Adults. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 10(12), 2986-2995. doi:10.1111/jsm.12157
- Hald, G. M., Seaman, C., & Linz, D. (2014). Sexuality and pornography. In D. L. Tolman, L. M. Diamond, J. A. Bauermeister, W. H. George, J. G. Pfaus, & L. M. Ward (Eds.), *APA handbook of sexuality and psychology, Vol. 2: Contextual approaches* (pp. 3-35). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Signs*, 14, 575-599.
- Hardy, S. (2004). Reading pornography. *Sex Education*, 4(1), 3.
doi:10.1080/1468181042000176506
- Hare, K., Gahagan, J., Jackson, L., & Steenbeek, A. (2014). Perspectives on Pornography: Exploring sexually explicit Internet movies' influences on Canadian young adults' holistic sexual health. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 23(3), 148-158.
doi:10.3138/cjhs.2732
- Hare, K. A., Gahagan, J., Jackson, L., & Steenbeek, A. (2015). Revisualising 'porn': how young adults' consumption of sexually explicit Internet movies can inform approaches to Canadian sexual health promotion. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 17(3), 269-283.
doi:10.1080/13691058.2014.919409
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. New York: Harper.
- Hennessy, M., Bleakley, A., Fishbein, M., & Jordan, A. (2010). Estimating the longitudinal association between adolescent sexual behavior and exposure to sexual media content. *Journal of sex research*, 46(6), 586-596.
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224490902898736.

- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A Guide to Conducting Consensual Qualitative Research. *Counseling Psychologist*, 25(4), 517-572.
doi:10.1177/0011000097254001
- Jekins, J. P. (2017). Pornography. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pornography>
- Johnson, J. L., & Repta, R. (2012). Sex and gender. In J. L. Oliffe & L. Greaves (Eds.), *Designing and conducting gender, sex, and health research* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Kail, R. V., & Cavanaugh, J. C. (2010). *Human Development: A lifespan view* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Kimmel, M. S. (2005). *The gender of desire : essays on male sexuality*. State Univeristy of New York Press.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. *Bold Visions in Educational Research*, 32, 285-326. doi:10.1007/978-94-6091-397-6_23
- Koletic, G. (2017). Longitudinal associations between the use of sexually explicit material and adolescents' attitudes and behaviors: A narrative review of studies. *Journal of Adolescence*, 57, 119-133. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.04.006
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214. doi: 10.5014/ajot.45.3.214
- Kubicek, K., Beyer, W. J., Weiss, G., Iverson, E., & Kipke, M. D. (2010). In the Dark: Young Men's Stories of Sexual Initiation in the Absence of Relevant Sexual Health Information. *Health Education & Behavior*, 37(2), 243-263. doi:10.1177/1090198109339993

- Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), 21-35.
doi:10.1177/160940690300200303
- Lavoie, F. R., L., & Herbert, M. . (2000). Teen Dating Relationships and Aggression: An Exploratory Study. *Violence Against Women*, 6(1), 6-36.
doi:10.1177/10778010022181688
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Linz, D., & Malamuth, N. (1993). *Pornography*. Thousand Oaks
Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc. Retrieved from
<http://sk.sagepub.com/books/pornography>. doi:10.4135/9781483326214
- Lo, V.-h., & Wei, R. (2005). Exposure to Internet Pornography and Taiwanese Adolescents' Sexual Attitudes and Behavior. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 49(2), 221-237. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4902_5
- Lofgren-Mårtenson, L., & Månsson, S. A. (2010). Lust, love, and life: a qualitative study of Swedish adolescents' perceptions and experiences with pornography. *Journal of sex research*, 47(6), 568-579. doi:10.1080/00224490903151374
- Luder, M.-T., Pittet, I., Berchtold, A., Akrâe, C., Michaud, P.-A., & Surâis, J.-C. (2011). Associations Between Online Pornography and Sexual Behavior Among Adolescents: Myth or Reality? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(5), 1027-1035. doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9714-0

