

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM
ERASMUS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES
Master Thesis Social Inequalities (MSc)

Representations, Stereotypes, and Identity Formation: The Role of Gay Male Pornography in the LGBTQI+ Community

Aikaterini Maria Sotiropoulou (735111)



Supervisor: Michael Giffin
Date: 22/06/2025

Abstract

This study examines the complex and ambiguous role of gay male pornography (GMP) as a social and cultural phenomenon, affecting identity formation, sexual politics, and social integration within LGBTQI+ communities. While GMP can serve as a tool for self-discovery and visibility, especially in contexts with limited LGBTQI+ representation or during adolescence, it also reproduces rigid dualistic models and hegemonic normativity that enforce systemic exclusion of multiple queer identities.

Using a qualitative approach grounded in *Queer Theory*, *Intersectionality*, *Feminist Theory*, *Critical Media Studies*, *Social Identity Theory*, and *Symbolic Violence Theory*, the research involved semi-structured interviews with nine self-identified gay men from various cultural backgrounds. The analysis identified recurring patterns, including the reinforcement of strict "active-passive" roles, hyper-masculine and gendered beauty standards, and heteronormative narratives portraying gay desire as deviant or transitional. These depictions act as forms of symbolic violence, fostering internalized insecurities, body dissatisfaction, and social hierarchies within and outside the LGBTQI+ community.

Participants acknowledged GMP's dual role as an educational resource, especially where sex education is lacking. However, industry commercialization continues to promote narrow, stereotypical representations, limiting authentic diversity. The findings highlight GMP's emancipatory potential alongside mechanisms of social control, underscoring the importance of critical media literacy, improved sex education, increased awareness, and industry responsibility. This study contributes to sociological understandings of how media representations intersect with power, desire, and social inequalities shaping queer identities and experiences.

Key Words: *GMP, queer identities, media representation, intersectionality, symbolic violence*

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Theoretical Framework	8
Conclusion	11
Methodology	12
Research Design	12
Population and Sampling Strategy.....	13
Data Collection Methods	13
Data Analysis Approach	16
Ethical Considerations	16
Conclusion	17
Results.....	17
Introduction	17
Main Thematic Sections.....	18
Section 2: The Complexity of Visibility and the Regulation of Normality through GMP	22
Section 3: Violence, Objectification, and Distortion of Gay Desire in GMP.....	26
Section 4: The Educational and Social Footprint of the GMP: Challenges and Opportunities	29
Discussion-Conclusion	34
Summary of Findings	34
Theoretical Approach:.....	35
Sociological Implications	38
Intervention Proposals	38
Conclusion	40
References	41
Appendix	44

Introduction

In modern society, the media significantly influences individual identities, social norms, and power relations. Among its diverse forms, pornography occupies a particularly contested position, often reflecting and reinforcing embedded cultural attitudes about gender, sexuality, and identity (Rothmann, 2013).

Despite the extensive research conducted on pornography, discussions about Gay Male Pornography (GMP) often focus primarily on its aesthetic and sexual dimensions, overlooking its sociocultural and psychological effects (Rothmann, 2013).

As a form of cultural representation, GMP is not limited to the depiction of sexuality but actively contributes to the formation of identity and creation of sexual scripts. Its multidimensional function, as both a site of empowerment and marginalization, makes the topic particularly important for broader study. Specifically, it embodies a dual social role, offering both validation for queer people and reinforcement of harmful stereotypes, such as restrictive beauty standards and social hierarchies. According to Rothmann (2013), the consumption of pornography contributes significantly to the formation and negotiation of sexual identity, especially for gay men. These men use pornography to define and express ideal forms of masculine identity. In this context, traditional standards of male attractiveness and sexuality are reinforced, as demonstrated by the seminal work of Tom of Finland, whose illustrations heavily influence the visual tropes associated with masculine culture (Snaith, 2003).

Although the main discussion is often focused on the aesthetic and sexual aspects of GMP, several studies try to explore its broader sociocultural and psychological effects. For instance, Corneau et al. (2017) conducted a survey in Quebec involving 974 active GMP consumers in

the past six months, which revealed various perspectives on its effects. Notably, 40% of the participants associated GMP with a positive image of homosexuality, while 21% expressed concerns about the reinforcement of racial and ethnic stereotypes. Additionally, 10% developed an independent perspective recognizing the problematic aspects of GMP without feeling personally affected.

The authors also found that, beyond its influence on attitudes toward sexuality, GMP consumption was associated with an increased sense of “pressure to conform”. Participants who viewed GMP more frequently reported comparing themselves to dominant depictions of attractiveness, ideal bodies, and sexual performance (Corneau et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with broader research linking pornography use to reduced sexual self-esteem and internalized social expectations.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for thoroughly analyzing how media consumption shapes self-concept and desire in LGBTQI+ spaces.

This research focuses specifically on gay male pornography (GMP), analyzing depictions of LGBTQI+ identities and exploring how these representations influence the formation of sexual identity and the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals. At its core, the study aims to answer a critical question: ***Does GMP function as a tool of empowerment and visibility, or does it perpetuate harmful stereotypes that marginalize and negatively impact some LGBTQI+ community members?***

Indeed, qualitative accounts from LGBTQI+ community members further illuminate these challenges. Many report feeling marginalized due to the prevailing racial and hyper-masculine stereotypes reproduced in GMP (Rothmann, 2013). These depictions often prioritize white, muscular, and conventionally attractive bodies, overlooking other representations and reinforcing narratives of exclusion (Corneau et al., 2017). This not only

perpetuates existing social inequalities but also shapes how individuals perceive themselves and their desires, both personally and socially.

Given these complex and often contradictory narratives, this research seeks to fill a gap in empirical knowledge by exploring how the stereotypes depicted in GMP influence identity formation, self-perceptions, and experiences through the coming-out process. Especially, it examines whether GMP promotes empowerment and visibility, or, conversely, promotes narratives that marginalize. The focus on gay men within the broader LGBTQI+ community is intentional, as GMP is widely used as a formative resource, and there are still unexplored aspects of its impact in the existing literature. In particular, it emerges as an important tool of identification for those living in societies where LGBTQI+ identity is invisible or stigmatized. In these societies, GMP offers the first contact with homosexual representations, actively contributing to the formation of identity. In contrast to heteronormative pornography, independent queer-oriented productions function as an alternative space of fantasy and social inclusion, especially for people unable to access queer communities.

The study used qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews, to gather in-depth insights into the effects GMP exerts on consumers. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, depending on the preferences of participants. Each session, lasting approximately one hour, allowed for a detailed exploration of personal experiences, interpretations, and internalization of GMP imagery. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, aiming for diverse representation, planning approximately ten respondents aged 18+. Moreover, ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and participant comfort, were strictly adhered to. Participants were fully informed about the aims of the study, their right to withdraw, and measures to protect their privacy. Last but not least, interview questions have been worded neutrally to minimize researcher bias and ensure authentic responses.

In general, this research had significant social relevance, offering valuable insights into how pornography could facilitate or hinder processes of self-understanding and acceptance.

Understanding the influence of GMP on empowerment and marginalization had critical implications for policy and educational initiatives aimed at challenging harmful stereotypes in the media and promoting inclusion. While self-reported experiences were inherently subjective, careful design of the interview protocol and reflective analysis strategies ensured the reliability and validity of the findings.