- Manaf, M. R. A., Tahir, M. M., Sidi, H., Midin, M., NikJafar, N. R., Das, S., & Malek, A. M. A. (2014). Pre-marital sex and its predicting factors among Malaysian youths. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 55(Supp, 1), 82-88. doi: 10.1016/j.comppsy.2013.03.008
- Marston, C., & Lewis, R. (2014). Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK. *BMJ Open*, 4(8). doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996
- Mattebo, M., Tydén, T., Häggström-Nordin, E., Nilsson, K. W., & Larsson, M. (2014). Pornography and sexual experiences among high school students in Sweden. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 35(3), 179-188. doi:10.1097/DBP.0000000000000034
- McElroy, W. (1997). A feminist defense of pornography. *Free Inquiry*, 17(4), 14-17.
- McKee, A. (2009). Social scientists dont say Titwank. *Sexualities: Studies in Culture and Society*, 12(5), 629. doi:10.1177/1363460709340372
- Mesch, G. S. (2009). Social bonds and Internet pornographic exposure among adolescents. *YJADO Journal of Adolescence*, 32(3), 601-618. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.06.004
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250
- Mulholland, M. (2013). *Young people and pornography : negotiating pornification*. Palgrave MacMillan. doi:10.1057/9781137326195
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2007). Adolescent's exposure to a sexualized media environment and their notions of women as sex objects. *Sex Roles*, 56(5-6), 381-395. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9176-y

- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2009). Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material and Notions of Women as Sex Objects: Assessing Causality and Underlying Processes. *Journal of Communication*, 59(3), 407-433. doi:10.1177/0093650210362464
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2010). Processes underlying the effects of adolescents' use of sexually explicit Internet material: The role of perceived realism. *Communication Research*, 37. doi:10.1177/0093650210362464
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2011a). The influence of sexually explicit internet material on sexual risk behavior. A comparison of adolescents and adults. *Journal of Health Communications*, 16(7), 750-765. doi:10.1080/10810730.2011.551996
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2011b). The Use of Sexually Explicit Internet Material and Its Antecedents: A Longitudinal Comparison of Adolescents and Adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(5), 1015-1025. doi:10.1007/s10508-010-9644-x
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2016). Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4-5), 509-531. doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1143441
- Romito, P., & Beltramini, L. (2015). Factors associated with exposure to violent or degrading pornography among high school students. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 31(4), 280-290. doi:10.1177/1059840514563313
- Rothman, E. F., Kaczmarzsky, C., Burke, N., Jansen, E., & Baughman, A. (2015). "Without Porn ... I Wouldn't Know Half the Things I Know Now": A Qualitative Study of Pornography Use Among a Sample of Urban, Low-Income, Black and Hispanic Youth. *Journal of sex research*, 52(7), 736-746. doi:10.1080/00224499.2014.960908

- Sabina, C., Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2008). The nature and dynamics of internet pornography exposure for youth. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 11(6), 691-693.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.0179>
- Scarcelli, C. M. (2015). 'It is disgusting, but ... ': adolescent girls' relationship to internet pornography as gender performance. *Porn Studies*, 2(2-3), 237-249.
doi:[10.1080/23268743.2015.1051914](https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2015.1051914)
- Schalet, A. T. (2011). Beyond abstinence and risk: A new paradigm for adolescent sexual health. *Women's Health Issues*, 21(3), 5. doi:[10.1016/j.whi.2011.01.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2011.01.007)
- Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stance for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionis. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 189–213). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Scott, J. E. (1991). What is obscene? Social science and the contemporary community standard test of obscenity. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14, 29-45.
doi:[10.1016/0160-2527\(91\)90023-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-2527(91)90023-G)
- Setty, E. (2022). Pornography as a cultural resource for constructing and expressing gendered sexual subjectivities among students in a co-educational boarding school. *Porn Studies*, 9(2), 159. doi:[10.1080/23268743.2021.1875028](https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2021.1875028)
- Sevcikova, A., & Daneback, K. (2014). Online pornography use in adolescence: Age and gender differences. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 11(6), 674-686.
doi:[10.1080/17405629.2014.926808](https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2014.926808)

- Shek, D. T., & Ma, C. M. (2013). Consumption of pornographic materials among Hong Kong early adolescents: A replication. *International Journal of Child Health and Human Development*, 6(1), 157-166. doi:10.1100/2012/406063
- Sinacore, A. L., & Enns, C. Z. (2005). Multicultural and feminist literatures: Themes, dimensions, and variations. In C. Z. Enns & A. L. Sinacore (Eds.), *Teaching and social justice: Integrating multicultural and feminist theories in the classroom* (pp. 99-107). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Smith, J., Jarman, M., & Osborn, M. (1999). Doing interpretive phenomenological analysis. In M. Murray & K. Chamberlain (Eds.), *Qualitative Health Psychology* (pp. 218-240). London: Sage.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis : theory, method, and research*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Smith, M. (2013). Youth Viewing Sexually Explicit Material Online: Addressing the Elephant on the Screen. *Sex Res Soc Policy Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 10(1), 62-75. doi:10.1007/s13178-012-0103-4
- Spišák, S. (2016). 'Everywhere they say that it's harmful but they don't say how, so I'm asking here': young people, pornography and negotiations with notions of risk and harm. *Sex Education*, 16(2), 130-142. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1080158
- Steele, J. R., & Brown, J. D. (1995). Adolescent room culture: Studying media in the context of everyday life. *Journal of Youth and Adolescents*, 24(5), 551-576. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01537056
- Steeves, V. (2014). *Young Canadians in a wired world, phase III: Trends and recommendations*. Retrieved from Ottawa: <http://mediasmarts.ca/ycww>

- Svedin, C. G., Akerman, I., & Priebe, G. (2011). Frequent users of pornography. A population based epidemiological study of Swedish male adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34(4), 779-788. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.04.010>
- Taylor, K., & Jackson, S. (2018). I want that power back: Discourses of masculinity within an online pornography abstinence forum. *Sexualities: Studies in Culture and Society*, 21(4), 621. doi:10.1177/1363460717740248
- Tibbals, C. A. (2014). Gonzo, trannys, and teens – current trends in US adult content production, distribution, and consumption. *Porn Studies*, 1(1-2), 127-135. doi:10.1080/23268743.2013.863659
- Tsitsika, A., Critselis, E., Kormas, D., Konstantoulaki, E., Constantopoulous, A., & Kafetzis, D. (2009). Adolescent pornographic internet site use: A multivariate regression analysis of the predicitive factors of use and psychosocial implications. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 12, 545-550. doi:<https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1089/cpb.2008.0346>
- van Manen, M. (1997). From Meaning to Method. *Qualitative health research.*, 7(3), 345. doi:10.1177/104973239700700303
- Vandenbosch, L. (2015). Antecedents of adolescents' exposure to different types of sexually explicit internet material: A longitudinal study *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50, 439-448. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jora.12008>.
- Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2013). Sexualization of adolescent boys: Media exposure and boys' internalization of appearance ideals, self-objectification, and body surveillance. *Men & Masculinities* 16(3), 283-306. doi:10.1177/1097184X13477866

- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. . Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Ward, L. M., Gorvine, B., & Cytron-Walker, A. (2002). Would that really happen? Adolescents' perceptions of sexual relationships according to prime-time television. In J. D. Brown, J. R. Steele, & K. Walsh-Childers (Eds.), *Sexual teens, sexual media: Investigating media's influence on adolescent sexuality* (pp. 95-124). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Weber, M., Quiring, O., & Daschmann, G. (2012). Peers, Parents and Pornography: Exploring Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material and Its Developmental Correlates. *Sexuality & Culture*, 16(4), 408-427. doi:10.1007/s12119-012-9132-7
- Wilkinson, S., Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2004). Qualitative data collection. In D. Marks & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology* (pp. 39-55). London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Wilson, H., & Hutchinson, S. (1991). Triangulation of qualitative methods: Heideggerian hermeneutics and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research*, 1, 263-276.
- Wolak, J., Mitchell, K., & Finkelhor, D. (2007). Unwanted and Wanted Exposure to Online Pornography in a National Sample of Youth Internet Users. *Pediatrics*, 119(2), 247-257. doi:10.1542/peds.2006-1891
- Wosick, K. (2015). Pornography. In J. DeLamater & R. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Yardley, L. (2015). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (3rd ed., pp. 257-272). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2005). Exposure to internet pornography among children and adolescents: A national survey. *Cyberpsychology & behavior: The impact of the Internet, multimedia and virtual reality on behavior and society*, 8(5), 473-486.
doi:10.1089/cpb.2005.8.473
- Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., Hamburger, M., Diener-West, M., & Leaf, P. J. (2011). X-rated material and perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior among children and adolescents: is there a link? *Aggressive Behavior*, 37(1), 1-18. doi:10.1002/ab.20367
- Zillmann, D. (1986). Shifting preferences in pornography consumption. *Communication Research*, 13(4), 560. doi: 10.1177/009365086013004003

Appendix A

Advertisement



**ARE YOU A MAN BETWEEN 18 AND 25 YEARS
OLD?**

**DID YOU START VIEWING PORNOGRAPHY
SINCE ADOLESCENCE?**

**IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THESE TWO
QUESTIONS, WE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY USE!**

The goal of this study is to learn about how young men select, interpret and make-use of online pornographic material. Young men between the ages of 18 and 25 who have consumed pornography since adolescence are invited to participate.