By examining the dual role of GMP in identity formation and the perpetuation of stereotypes, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media representation and individual self-perception within the LGBTQI+ community.

Theoretical Framework

The study examines sociological perspectives that critically analyze media, identity formation, and social inequalities, focusing on the representation of LGBTQI+ communities. Media representation plays a crucial role in shaping social identities, especially within LGBTQI+ communities. These depictions often enforce narrow ideals of beauty and sexual power, reinforcing hegemonic norms that marginalize those who do not conform to established standards (Jansen, 2002). Through the analysis of GMP (Gay Male Pornography), the research seeks to understand how these depictions shape perceptions of desire, body image, and social hierarchy within gay communities.

Queer theory offers a critical lens for critically analyzing normative assumptions about gender and sexuality, focusing on how media representations shape identities and desires (Jagose, 1996; Spargo, 1995). According to queer theorists, dominant depictions in GMP

often reinforce binary notions of masculinity and sexuality, prioritizing white, muscular male bodies and marginalizing non-conforming identities (Rousselle, 2020). This study, applying queer theory, examines how GMP constructs and regulates queer identities, reiterating narratives that can be exclusionary and impact individuals' self-perceptions and sense of belonging.

Additionally, theories related to *sexual identity formation* emphasize the importance of cultural exposure, socialization, and personal interactions in shaping individual identities (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012). According to *Social Identity Theory*, people construct their self-concept through group membership, which is particularly critical for LGBTQI+ individuals, as media representations often shape their identities, largely due to the limited diversity of representation in mainstream media. GMP functions as a key reference point that shapes gay men's understanding of sexuality, leading to social comparisons and feelings of belonging.

The concept of *intersectionality*, as introduced by Crenshaw in 1989, further enriches the theoretical framework by highlighting how various social identities—such as race, gender expression, sexuality, and social class—intersect and interact, creating different experiences of privilege or oppression. With roots in black feminism and critical race theory, it emphasizes the overlapping systems of power and discrimination, particularly affecting individuals with multiple marginalized identities (Carbado et al., 2013). Cerezo et al. (2019) highlight the importance of it in the process of identity formation, particularly for those who face multiple marginalized identities. The frequent marginalization or fetishization by GMP of racially diverse and non-hypermasculine bodies reinforces existing inequalities and hierarchies of desire, significantly affecting self-concept and social interactions in LGBTQI+ communities.

Furthermore, *feminist theory* offers valuable insights into the analysis of power dynamics that arise from media representations, especially related to gender, sexuality, and the commodification of the body. Although feminist critiques have traditionally focused on heterosexual pornography, scholars such as Marinucci (2010) and Lykke (2010) have extended these analyses to include LGBTQI+ media. GMP, like mainstream pornography, often reinforces racial and sexual hierarchies, favoring white, hypermasculine bodies and marginalizing alternative representations of queer identities. Feminist approaches critically assess how the media supports the capitalist commodification of sexuality, thereby limiting diverse expressions of non-normative desire and identity (Gardiner, 2002). This study uses feminist frameworks to explore how GMP both challenges and supports dominant sexual norms, influencing the self-concept and social inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Building upon the ideas already presented, *critical media studies* is a powerful analytical approach examining the media as sites of power, ideology, and representation. It emphasizes the role of media industries acting as critical gatekeepers, selectively promoting specific identities while marginalizing or ignoring others, shaping public perceptions, and perpetuating social inequalities. Specifically, it combines the social theory of structure, ownership, and economic interests with cultural analyses of hegemony (Ott & Mack, 2014). As Jansen (2002) notes, the commodification associated with GMP typically privileges hypermasculine, white bodies, thereby reinforcing dominant norms and limiting diverse representations. Similarly, Gauntlett (2008) identifies a paradox in the digital age—despite the increased visibility of LGBTQI+ individuals, depictions often follow restrictive cultural ideals. Indeed, as McInroy and Craig (2016) report, GMP production is usually driven by commercial goals and market viability, favoring representations deemed appealing to mainstream consumers rather than authentically representing the full range of queer identities.

Finally, delving into the understanding of the mechanisms used in reproduction, such as GMP, affecting the formation of social inequalities and hierarchies, the concept of *symbolic violence*, as originally formulated by Pierre Bourdieu in 1990 and subsequently reformulated, is particularly significant (Morrison & Pedersen, 2024). The theory focuses on the subtle, often invisible processes through which dominant social groups impose their norms, values, and meanings, which individuals internalize as "natural" and "obvious." In the context of GMP, the continuous representations of conventional sexual roles, aesthetic standards, and racial hierarchies are typical forms of symbolic violence, notably affecting the self-perception and social integration of gay men. Besides, psychoanalytic approaches deepen insight into these dynamics, highlighting how representations manifest as externalizations of internal fantasies, through which individuals manage desires, insecurities, and conflicts within social arrangements marked by unequal power distribution and normative patterns (Johanssen, 2025).

Conclusion

This research combines *Queer Theory*, *Social Construction and Identity Formation Theories*, *Intersectionality*, *Feminist Theory*, *Critical Media Studies*, and *Symbolic Violence* to develop a comprehensive framework for analyzing how GMP influences identity formation, desirability politics, and social inclusion in LGBTQI+ communities. The interplay between media representations, power, and inequalities is crucial to understanding the broader sociological implications of these depictions. The study critically explores whether GMP reinforces exclusionary norms or whether instead offers opportunities for self-affirmation and empowerment.

The integration of *Feminist Theory* allows an in-depth exploration of how GMP reflects broader power structures, particularly concerning racial and gender hierarchies in media

representation. Meanwhile, the application of *Critical Media Studies* facilitates the analysis of the contribution of the media to the construction of hegemonic norms of desire, projecting queer identities in ways that reinforce social orders. *Theories of Social Construction and Identity Formation* offer complementary interpretations of how individuals internalize, resist, or negotiate these depictions, about their self-perceptions, and the sense of belonging in the community.

Within a complex and multi-layered theoretical model, the incorporation of *Symbolic Violence Theory* adds a more nuanced dimension by drawing attention to the way media portrayals, including those found in GMP, sustain and reproduce societal power relations.

This framework guides the study in exploring participants' narratives and interactions with the media, offering valuable insights into the broader social structures that influence LGBTQI+ identity and experience.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach to explore how gay male pornography influences identity development, desire politics, and social inclusion within LGBTQI+ communities. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study aimed to capture personal narratives and social dynamics that cannot be fully understood through quantitative methods.

Research Design

Given its focus on lived experiences and self-perceptions, a qualitative method was the most appropriate. Qualitative methods allowed for in-depth engagement with participants,

providing rich insights into the media influence on their identity and social position. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining a consistent structure.

Population and Sampling Strategy

The study recruited 9 adult gay men from diverse cultural backgrounds, through purposive and snowball sampling, to ensure inclusive representation of lived experiences:

1. Purposive sampling ensured that all participants had experience with gay male pornography and could critically reflect on its role in their self-concept and social relationships.
2. Snowball sampling broadened the sample by allowing participants to nominate others from their social networks, thereby incorporating diverse perspectives that might have been more difficult to reach through conventional methods.