This is a doctoral dissertation study conducted by Shaofan Bu under the supervision of Dr. Ada Sinacore. If you are willing to participate in a 60-90 minute confidential interview, please contact:

Shaofan Bu, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
E-mail: shaofan.bu@mail.mcgill.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. Ada Sinacore
Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
E-mail: ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca
Phone: 514-398-3446

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in the research project entitled:
**AN EXPLORATION OF YOUNG MEN'S EXPERIENCE OF CONSUMING
 PORNOGRAPHY AND IT'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP**

Conducted by: Shaofan Bu, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, shaofan.bu@mail.mcgill.ca

Research Supervisor: Ada Sinacore, Ph.D., Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, (514) 398-3446, ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca

McGill University Research Ethics Board: Lynda McNeil, Manager Research Ethics, (514) 398-6831, lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

The current study is being conducted by Shaofan Bu for the purpose of completing a doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology. This research project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ada Sinacore from the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and has been subject to evaluation and approval by the Review Ethics Board, which adheres to the Tri-council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants.

Goals of Research Study:

- To examine young men's processes of selecting, interpreting, and making use of sexually explicit internet material (SEIM).
- To understand the how SEIM consumption play a role in young men's intimate relationships.

Process of Study:

- To keep a private diary about SEIM consumption for a period of four weeks. This diary is private and will not be accessed by the researcher
- Participate in a 60-90 minute audio recorded interview, conducted in English, at the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab (EDUC B111/112)
- Discuss participants' processes of selecting, interpreting, and making use of SEIM
- Discuss the role of SEIM in participants' intimate relationships,
- Participants can refuse to respond to any questions they are not comfortable answering
- Participants can withdraw from the study at any time

Risks of Participation:

- There are minimal potential psychological risks of the study, since participants have the right to choose the information that they wish to share during the interview and to refuse to answer any questions

- In case of any unforeseen psychological distress, the researcher will stop the interview. The researcher has expertise in psychological interviewing and will make every effort to address any problems that arise
- The researcher can refer the participants to the appropriate mental health services (e.g., McGill Counselling Centre), if necessary

Confidentiality:

- The interview will be audio recorded and the data will later be coded by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcriber
- The transcriber will not have access to the name of the participants; however, since they will be listening to the tape, they may have access to information about the participants. Thus, a confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the transcription service provider will be signed
- Following transcription, the primary researcher will verify the transcription and at that time, take out all identifying information (e.g., names, names of cities and schools, etc.) and store transcripts in locked filing cabinets in the researcher's lab
- The informed consent and the data will be kept in separate, secure environments (i.e., locked cabinets) in the researcher's lab
- Throughout the process of communicating results, participants' confidentiality and anonymity will be protected
- If quotes are used, all identifying information will be removed
- Audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the study and will then be erased
- The researcher will not have access of participants' private diaries. The degree of disclosure during the interview about diary entries is at the sole discretion of the participants

How Data Will Be Used:

- Disseminated in the researcher's doctoral thesis
- Disseminated at professional conferences and published in scholarly journals

After reviewing the form with the researcher:

- I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits and inconveniences involved in this project
- I understand that I am free to withdraw **at any time** from the study without any penalty or prejudice
- I understand how confidentiality will be maintained during this research project
- I understand the anticipated uses of data, particularly with respect to publication, communication, and dissemination of results

I have read the above and I understand all of the above conditions. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I agree that my interview can be audio recorded.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C**CONTACT INFORMATION FORM**

DATE:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER(S):

Number	OK to leave message (Yes/No)	Best time to be reached
(Home)_____	_____	_____
(Work)_____	_____	_____
(Cell) _____	_____	_____

Appendix D

DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION FORM

Please answer all of the following questions by circling the appropriate response(s). Please fill in additional information where necessary.

Background Information:

1) Age: _____

2) Preferred pronoun (e.g., he, she, they): _____

3) Relational status:

- a) Married
- b) Common Law
- c) Partnered
- d) Single
- e) Divorced/Separated
- f) Widowed/Widower
- g) Other: _____

4) Sexual Orientation:

- a) Heterosexual
- b) Gay
- c) Lesbian
- d) Bisexual
- e) Transgender
- f) Questioning
- g) Other: _____

5) Race:

- A. Aboriginal (Inuit, Métis, North American Indian)
- B. Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
- C. Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
- D. East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese)
- E. South East Asian (e.g., Indian, Bangladeshi)
- F. Latin American
- G. White (Caucasian)
- H. Other: _____

6) Ethnicity/ies: _____

12) Primary Religious Affiliation:

- a) Christian

- b) Jewish
- c) Muslim
- d) Buddhist
- e) Hindu
- f) Baha'i
- g) None
- h) Other (specify): _____

15) Highest educational degree obtained:

- a) High School
- b) Cegep
- c) Bachelor's
- d) Master's
- e) Doctorate
- f) Other: _____

16) Citizenship Status in Canada

- a) Citizen
- b) Permanent resident
- c) Student/Work Visa
- d) Refugee
- e) Other _____

Occupational Information:

17) Current occupation: _____

18) Employment status:

- a) Full-time (35 or more hours per week)
- b) Part-time (less than 35 hours per week)
- c) Unemployed
- d) Other _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Introduction

During this interview, I would encourage you to use your private diary as prompt for our discussion. It is up to you how much you'd like to share from your diaries.

- Can you please tell me about yourself?
- What made you want to participate in this study?

Background/warm-up

- Please tell me about your experience with internet pornography
 - prompts:
 - How would you define pornography?
 - What types pornography do you usually watch?
 - How do you usually access pornography?
 - Tell me about the time you first stated watching pornography
 - How has it change from then to now?
- In general, what are some of the main reasons why you watch internet pornography?
- Could you tell me about your attitude and perception of internet pornography?

Topic 1. Process of selecting pornography

- Describe what was happening right before you decided to watch pornography?
 - Prompts:
 - where are you?
 - what was happening?
 - how were you feeling?
 - why did you decide to watch pornography at that time (e.g., bored, stressed, aroused)?
- Given that there are so many different types of internet pornography, how did you decide which ones to watch?
 - Prompts:
 - what did you decide to watch?
 - what draws you to that particular pornography?
 - what factors, if any, influenced your selection?
 - listening for mentioning of social locations (e.g., sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, gender performance).
 - did you decide on a particular pornography right away? if no, what types of pornography you eliminated before you decided on that one?
 - which websites/sources did you use?

Topic 2. Interpretations and making use of pornography

- Could you describe how you make sense of or interpret the representations in internet pornography?
- Prompts:
 - did you detect themes or messages in the pornography that you viewed? if so, what are they?
 - what were your reactions toward these messages, if any?
 - what were some thoughts that came up for you?
 - listening for critiques of pornography, positive comments about pornography comments on its utility and realism
 - what factors, if any, played a role in your interpretation process?
 - listening for social locations: sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, gender presentation, etc.,
- Could you describe how you make use of, if at all, the things you see in internet pornography?

Topic 3. Internet pornography and intimate relationship

- Could you describe the ways in which internet pornography play a role, if at all, in your intimate relationships?

Closing Questions:

- What was this process like for you?
- What was helpful about the discussion? What was not?
- What was meaningful about the discussion? What was not?
- Was anything important missing from the discussion?
- What was your general experience with diary keeping?
- Is there anything else about your pornography that you think it would be important for me to know?

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ Date: March 19, 2020

Faculty Supervisor Statement: I have read and approved this project and affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval. I will ensure that the student investigator is aware of the applicable [policies and procedures](#) governing the ethical conduct of research involving human participants at McGill University and I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures.



Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: Mar 19, 2020

Respond directly on this form to each section (1-8). Do not re-order or omit any section or any of the questions under each section heading. [Answer every part of each section. Forms with incomplete sections will be returned.](#)

1. Purpose of the Research

a) Describe the proposed project and its objectives, including the research questions to be investigated (one-two page maximum).