This sampling approach emphasized diversity in race, body image, gender expression, and sexual identity, recognizing that media representations affect individuals differently based on their intersecting identities.

Data Collection Methods

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews, which were conducted either in person or online, depending on their preference. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was guided by open-ended questions that explored:

Personal Engagement with GMP

- How often do you engage with GMP and in what circumstances?
- What aspects of GMP appeal to you, and what are the reasons behind this?
- Do you believe that GMP influences the formation of your self-concept and sexual identity?

Representations and Politics of Desire

- How do you perceive the representation of male identity in GMP?
- Do you believe that GMP imposes specific standards of attractiveness or desirability?
- Have you ever experienced exclusion or misleading representation in GMP due to race, body type, or gender expression?

The Role of GMP in Identity Formation

- Do you believe that GMP has influenced your self-concept or sexual identity, and to what extent?
- Do you think that GMP offers opportunities for self-exploration or imposes restrictive stereotypes?

Social and Psychological Impacts

- Have you ever felt pressured to conform to the beauty or body image standards displayed on GMP?
- Do you believe that GMP contributes to self-esteem issues or internalized insecurities among gay men?

- Has GMP influenced your dating preferences or perceptions of desirability within the LGBTQI+ community?

Empowerment vs. Marginalization

- Do you believe that GMP functions as a source of sexual empowerment or reinforces oppressive norms?
- Have you identified alternative or independent GMP content that better represents diverse queer experiences?
- How do you think the LGBTQI+ community can challenge problematic representations of GMP?

Two additional questions were added to the initial set of interview questions, which were formulated during the research process to further explore issues that were raised by the participants:

- Is there a specific portrayal of gay men in GMP that particularly bothers you, recurring elements that make you feel like your personal reality is not adequately reflected?
- Regarding sexual roles, do you notice certain elements emphasizing specific positions? Is there a lack of flexibility, such as the absence of role-switching?

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, ensuring that participants' voices were accurately captured.

Note: The questions provided an essential guide rather than being strictly defined. Due to the qualitative and semi-structured nature of the research, the interviews remained flexible, allowing participants to introduce new ideas or focus on experiences that may not have been initially anticipated. The wording, order, and emphasis of questions were adjusted during the

conversation to reflect the flow of the discussion and the specific context of each participant's experiences.

Data Analysis Approach

Thematic analysis was applied for the systematic analysis of the interview data. This process included:

- Data Familiarization – Transcription of interviews and repeated reading of responses.
- Coding and Categorizing – Identifying recurring ideas and important themes.
- Theme Development – Grouping codes into broader thematic categories.
- Refinement and Interpretation – Ensuring themes aligned with the study's theoretical framework.

The analysis was guided by *Queer Theory*, *Intersectionality*, *Feminist Theory*, *Critical Media Studies*, *theories of Social Identity Construction*, and *Symbolic Violence* ensuring a critical interpretation of the influence of media on desire and identity formation.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical integrity, the study adhered to strict ethical guidelines:

- Informed consent: Participants received a detailed information sheet outlining their rights and the purpose of the study.
- Confidentiality: Pseudonyms were used, and personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts.

- Right to withdraw: Participants could withdraw from the study without explanation.
- Data Security: All interviews and transcripts were stored securely and accessible only by the researcher.
- Reflection: The researcher maintained a reflection journal to ensure awareness of biases and positions when interpreting the data.

Conclusion

The methodology was designed to capture the complexity of identity formation and desire politics in LGBTQI+ communities through direct narratives and critical analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis allowed for a deep engagement with participants' lived experiences, while the sampling strategy ensured a diversity of perspectives. This approach provided a solid foundation for understanding how gay male pornography impacts social inclusion, self-image, and power relations in LGBTQI+ spaces.

Results

Introduction

This section presents the findings of a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with nine (9) self-identified gay men over the age of 18, representing diverse cultural backgrounds, to capture a wide range of experiences. As users and consumers of gay male pornography (GMP), the participants shared their multifaceted experiences regarding

pornography, gender identity, and sexual desire. The selection of participants was made through purposive and snowball sampling, aiming to reflect different socio-cultural perspectives.

The interviews were conducted in person and online (via phone calls), lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and were recorded with the participants' consent. The analysis followed a thematic approach, emphasizing the identification of patterns related to the impact of GMP on the formation of specific representations, identities, and desires.

Main Thematic Sections

The following key thematic categories emerged from the analysis:

- 1. The Role of GMP in the Construction and Enforcement of Social Roles and Standards*
- 2. The Complexity of Visibility and the Regulation of Normality through GMP*
- 3. Violence, Objectification, and Distortion of Gay Desire in GMP*
- 4. The Educational and Social Footprint of the GMP: Challenges and Opportunities*

To ensure anonymity, excerpts are presented using pseudonyms (e.g., Participant A), listed alphabetically. The findings are presented descriptively, while the interpretive commentary will be further developed in the “*Discussion*” chapter.

Section 1: The Role of GMP in the Construction and Enforcement of Social Roles and Standards

Gay male pornography (GMP) extends beyond erotic content, functioning as a cultural tool that shapes societal expectations, identities, and hierarchies tied to erotic power within gay men's lived experiences. As emerged from the interviews, GMP promotes internalized dichotomous roles, aesthetic standards, and behavioral norms, subtly influencing self-

perception. Such effects are especially evident among individuals at the early stages of exploring their sexuality, where GMP serves as both a reference point and a normative model.

Creating desire and role dichotomy (top-bottom)

Participants noted that GMP establishes a rigid binary of sexual roles—"top" and "bottom"—that shapes preferences and positions within gay culture. This dichotomy is not random but stylized, repeated, and presented as an inherent sexual truth (Rousselle, 2020).

Specifically, the "top" is depicted as hypermasculine, dominant, assertive, and energetic—often associated with white or Latin bodies—and characterized by an imposing appearance and exaggerated physical traits, such as large genitals or muscularity. This archetype embodies dominant ideals of male sexual desire. Conversely, the "bottom" is portrayed as hyperfeminine, vulnerable, romantic, emotional, masochistic, and more receptive to the partner's authority, often lacking clear boundaries and appearing more juvenile. This binary extends beyond sexual roles, affecting identity formation by shaping how individuals are expected to embody these personas.

Participant B acknowledged: *"Let's say, I know from my ex that there has been a clear influence from the fact that I should only be passive or I should only be active."* He further remarked: *"In porn there is a very strong element of passivity and there is an entire segment of gay porn dealing with women's garters and femininity[...] Femininity is always undervalued, suppressed, oppressed, and simultaneously likes it that way."*

According to **queer theory** (Jagose, 1996), such representations are performative. Gender and dominance are not expressed as innate traits but as repetitive imitation of internalized images. GMP not merely reflects desire; it actively produces it through continuous enactment (Ott & Mack, 2014).

Aesthetic hegemony and commodification of the body

In contrast to behavioral scripts, GMP promotes a narrow, commercialized beauty ideal. Youthfulness, athleticism, whiteness, or Latino features, and exaggerated masculinity dominate representations.