The increasing availability of internet access and internet-enabled devices has made sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) become easily accessible and widely available. With increasing number of youths consuming SEIM, there has been increasing effort to examine the effects of consumption in recent years. However, extant studies have primarily focused on the harmful effects of SEIM consumption using quantitative measures. Young men's experience with SEIM consumption, their internal processes as consumers, and the impact on their intimate relationships remain poorly understood. This study aims to develop insights into how male emerging adults (ages 18-25) select, interpret, and make use of SEIM, and how SEIM consumption plays a role in their intimate relationships. In this study, SEIM is defined as material on or from the internet that is intended to sexually arouse the audience, including the explicit, unconcealed depiction of genitals and sexual activities.

A review of the literature revealed a number of limitations. The most salient of which are: a) a lack of understanding of consumers' processes of selection and interpretation of SEIM; b) an over-emphasis on harms and risks; c) overreliance on cross-sectional research designs; and d) a lack of attention to participants' contexts and social locations. Given these limitations, this study seeks to explore the following research questions:

What are male emerging adults' processes of selecting, interpreting, and making use of SEIM?
 How do these processes intersect, if at all, with their social locations?
 How SEIM consumption play a role, if at all, with their experience in intimate relationships?
b) What is the expected value or benefits of the research?

This proposed study seeks to complement the existing literature by examining how male emerging adults interpret and make use of SEIM. The study also aims to produce contextual descriptions of SEIM consumption with considerations of intersecting identities and social locations. By accomplishing these two objectives, I hope to expand the current discussion about SEIM beyond the moralistic binary and contribute to a more holistic understanding of SEIM consumption. This holistic perspective can potentially contribute to the discourse about consent, healthy relationships and sex education.

c) How do you anticipate disseminating the results (e.g. thesis, presentations, internet, film, publications)?

The results of this proposed study will be communicated through presentation at professional conferences and peer-reviewed journals. Potential peer-reviewed publications outlets include but not limited to:

Culture, Health & Sexuality

Sexuality & Culture

Sex Education

Porn Studies

Journal of sex research

2. Recruitment of Participants/Location of Research

a) Describe the participant population and the approximate number of participants needed.

This proposed study seeks to recruit up to 18 participants or when data saturation is reached. Self-identified males between the ages of 18-25 will be recruited for this study. The age limit is such because between the ages of 18-25 is considered emerging adulthood, which is a distinct developmental period. Eligible participants will have had viewed SEIM about once a month or more since the age of 16.

b) Describe how and from where they will be recruited. Attach a copy of any advertisement, letter, flier, brochure or oral script to be used to solicit potential participants (including information to be sent to third parties).

All the participants will be recruited using purposive sampling. Participants will be recruited through words of mouth, online forums, social networking services (e.g., Facebook), newspapers, and recruitment flyers (Appendix A).

c) Describe the setting in which the research will take place.

Individual, in-person interviews will be conducted in the Social Justice and Diversity Research Lab (SJDR) located in B111/112, Education Building, at McGill University. If participants are not able to attend the office for the interview due to distance or accessibility issues, the interview will take place over Skype Business. In the case of Skype interview, the researcher will conduct the interview in a private office.

d) Describe any compensation participants may receive for participating.

Participants will be offered a twenty-five-dollar gift card (e.g., Amazon, Indigo,) as compensation. Their names will not be on or associated with the gift card.

3. Other Approvals

When doing research with various distinct groups of participants (e.g. school children, cultural groups, institutionalized people, other countries), organizational/community/governmental permission is sometimes needed. If applicable, how will this be obtained? Include copies of any documentation to be sent.

For co-investigators/collaborators from other institutions, clearly identify their role in the research and explain how they will obtain ethics approval from their home institution (or provide if already obtained).

N/A

4. Methodology/Procedures

Provide a sequential description of the methods and procedures to be followed to obtain data. Describe all methods that will be used (e.g. fieldwork, surveys, interviews, focus groups, standardized testing, video/audio taping). Attach copies of questionnaires or draft interview guides, as appropriate.

Upon receiving ethics approval, I will begin the recruitment process. Eligible participants will be invited to contact me, the PI, via phone or email. I will first schedule a pre-interview phone conversation with each prospective participant to explain the purpose of the study, activities involved in participation, and to determine their eligibility for the study. Each participant is invited to participate in two 45-minute interviews. If a prospective participant is eligible, I will schedule the first of the two in-person interviews during the pre-interview phone call. Interviews will be conducted in the offices of the SJDR lab. The goal of the first interview is to explore participants historical experience with SEIM and their processes of interpreting SEIM. Questions will query participants' first experiences with SEIM, how these experiences may have changed over time, and their processes of selecting and interpreting SEIM. The second interview will focus the role of SEIM in participants intimate relationships (i.e. dating relationships, casual sex). During this interview, participants will be asked questions about their experience in intimate relationships, and the influence of SEIM in those relationships. The benefit of conducting two smaller interviews rather than a single interview is that the participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences between the interviews which will yield richer data.

When participants attend the first interview, I will explain the purpose of the study, outline potential risks and benefits, and review the terms of informed consent. Participants will be given the opportunity to ask questions before they sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B). After the informed consent form is signed, participants will be given some time to fill out the Contact Information Form (Appendix C) and Demographic Information Questionnaire (Appendix D). Interviews will commence upon completion of these forms. Interviews will be conducted in English by the PI for approximately 30-45 minutes. At the end of the first interview, I will schedule the second interview approximately one week away. Please see Appendix E for sample guiding questions. If in-person interviews are not feasible, participants

may choose to be interviewed via confidential video conferencing (i.e., Skype for Business). The \$25 physical gift card will be mailed to those participants promptly after the interviews.

Interviews will be audio-recorded using a digital audio-recording device. Upon completion of the interviews, the audio files will be uploaded to the lab computer in the office of the SJDR lab. After the upload is complete, the audio files will be permanently deleted from the audio-recording device. Next, I retain a professional transcription service to transcribe the interviews. I will sign a confidentiality agreement with the transcription service provider (Appendix F). The transcriber will not have access to any identifying information of the participants.

5. Potential Harms and Risk

a) Describe any known or foreseeable harms, if any, that the participants or others might be subject to during or as a result of the research. Harms may be psychological, physical, emotional, social, legal, economic, or political.

There are no foreseeable harms. However, there is a possibility that some of the interview questions may produce discomfort as the interviews are focused on participants' private activities. The participants will be informed that they may decline to answer any questions and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of compensation.

b) In light of the above assessment of potential harms, indicate whether you view the risks as acceptable given the value or benefits of the research.

Given the minimal potential for harm, the foreseeable risks are deemed acceptable given the value of the research.

c) Outline the steps that may be taken to reduce or eliminate these risks.

Participants will be fully informed of the activities involved in this study as well as their rights. Specifically, they will be informed that they may decline to answer any questions for any reason and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of compensation. During the interview, should I observe distress, or distress is reported by the participant, I stop the interview. Further, should participants report experiencing psychological distress as a result of participation, I will offer to refer them to the appropriate mental health services.

Given the relatively small cybersecurity risk related to conducting online video conferencing, I will use Skype Business which is a widely used software with well-established security and privacy features. As well, I will only conduct interviews when connected to a private and password protected Wi-Fi network to further enhance cybersecurity during the interviews.

d) If deception is used, justify the use of the deception and indicate how participants will be debriefed or justify why they will not be debriefed.

N/A

6. Privacy and Confidentiality

a) Describe the degree to which the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of data and other identifiable study materials will be assured and the specific methods to be used for this, both during the research and in the release of findings.

In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, I will take active steps throughout the stages of research. Specific measures are outlined below.

Data collections

The interviews will be conducted by the PI in the offices of the SJDR lab. After the interviews are completed, I will contract a professional transcription service to transcribe the interviews. I will sign a confidentiality agreement with the transcription service provider. The service provider will not have access to participants' contact information or any identifying information. After I verify the transcript for accuracy, I will remove all identifying information from the transcripts (e.g., names of institutions, locations).

Data storage

All electronic data (e.g., transcripts, audio files) will be stored on the computer of the SJDR lab. All hard copies of data containing participants' identifying information (i.e., consent forms and contact information) will be stored separately from the deidentified data (i.e., demographic forms and the hard copies of transcripts) in the filing cabinets of SJDR lab under lock and key. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the electronic files and hard copies of documents. All participants will be given pseudonyms during data analysis. When communicating findings (e.g., publication, conference presentation), participants will be referred to by their assigned pseudonyms. Finally, all audio-recordings of the interviews will be deleted after the completion of the study.

b) Describe the use of data identification coding systems and how and where data will be stored. Describe any potential use of the data by others.