As **participant A** mentioned: *"We create the image that we can have sex with someone as fit as a model whose job is to have that kind of body — something that doesn't exist in the broader society."*

Participant I also commented: *"I think there are three male identities that are overrepresented in gay porn: the twink, the jock, and the bear [...] they're always portrayed in extreme ways, as caricatures of these people."* Rather than promoting diversity, these portrayals reinforce rigid stereotypes, compressing real-life variation into easily consumed visual categories.

The hierarchical nature of this structure is evident. As **participant E** expressed: *"I think a lot of porn is very, very hypermasculine... There is a certain body standard, a certain perspective that is better than the others. And usually it is very muscly, very toned, very masculine, very intimidating, you know, all that."*

From a **media criticism** standpoint, this phenomenon exemplifies biopolitical control: the body becomes a commodity, shaped to fit marketable ideals, while non-conforming representations are pushed to the margins or rendered invisible (Jansen, 2002; McInroy & Craig, 2016).

Internalization, insecurity, and symbolic violence

These aesthetic and behavioral norms are not simply external; they are internalized, shaping self-perception and behavior. GMP operates as a form of *symbolic violence*: it defines dominant standards and presents them as natural and unavoidable (Gardiner, 2002; Lykke 2010).

Many participants described the psychological tool of this process. For instance, **participant B** stated: *"I always shaved my whole body from the eyebrows down, because that way I looked a lot more like what they told me I was — a twink and a twink should not have hair."* He further added: *"Even if I don't want to admit it, yes, I want to be like that and I'm not because I'm underweight and I have an eating disorder and I'll probably never be able to be like that."*

Based on several participants' narratives, these types were internalized as core beliefs from a young age, at a time when personal identities were still forming. According to **participant I**: *"When I was younger and watched more porn and wasn't as open to the world, I had this idea: that's how I should be, regarding body fitness, weight, and hair growth[...]I believe it affects teenagers a lot, just like it affected me when I was that age. Because you don't know anything yet. You're very young, you're entering this whole world."*

These reflections reveal a deep and often irreversible impact. Feelings of insecurity, self-monitoring, and the desire to conform to dominant visual and behavioral norms are not experienced as external impositions but as internalized expectations (Rothmann, 2013; Rousselle, 2020).

Creating a "heteronormative" structure in gay sexual discourse

Although GMP is produced within a queer context, many participants observed that it often replicates heteronormative dynamics—the structures it claims to challenge. Dominant-active

and submissive-passive roles mirror the male-female binary frequently seen in mainstream heterosexual pornography.

Participant F articulated this simply: *"The other person is essentially a 'woman', takes on the female identity completely, meaning that in a bad sense one can do whatever they want to the other and they will never say no."* What is presented as desire is often structured around imbalance and dominance, undermining the potential for reciprocity, consent, or emotional connection.

Rather than expanding sexual imagination, GMP appears to restrict it, presenting formulaic scenarios and rigid roles. As *queer theory* suggests, this re-inscription of heteronormativity into queer spaces does not liberate desire but disciplines it into culturally legible forms (Jagose, 1996; Marinucci, 2010).

Section 2: The Complexity of Visibility and the Regulation of Normality through GMP

Although GMP often serves as a primary visual reference point for queer sexuality, its function as a tool of visibility is inherently paradoxical. Participants acknowledged that it introduced them to homosexual desire and played a role in early self-exploration. However, this form of visibility often lacks authentic diversity. Instead, it perpetuates narrow definitions of what is considered normal, attractive, and acceptable within the LGBTQI+ community.

Structural Invisibility and Unfitness Status

Participants repeatedly noted the absence of entire groups and identities within GMP, including the elderly, disabled individuals, and those marked by racial or gender diversity.

Participant A noted: *"A person cannot identify themselves if they are a significant minority."*, underscoring that visibility entails more than mere presence—it involves being recognized as valid and desirable. **Participant E** shared similar concerns: *"I'm tired of not seeing Asian people in porn, I would love to see more Asian people. I would like to see less straight people in porn and more chubby people, people that don't work out."* This comment illustrates how GMP reinforces a specific aesthetic, excluding diverse realities and desires.

The absence of these identities is not insignificant; it functions as *symbolic violence*, implying that only certain body types are desirable and worthy of representation (Gardiner, 2002). Moreover, from an *intersectional perspective*, invisibility arises from interlocking systems of marginalization—based on race, body type, age, ability, and gender identity—rather than from isolated traits (Carbado et al., 2013).

Gay Identity as Deviation

Instead of portraying queer identity as a valid and stable orientation, GMP often depicts it as transgressive or temporary (Rothmann, 2013).

Participant C stated: *"There are movies that present the stepbrother as gay while he's straight. There are many movies doing this, that convey the message that I'm 'changing him' [...] I've seen a porno where two friends, who come back from a party drunk, start having sex slowly, while supposedly one of them is straight."* Such portrayals suggest that homosexual desire is episodic or artificial—prompted by alcohol, experimentation, or circumstantial factors—rather than an authentic aspect of identity.

This framing, based on *symbolic violence*, reinforces the idea that homosexuality is a phase. It fosters internalized shame and alienation for viewers who cannot see themselves reflected in such depictions (Gardiner, 2002; Rousselle, 2020).

Fetishization of Difference

When diverse bodies appear in GMP, they are frequently fetishized rather than represented as full individuals.

Participant E commented: *"The black guys have massive dicks[...]and are also very stereotypically displayed."*, while **Participant A** added: *"Some fetishes have to be satisfied, e.g., if I want to have sex with someone who is very feminine or is trans or black. It's not, but we present it that way. It's a negative element[...]"* This tendency reduces diversity to flattened stereotypes, reinforcing existing racial, gender, or sexual fantasies.

Feminist and queer theories argue that such portrayals maintain patriarchal power structures, confining marginalized identities within narrow, exploitative representations of difference (Lykke, 2010; Marinucci, 2010).

Regulating Desire and Learning Roles

Through the lens of ***social construction and identity formation theory***, GMP is not merely reflective; it functions as a pedagogical mechanism, teaching sexual normativity (Cinoğlu, H., & Arıkan, 2012; Ott & Mack, 2014).

Participant B observed: *"Instead of thinking about what will happen, I watch it there. I see and hear it. Porn tells you when you're going to finish."* This underscores GMP's role in prescribing behaviors: how sex should unfold, what arouses people, and how roles should be performed. **Participant G** further noted: *"Because of porn, we're supposed to believe that you're either a dominant guy who only tops or really submissive and you put yourself in a submissive position."*

These binary frameworks, frequently reinforced in GMP narratives, constrain the fluidity of queer desire and establish rigid sexual hierarchies.

Reproduction of Internal Stigma within the LGBTQI+ community

Beyond external pressures, GMP also amplifies internal community dynamics by establishing beauty standards and sexual roles.

According to **Participant A**: *"It may somehow create certain beauty standards. The others marginalize me because I don't meet the high standards that the industry has created in the minds of consumers."* This creates a vicious cycle where industry standards become internalized, deepening marginalization for those who do not conform. **Participant G** also shared: *"Sometimes I just don't feel safe with my identity or with my sexual orientation."*

Here, shame arises from both societal pressure and LGBTQ+ community dynamics.

As **queer theory** suggests, the concept of hyper-visibility explains how internalized media representations within GMP can foster exclusionary practices and redefine what it means to be genuinely queer (Jagose, 1996; Morrison & Pedersen, 2024).

The Industrial Commodification of Visibility

Participants perceived that aesthetic standards promoted in GMP are driven primarily by commercial motives rather than community values.

Participant B stated: *"It's business, and it's what sells. Having his hair touched doesn't sell. Fucking him sells!"* Similarly, **Participant F** remarked: *"There are 5 assholes behind a camera saying: This one sells, that one sells. And they do it that way."* These comments show how market imperatives dictate what is visible and what is hidden, prioritizing profit over inclusive representation.

From a **critical media studies** perspective, this reveals how visibility can be co-opted to serve capitalist interests rather than contributing to genuine empowerment and liberation (Ott & Mack, 2014; Johanssen, 2025).

The Ambivalence of Visibility

Despite these criticisms, participants also acknowledged the positive aspects of GMP. They highlighted its role in building self-awareness and offering a sense of belonging (McInroy & Craig, 2016; Rothmann, 2013).

Participant D mentioned: *"It can sometimes help you realize that you're not alone, that there are other gay people out there."*, while **participant E** added: *"It starts with porn because you get the opportunity to explore those topics first in the safety of your own home. But then you have to shake yourself out and face real life."* These reflections underscore the paradoxical nature of GMP. On one hand, it provides visibility and supports early identity formation. On the other hand, it imposes narrow, normative frameworks that constrain the full range of queer self-expression.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to reject GMP but to critically engage with its educational and ideological dimensions, recognizing its simultaneous power to illuminate and restrict queer self-understanding.

Section 3: Violence, Objectification, and Distortion of Gay Desire in GMP

Gay male pornography (GMP) extends beyond mere erotic entertainment; it acts as a formative cultural force that shapes, normalizes, and perpetuates particular gay desire models often marked by violence and objectification. Participants' narratives reveal a deep tension between the visual pleasure offered and the emotional, psychological, and social effects produced. Through repetitive, highly stylized, and formulaic scripts, GMP commodifies bodies, distorts relational dynamics, and limits the diversity of gay male sexuality, frequently marginalizing emotional intimacy and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.

GMP as a Mechanism for Constructing Rude and Violent Sexuality

Many participants critically reflected on how GMP depicts sexual encounters as predominantly emotionally detached and physically aggressive, with limited space for intimacy, vulnerability, or varied sexual expressions.

For instance, **Participant A** pointed out a prevalent trope: *"The classic pattern that annoys me, but there is a solution, is that we enter, say good morning, I grab your genitals, and we start having sex[...]*There must be storytelling, because otherwise it is unappetizing."*"* This formulaic portrayal reduces sex to a performance of dominance and submission, erasing opportunities for emotional connection or narrative depth.

Building on this, **Participant C** emphasized the broader cultural concerns: *"The only thing I can think of is that it's very intense in its glorification of sex. There isn't as much of the "relationship" part, it isn't projected as much. This is also a real issue in the gay community that everyone is chasing sex."* This observation illustrates how GMP scripts shape community norms, reinforcing sexual urgency over emotional engagement.

As *queer theory* discusses, these portrayals reinforce gendered expectations that equate masculinity with control, emotional suppression, and physical performance, excluding more fluid, relational, or emotionally nuanced modes of queer being (Rousselle, 2020; Spargo, 1995).

Legitimization of Violence and Objectification of the Subject

Participants also described disturbing depictions in GMP that blur or disregard consent, often incorporating themes such as coercion, blackmail, pseudo-rape scenarios, or revenge fantasies.

These narratives reveal a deeper form of *symbolic violence*, where arousal becomes linked to domination and control, undermining the partner's agency (Johanssen, 2025). *Feminist theory* further explains the way internalized systems of violent masculinity present femininity and queerness as weak, passive, and perpetually available, often void of clear consent (Gardiner, 2002).

Participant A commented: *"Let's say I'm a top and I see in the movies that the ones like me have sex with the bottoms in a certain way. These images, if you actually try them on a person, are barbaric, they are rape, they are 1002 things."* Also, **Participant D** noted: *"I'm bothered by the issue of consent and how gay people are portrayed as being completely objectified. This happens in all porn, I think[...]*It seems like the sex starts because one side begins, without the other even having any idea, or under some kind of blackmailing framework."*Likewise, Participant F added: "It's just that you don't care about the other person, you just want to put your dick in. It is objectification at its highest level."* These depictions not only objectify the bodies involved but also distort the concept of consent into a muted, assumed act.

Additionally, **Participant C** referred to a recurring trope involving kidnapping and forced experimentation: *"In another more hardcore scenario I've watched, I remember that they had kidnapped someone, that's a general theme, and they did things to them[...]*For example, the secretary who got fired by him tied him up and said, *"Now I'm going to try things on you!"* The fact that such violent scenarios are depicted as sexually stimulating reveals a dangerous abuse glamorization, reinforcing stereotypes portraying queer sexuality as inherently transgressive, deviant, or excessive.

The Paradox of Pleasure: From Autonomy to Guilt

Even among participants who recognized the problematic nature of GMP, a paradoxical experience emerged—simultaneously feeling pleasure and discomfort, desire and guilt. This inner conflict illustrates the extent to which such narratives are internalized.

Participant D admitted: *"I try to reduce/cut it down. Let's say it was a week without watching, but then I started again[...]*There are strictly only two roles, which bothers me, but at the same time, I often enjoy consuming such content. I don't know, that's a bit of a problem too..." Accordingly, **Participant B** mentioned: *"Yes, and it even reinforces the insecurities. It's what I told you, that everyone should be Brazilian, chubby, fit[...]*until you see it, your mind doesn't wait and think that this is his job, that's why he's like that. You think: "I have to be like that too!"

The phenomenon illustrates the intersection of ***queer theory*** and ***symbolic violence***. Desire is not shaped solely by individual agency but also by industry and social norms defining certain bodies, behaviors, and fantasies as desirable, while marginalizing others. Internalizing such representations leads viewers to see what is depicted not just as erotic but natural, ideal, and necessary, resulting in internalized shame, insecurity, and body dissatisfaction (Jagose, 1996; Johanssen, 2025).

Section 4: The Educational and Social Footprint of the GMP: Challenges and Opportunities

In the absence of comprehensive and inclusive sex education, many participants described GMP as their first significant exposure to queer sexuality and identity. While acknowledging its limitations and harmful aspects, they also recognized its dual role as a tool for sexual exploration and a space for the reproduction of social norms (Cerezo et al., 2019).

As **Participant A** explained: *"I think it's a primary stage that we unfortunately have[...]in Greece, we lack the education, structure, or the right people to have this discussion outside of the family environment[...]It's an easy and quick way to do a first check to see if you like it."*

This quote reveals how GMP fills an educational gap, though with certain flaws.

Distorted Learning and Internalization of Roles

Participants repeatedly emphasized that GMP promotes fixed sexual roles, shaping viewers' expectations and behaviors. Rather than offering a wide range of options, it often imposes rigid binaries, particularly through the top/bottom divide.