All data will be coded using Microsoft Word, and/or NVivo software on the computer of the SJDR lab. All participants will be given pseudonyms during data analysis. All electronic data containing identifying information (e.g., transcripts, audio files) will be stored in the SJDR lab computer with password encryptions. Hard copies of data containing participants' identifying information (i.e., consent forms and contact information) will be stored separately from the deidentified data (e.g., transcripts) in the PI's lab (Education Building, B111/B112) filing cabinets under lock and key.

c) Who will have access to identifiable data?

Only the PI and his thesis supervisor will have access to identifiable data.

d) What will happen to the identifiable data after the study is finished?

Audio files of interviews will be deleted from the SJDR lab computer after the completion of the study. Hard copies of identifiable data (e.g., consent form, contact information sheet) will be kept separately from other de-identified data (demographic sheet, transcripts) in the locked filing cabinet in the PI's lab (Education Building, B111/B112) for seven years following the submission of the thesis in accordance with university policy.

e) Indicate if there are any conditions under which privacy or confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (e.g. focus groups).

There are no known conditions under which privacy or confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

7. Informed Consent Process

a) Describe the oral and/or written procedures that will be followed to obtain informed consent from the participants. Attach all consent documents, including information sheets and scripts for oral consents. For studies involving minors, describe the parent consent and child assent process and provide parent consent and youth assent forms.

In-person interview

A pre-interview screening will be scheduled to inform prospective participants of the study rationale, activities involved in participation, protection of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. This screening will take place over the phone. When participants attend the in-person interview, I will explain the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and how data will be used. Participants will be given opportunities to ask questions prior to signing the Informed Consent Form.

Online-Interview

During the pre-interview screening, participants will be asked whether they prefer to conduct the interview in-person or via Skype Business. If they are deemed eligible and choose the online meeting option, I will send those participants a password protected Informed Consent Form. The password will be sent in a separate email. I will explain the consent form in detail to the participants via phone. The consent form signed by the participant will be scanned and sent back to me. Next, I will send the password protected Contact Information and Demographic Information Form to the participants. Again, the password will be sent to participants in a separate email. The completed forms will be scanned and emailed back to me. Once I secure all three forms, the interview will be conducted via Skype for Business. Participants will receive a secure link to the Skype interview.

The use of this link does not require participants to use their personal Skype account. At the beginning of this Skype meeting, I will remind them of their rights as participants to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw at any time without penalty. The researcher will record the interview with a digital audio-recorder. No video or images will be recorded. The \$25 gift card will be mailed to participants after the interview.

b) If written consent will not be obtained, explain why an alternate consent procedure is appropriate.

Not applicable

8. Other Concerns

a) Indicate if participants are in any kind of potential conflict of interest relationship with the researcher such as being students, clients, patients or family members. If so, explain how you will ensure that participants do not feel pressure to participate or perceive that they may be penalized for choosing not to participate.

There are no foreseeable conflict-of-interest relationships between the participants and the researcher.

b) Comment on any other potential ethical concerns that may arise during the course of the research.

There are no foreseeable ethical concerns related to this proposed research.

Appendix G

Contract for Transcriber

This is an agreement between _____ and the Principle Researcher, Shaofan Bu, with regards to transcribing audiotapes for his research.

The Parameters of the Agreement are as follows:

1. _____ (to be referred as the transcriber) has agreed to transcribe audiotapes.
2. Roles and Responsibilities:
 - a) Transcriber understands that data is extremely sensitive and will treat it with the utmost of care and confidentiality consistent with Ethical Requirements of the Tri-Council Policy and the Ethical codes of the American Psychological Association.
 - b) The sole owner of the data is Shaofan Bu (Principle Researcher) and transcriber understands that she/he is not to keep any data on her/his computer or is she/he to use it for purposes other than transcription. She/he will not make any copies of the data or of use it for her/his own purpose.
 - c) No other individual should hear the tapes, read the transcript or have any interaction with the data without the written permission of Shaofan Bu. No discussion about the data should occur with anyone other than those mentioned above.

I have read the agreement and understand the conditions therein and agree of my own free will without coercion to all of the above conditions.

Transcriber

Principle Researcher

Date: _____