Participant C noted: *"The roles are clear and don't change. The one will be steadily there, the other somewhere else, that's it."*, underscoring how GMP scripts cement static sexual identities. **Participant B** added: *"Instead of thinking about what's happening, I hear something that already gives me a tempo on what should be happening."*, indicating how the medium discourages spontaneity or emotional reflection. **Participant I** further remarked: *"I think it has affected the way you see your sexual identity[...]you try to imitate what you see and become a little more cool somehow."*

These insights align with **queer's theory** notion of performativity—identities are produced through repeated actions (Jagose, 1996). Simultaneously, Bourdieu's concept of **symbolic violence** explains how these norms are internalized without explicit coercion. GMP teaches users what is desirable, acceptable, and worthy of reproduction (Lykke, 2010; Johanssen, 2025).

The "Education" of Desire and Body Standards

Beyond social roles, participants also reported internalizing aesthetic ideals promoted by GMP. These often involve hyper-masculine physiques, bodily discipline, and cleanliness, especially for submissive partners.

Participant C stated: *"The other must be well-trained[...]The bottom should be very clean, shaved all over."* The emphasis on bodily preparation reveals how GMP regulates sexual presentation. **Participant G** emphasized: *"For me, it's the masculinity and muscles."* Similarly, **participant D** noted: *"I certainly try to get as close to the standards as I can. It affects both consciously and subconsciously."*

These statements demonstrate how GMP does not merely reflect existing standards but shapes and enforces them, guiding desire toward specific norms: well-muscled, clean, masculine bodies, under tightly controlled visual representation. This is not neutral. It is normative production.

According to *queer theory*, desire operates within performative and social contexts (Jagose, 1996). Meanwhile, *symbolic violence* explains how such aesthetic norms act as invisible pressures, compelling conformity even without agreement or awareness (Johanssen, 2025).

Absence of Consent and Misguided Pedagogical Messages

One of the most serious concerns discussed was the erasure of consent in GMP.

Participant D underlined: *"Something that is presented quite often and is very wrong[...]no one talks about consent[...]"*, highlighting how the lack of explicit consent legitimizes power imbalances and coercive scenarios.

Feminist theory has long criticized the portrayal of sex as domination rather than mutual engagement, emphasizing that the absence of clear consent can normalize coercion and represent non-consensual behavior as erotic and acceptable (Marinucci, 2010).

The Paradox of Self-Exploration: Exploration and Trapping

Despite the concerns raised, participants also spoke of GMP as an important space for self-exploration.

Participant E remarked: *"I really think it has had a really positive influence on my sexual identity because I've explored a lot of ideas first in porn, which I then had the option to consider."*, reflecting GMP's potential to open up pathways for imagining and testing desires that might otherwise be inaccessible. **Participant I** added: *"I believe it also offers a space to explore yourself, beyond the issues it has[...]it can help you understand that maybe it's normal, maybe nothing is wrong with me."*

At the same time, **Participant E** acknowledged the tension and duality involved: *"I do think to a certain extent it imposes stereotypes, but I do also think it's a very dual thing that happens where it offers exploration[...]a useful and safe way to experiment and explore an identity [...]at the beginning "*. However, **Participant B** expressed the confusion this paradox may produce: *"I feel like a single, unique entity, that's me. But porn used to make me think, "Am I? Who am I?"*

Queer theory sheds light on this ambiguity. GMP functions as both a vehicle for liberation and a mechanism of oppression—it expands the possibilities for queer identity formation while reinforcing socially prescribed limitations (Spargo, 1995; Rothmann, 2013).

The Responsibility of the Community, the State, and Individuals

Recognizing the power of GMP as both an educational and cultural tool, many participants advocated for a transformation not only on a personal level but also across institutions and the media industry.

Participant A emphasized the need for media literacy: *"[...]individually, each person must understand that what they see is something outside of reality, it is embellished, it is made for a purpose, and that this is a dream that is unrelated to reality."* He further argued: *"To change this mentality, specialists in preschool and school education are needed."*, pointing to the importance of early, positive, and inclusive sex education.

Others underlined the need for industry reform. Specifically, **participant I** suggested: *“They should definitely use a wider variety of people in these videos[...]the act of sex should not be so sexualized[...]the industry produces what the public wants to see. So, if people changed*

their preferences, the industry would change too!” Moreover, **participant E** proposed:

“[...]it requires a systemic change[...]to take out all the roots and all the things that are tied to the problem[...]the gay community steering away from hookup culture and[...]spread more awareness using gay platforms, clubs, and community spaces[...].” He also recommended:

“[...]a bigger promotion of body positivity and diversity in porn[...]what if studios were required to involve gender non-performing people, plus-size models in their cast.”

These suggestions align with the ***intersectionality theory***, which argues that inclusion must be holistic, addressing the interconnected oppressions of race, gender identity, body size, and class, to dismantle exclusionary norms in media and education (Carbado et al., 2013; Morrison & Pedersen, 2024).

The Potential of Alternative and Participatory Porn

While participants expressed criticism of mainstream GMP, some expressed optimism for more inclusive and grassroots alternatives.

Participant E explained: *“I actively went looking for that cause I came to realize later that all the porn I was watching was really the same[...]And I found creators that post more diverse content[...]when you're watching porn on Twitter, for example, where like so many regular people are doing OnlyFans or creating content[...] those types of porn, when you watch it, you get a more balanced sense[...].”* These decentralized platforms offer greater diversity, authenticity, and viewer identification. **Participant B** agreed: *“OnlyFans helps with inclusion because there are obviously people who want to be seen[...]This makes it much more easily accessible.”*

According to *critical media theory*, such platforms act as sites of resistance. Though still marginal, alternative pornography challenges the homogenized aesthetics and power dynamics of traditional GMP, offering a vision for a more inclusive and equitable landscape of queer sexual representation (Jansen, 2002; McInroy & Craig, 2016).

Discussion-Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This study examined the complex role of gay male pornography (GMP) in shaping identity, cultural desires, and social integration within LGBTQI+ communities, focusing on whether GMP functions as a tool of empowerment or if it reproduces stereotypical patterns of marginalization (Jagose, 1996; Spargo, 1995).

The analysis showed that in the early stages of seeking a sexual identity, particularly during adolescence or in social environments with limited visibility of LGBTQI+ groups, GMP was a key reference point and the first contact with the queer experience. However, many participants reported that constant exposure to dominant representations introduces them to strict binary roles: hyper-masculine, dominant "tops" and passive, emasculated "bottoms" (Rousselle, 2020; Rothmann, 2013).

These binary roles are often accompanied by the overrepresentation of white, muscular, young, and non-disabled individuals, limiting the representation of diverse bodies, racial backgrounds, age groups, and gender identities (Carbado et al., 2013). Participants who deviate from these norms feel invisible, doubt their identity, and experience psychological discomfort (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012; Cerezo et al., 2019).

GMP also contributes to the reproduction of narratives that present gay sex as a temporary deviation for straight men, undermining a stable queer identity (Spargo, 1995; Jagose, 1996). At the same time, the absence of consent, the imposition of violence, and the coercive sexual practice are normalized, turning the body into an object of commodification and domination, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies (Gardiner, 2002; Marinucci, 2010).

Although participants maintain a critical stance, they find it difficult to distance themselves from GMP due to its dominance in the commercial market, which promotes this specific pattern of sexual expression as "normal" (Ott & Mack, 2014; Jansen, 2002). This situation is part of cultural hegemony, where market structures determine the scope of acceptable queer visibility and desire (McInroy & Craig, 2016; Morrison & Pedersen, 2024).

Based on the theory of symbolic violence, it appears that queer consumers themselves unconsciously incorporate these social norms, which they experience as obvious and natural, even when they experience exclusion (Johanssen, 2025). Therefore, GMP not only imposes standards but also functions as an informal social education that disciplines the subject, affecting its self-image, romantic expectations, and sexual practices.

Theoretical Approach:

The interpretation of the findings is based on a cross-sectional theoretical framework that combines different scientific perspectives to capture the complexity of the phenomenon.

Firstly, *queer theory* provides the framework for understanding how representations in GMP not only liberate desire but also trap it in normative binaries of gender identity and performativity. Specifically, gay sex is often portrayed through roles of absolute dominance and passivity, indirectly reproducing heteronormative power codes (Rousselle, 2020; Spargo,

1995). According to the participants' descriptions, strictly defined sexual roles are often portrayed —the hyper-masculine "top" and the hyper-feminine "bottom" —thereby shaping the internalization of these distinctions as criteria for desirability and perceived normality within the context of gay male identities. This led some of them to adopt or reject prescribed standards and behaviors in real life, ultimately affecting their self-esteem and social engagement patterns. Moreover, GMP contributes to the masking of homosexuality, reinforcing hyper-masculine aesthetics and associating masculinity with desirability and social value, while excluding those who do not fit this ideal (Snaith, 2003).

*Building on this, **social identity theory*** explains how participants form their self-image through comparisons with the dominant GMP standards. The internalization of normative expectations related to body image—such as the pursuit of muscularity, youthfulness, and light skin—led few of them to experience feelings of insecurity, self-doubt, and even behavioral disorders as they felt pressure to meet ideals, often considered unrealistic and unnatural. Deviation from these ideals leads to self-esteem issues and emotional discomfort, as social acceptance is frequently linked to adherence to the norms (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012; Cerezo et al., 2019).

Additionally, the perspective of **intersectionality** points out that GMP is not limited to the reproduction of gender roles but extends to the reinforcement of exclusions related to race, body, age, gender expression, and ability. The multiple social and cultural characteristics of these individuals deepen their sense of marginalization (Carbado et al., 2013). Participants repeatedly noted the underrepresentation of black, Asian, trans, disabled, older, and non-athletic bodies on the central stage of gay pornography. This is not only linked to a lack of visibility but also to the degradation of these body types, making them "undesirable," sustaining an unseen layer of disempowerment.

Furthermore, *feminist theory* complements the synthesis by focusing on the commodification of the body and the objectification of sexuality. This perspective reveals how GMP naturalizes power inequalities, reproducing practices that establish domination and social inequality as integral to sexual experience (Gardiner, 2002; Lykke, 2010). Several participants highlighted that gay porn promotes stereotypes and repetitive scenarios prioritizing visual stimulation over emotional interaction or consensual participation. Particular interest was expressed in narratives involving elements of dominance, sexual victimization, and violence, where bodies are depicted as objects for consumption, lacking depth or complexity.

Meanwhile, a *critical media analysis* examines the role of porn industry as a central mechanism for controlling queer representations. Participants repeatedly emphasized its influence, underlining that decisions regarding the content are driven by commercial profitability. The media not only determine the content, but also the standards of socially acceptable desire, correlating commercialism and visibility (Ott & Mack, 2014; Gauntlett, 2008). Many users reported seeking alternative platforms, such as Twitter, OnlyFans, or independent content creators on social media, to find more diverse and inclusive representations. This assumption underscores the evolving function of participatory media in challenging the aesthetic criteria of conventional porn.

Finally, *symbolic violence theory* reveals the underlying level of the GMP: the internal acceptance of dominant stereotypes by the consumers themselves. Aesthetic, role, and sexual practices are experienced as "natural" and "obvious," producing internalized exclusion, even in cases of apparent acceptance (Johanssen, 2025). Some participants mentioned adopting behaviors and practices, such as hair removal and excessive body care, because these expectations seemed "self-evident" or "natural". This form of conformity, which does not stem from external pressure, exemplifies the invisible enforcement of symbolic violence.

Sociological Implications

GMP functions not only as a means of entertainment but also as a mechanism of social education, which normalizes aesthetic, gender, and sexual norms. Continuous exposure to one-dimensional models shapes the self-images of LGBTQI+ individuals, causing comparisons, internalized insecurities, and self-doubt (Corneau et al., 2017; Rothmann, 2013).

The dominant bodies — white, muscular, young, and masculine — serve as models of acceptance, excluding those who deviate and reinforcing invisible exclusions. The pressure to fit these standards has a serious psychological impact, associated with anxiety, body dissatisfaction, insecurities, and sometimes depression (Cerezo et al., 2019). Furthermore, the normalization of violent and non-consensual sexual practices dangerously reinforces patterns of sexual behavior (Gardiner, 2002).

Despite the proliferation of alternative platforms such as OnlyFans, Twitter, and Reddit, these initiatives often remain marginalized against the powerful commercial industry that shapes the majority of pornographic production (McInroy & Craig, 2016).

Intervention Proposals

Addressing the effects of GMP requires a multi-level approach:

Individual Responsibility and Empowerment: It is important to develop critical analysis and content selection skills. Individuals are called upon to reject one-dimensional

representations and to support alternative and qualitative models that promote diversity and respect for consent. Additionally, active participation in production platforms such as OnlyFans, Twitter, and Reddit can give a voice to underrepresented identities and enrich the range of queer experiences.

Community Awareness and Visibility: The LGBTQI+ community must develop mechanisms for self-awareness and information about the dangers of GMP and stereotypical representations of it. Through organized events, online campaigns, and social media awareness actions, diversity can be raised, and internalized exclusion patterns can be dismantled.

Industrial Responsibility and Regulations: Content creators are called upon to reexamine their representations, adopting standards based on consent, diversity of bodies, ages, identities, and roles, avoiding the reproduction of unhealthy stereotypes.

Institutional Education and Policies: The introduction of comprehensive sex education programs for the LGBTQI+ community from adolescence is a basic requirement. Through educational programs that promote critical thinking about media, young people can acquire tools to deal with the pressures of pornography.

Psychological Support and Public Health: Access to mental health services that are sensitive to the needs of the LGBTQI+ community can help address internalized stereotypes, manage physical concerns, and promote mental well-being.

Limitations and Future Research Prospects:

Although this qualitative sample provides significant insights into the experiences and internal conflicts of the participants, it is limited in terms of the generalizability of the findings. The diversity of queer experiences requires further quantitative and qualitative studies.

Future research could explore the long-term development of LGBTQI+ identities across diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts, especially focusing on how the identities evolve or challenge prevailing social norms. A key aspect of the investigation would be to examine the integration of trans, non-binary, disabled, and racial minority individuals in GMP, highlighting the way overlapping forms of exclusion influence their visibility and desirability. Simultaneously, investigating alternative and participatory models of porn production (e.g., OnlyFans, Twitter) could provide useful insights into how independent creators challenge and deconstruct dominant representations. Equally crucial would be the evaluation of educational and psychological interventions designed to prevent internalized stereotypes and promote healthy perceptions of sexuality within inclusive and supportive environments.

Conclusion

GMP is a complex and dual phenomenon. On one hand, it provides initial visibility and space for experimentation for LGBTQI+ individuals, particularly in areas where positive representation is lacking (Jagose, 1996; Spargo, 1995). On the other hand, it confines queer identities to strict aesthetic and gender norms, promoting dominant power relationships, aesthetic excess, internalized violence, and marginalization (Rousselle, 2020; Marinucci, 2010).

The sociological approach showed that GMP functions as a mechanism for shaping, educating, and disciplining desires, roles, and bodies. Despite a critical stance, consumers unconsciously internalize dominant norms, thereby shaping their self-perception and their romantic identity (Johanssen, 2025).

Overcoming these contradictions requires a combination of political, educational, and psychological interventions. Through multi-level actions, a more fair and authentic representation of the LGBTQI+ experience can be formed, reflecting the diversity and authenticity of identities.

References

1. Carbado, D. W., Crenshaw, K. W., Mays, V. M., & Tomlinson, B. (2013). Intersectionality: Mapping the movements of a theory. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10(2), 303–312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000349>
2. Cerezo, A., Cummings, M., Holmes, M., & Williams, C. (2019). Identity as resistance: Identity formation at the intersection of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(1), 67-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319875977> (Original work published 2020).
3. Cinoğlu, H., & Arıkan, Y. (2012). Self, identity, and identity formation: From the perspectives of three major theories. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 9(2), 1114-1131. <https://www.j-humansciences.com/ojs/index.php/IJHS/article/view/2205>

4. Corneau, S., Beaulieu-Prévost, D., Bernatchez, K., & Beauchemin, M. (2017). Gay male pornography: A study of users' perspectives. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 8(3), 223-245.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2017.1360931>
5. Gardiner, J. K. (2002). *Masculinity studies & feminist theory: New directions*. Columbia University Press.
6. Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, gender, and identity: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203930014>
7. Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.
8. Jansen, S. C. (2002). *Critical communication theory: Power, media, gender, and technology*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
9. Johanssen, J. (2025). *Rethinking symbolic violence on social media: Incels and mentalisation*. *HARM – Journal of Hostility Aggression Repression and Malice*, 4, 22–36.
<https://doi.org/10.46586/harm.2025.12132>
10. Lykke, N. (2010). *Feminist studies: A guide to intersectional theory, methodology, and writing* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203852774>
11. Marinucci, M. (2010). *Feminism is queer: The intimate connection between queer and feminist theory*. Zed Books.
12. McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2016). Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(1), 32-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1184243>
13. Morrison, J., & Pedersen, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Silenced voices and the media: Who gets to speak?* Springer Nature Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65403-9>

14. Ott, B. L., & Mack, R. L. (2014). *Critical media studies: An introduction* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
15. Rothmann, J. (2013). 'Doing' and 'using' sexual orientation: The role of gay male pornographic film in the identity construction of gay men. *South African Review of Sociology*, 44(3), 22-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2013.817048>
16. Rousselle, D. (2020). *Gender, sexuality, and subjectivity: A Lacanian perspective on identity, language, and queer theory* (1st ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003044819>
17. Snaith, G. (2003). Tom's Men: The Masculinization of Homosexuality and the Homosexualization of Masculinity at the End of the Twentieth Century. *Paragraph*, 26(1/2), 77-88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43263715>
18. Spargo, T. (1995). *Foucault and queer theory*. Icon Books.

Appendix



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed before commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so, by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: *Representations, Stereotypes, and Identity Formation: The Role of Gay Male Pornography in the LGBTQI+ Community*

Name, email of student: AIKATERINI MARIA SOTIROPOULOU, 735111as@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: MICHAEL GIFFIN, giffin@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 07/03/2025-22/06/2025

Is the research study conducted within DPAS ☒ YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to an accredited medical research ethics committee or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO
5. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

6. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES-NO
7. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a

person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO

8. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
9. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO
10. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
11. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study:

Q6: The issue is inevitable, as the study focuses on identity in gay male pornography, including natural characteristics such as sexual orientation, race, and body image. All the above are central to the research.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.)?

To address any concerns, participants will be fully informed, and all questions will be optional. The environment will be respectful, and anonymity will be strictly guaranteed.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

While some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing individual experiences, they always have the option to skip questions or withdraw at any time, ensuring that their comfort and autonomy are a priority.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Through interviews both online and in-person depending on the participant's preference.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

Approximately 10 adult gay men.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Unknown but targeting the LGBTQ+ community via purposive and snowball sampling.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

The recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be kept securely on my laptop, in password-protected folders to which I have exclusive access.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Aikaterini Maria Sotiropoulou

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Immediately after the interview and weekly throughout the research

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Transcripts will use pseudonyms. Personal information will be stored separately from data, linked only via code.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Aikaterini Maria Sotiropoulou

Name (EUR) supervisor: Michael Giffin

Date: 07/03/2025

Date: XXXXX

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Giffin', with a stylized, cursive script.

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Project: *Representations, Stereotypes, and Identity Formation: The Role of Gay Male Pornography in the LGBTQI+ Community*

Researcher: Aikaterini Maria Sotiropoulou

Master Social Inequalities

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Email: 735111as@eur.nl

Supervisor: Michael Giffin

Email: giffin@essb.eur.nl

Contact for privacy concerns:

Data Protection Officer – Erasmus University Rotterdam

Email: privacy@eur.nl

Purpose of the Study

This research explores how representations in gay male pornography (GMP) influence identity formation, desirability politics, and social inclusion within the LGBTQI+ community. The study aims to understand the dual role of GMP—as a space of empowerment and as a possible source of marginalization—through the individual experiences of gay men.

What Participation Involves

- You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (approximately 1 hour).
- Interviews will be conducted in person or online, depending on your preference.
- You are free to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
- The interview will be audio-recorded (with your permission) and transcribed for analysis.

Voluntary Participation & Right to Withdraw

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reason and without any negative consequences.

Data Confidentiality & Privacy

- Your data will be anonymized. A pseudonym will be used, and any identifying information will be stored separately.
- Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the anonymized data.
- Data will be securely kept on my laptop, in password-protected folders to which I have exclusive access.
- The data will be kept for a maximum of five years, after which it will be securely deleted.

Sensitive Data

This research may involve questions about your sexual orientation, body image, gender expression, race/ethnicity, and related identity issues. By signing this form, you explicitly consent to the collection and processing of these special categories of personal data for this academic study.

Your Rights under GDPR

You have the right to:

- Access your data
- Request correction or deletion of your data
- Restrict processing of your data
- Withdraw consent at any time
- File a complaint with the Dutch Data Protection Authority if needed

Consent Statement

By signing below:

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the purpose and procedure of the study.
2. I voluntarily agree to participate.
3. I understand I can withdraw at any point without penalty.
4. I consent to the interview being recorded and the data being used for academic research.
5. I consent to the processing of personal and sensitive data under GDPR.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____