



The Impact of Male Partners' Pornography Consumption on Female Partners' Self-Image, Sexual Preferences and Pleasure

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Social Inequalities

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Abstract

This research examined how male partners' pornography consumption affects their female partners' self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure during sexual activity. Previous studies have shown that pornography can have detrimental effects on individuals in relationships. The current research conducted interviews with women whose male partners consume or have consumed pornography. Theories of social comparison, self-objectification and sexual scripts were used to discover how the women's self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure were affected. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. The findings demonstrate that many women are influenced by unrealistic expectations and norms portrayed in pornography. The majority of women recognized how pornography has influenced their partners in both negative and positive ways. Some women were not affected by their partners watching pornography. This research is important to understand the broader effects of pornography on individuals in romantic and sexual relationships, the role and portrayal of women in mainstream pornography, and how this representation affects women's real-life experiences.

Keywords: heterosexual relationships, pleasure, pornography, self-image, sexual preferences

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Introduction

Over the past decades, pornography has become increasingly popular worldwide, among diverse populations. Although scholars have argued over definitions of what counts as pornography, generally it can be defined as “sexually explicit materials intended to create sexual arousal in the consumer” (Hals et al., 2010, p. 2). Pornography’s popularity has been an incentive for researchers to examine mental, sexual, physical, and health consequences of pornography consumption (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022), as pornography can influence attitudes and behaviors both on an individual scale and within partnerships (El-Guebaly & Butterwick, 2016).

Some researchers have identified positive impacts of pornography, such as representations of diverse bodies, sexualities, races, and ages; respectfulness and emphasis on mutual pleasure; safe sex practices, and important conversations about consent (El-Guebaly & Butterwick, 2016). There is also some evidence that pornography consumption may offer benefits within romantic and sexual relationships, such as feeling more free and comfortable to discuss sexual fantasies with partners, increases in the frequency of sexual activity, more exciting sexual encounters, and impetus to engage in new sexual acts (Willoughby et al., 2015).

However, recent research has also focused on risks and dangers of pornography consumption (Taylor & Gavey, 2019). Peter & Valkenburg (2014) emphasize studies which reveal that men and women’s bodies in pornography are largely not representative of the general population. Furthermore, research by McKee et al. (2008) analysed best-selling pornographic videos and showed that the overwhelming majority of actors were representing unrealistic beauty standards - such as women being slim, having big breasts and observable breast surgery, and men being muscular and having penises that are larger and/or thicker than on average.

Beyond the negative effects pornography can have on body-image of its consumers, critical theorists have scrutinized pornography for promoting unequal power dynamics, heteronormative behaviors, racialized and gendered stereotypes, and violence directed towards women (Taylor & Gavey, 2019). Arguably, one of the most crucial aspects are the gendered elements of pornography, as women are known to be portrayed differently than men (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022), with male dominance being one of the main themes found in the majority of pornographic material (Wright et al., 2014). Male dominance is expressed in a multitude of ways, possibly the most harmful being physical and verbal aggression towards women, as men are usually dominators and women the targets (Wright et al., 2014).

Two studies analyzed popular pornographic videos, and found that 70-90% of them included physical and/or verbal aggression (Bridges et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2008). Women in pornography are most often subjected to the male gaze and engage in and/or are the targets of degrading acts aimed to pleasure men, such as spanking, name-calling, slapping, choking, double-penetration, gagging, facial ejaculation, ass-to-mouth, hair-pulling, receiving anal sex, giving oral sex, gang bangs, and favoring of male orgasm over female pleasure (Maas et al., 2023; Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Wright et al., 2014). Considering the majority of pornographic content includes violence towards women, it is not surprising that only a minority of videos portray gentle and warm behaviors, such as hugging, cuddling, care for the other, holding, compliments, and talking after sexual activity (Wright et al., 2014), all of which studies have found to be more important to women (Denney et al., 1984). A lack of these behaviors further confirms the idea that pornography is mainly concerned with the pleasure of men and submission of women.

Consumption of pornography can have detrimental effects on romantic and sexual relationships, and, in most cases, in heterosexual relationships the woman is impacted the most. Several studies up to date have researched the impacts of male partner's pornography

consumption on their female partner, and relationship outcomes. For example, studies by Sun et al. (2014), Stewart & Szymanski (2012), Tylka & Kroon Van Diest (2014), and Wright & Tokunaga's (2017) meta-analysis revealed that women's negative body image and low self-esteem are associated with their male partner's pornography consumption, as acknowledging that their partners may compare them to women seen in pornography results in women's insecurity about their own appearance. The studies also found a link between male partner's pornography consumption and their female partner's lack of sexual satisfaction (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014; Wright & Tokunaga, 2017), which may be the result of male partner's emotional detachment from the woman's needs due to heavy pornography use (Cooper et al., 2001). These findings indicate that, although not always stated explicitly, women feel as if they are merely sex objects to their partners.

One explanation for the gender difference is that more women than men are critical towards pornographic material, resulting also in lower consumption of pornography (Peter & Valkenburg, 2014). For example, Carroll et al. (2016) found that not only men in committed relationships are 6 times more likely to consume pornography weekly compared to their female partner, but also that some women in seriously committed relationships view their male partner's pornography consumption as an act of infidelity.

Research has also highlighted impacts of male pornography consumption on both partners, leading to decreased sexual satisfaction for both, lower relationship quality and satisfaction, and negative communication (Bridges & Morokoff, 2010; Maddox et al., 2009; Poulsen et al., 2013; Stewart & Szymanski 2012; Willoughby et al., 2015; Wright & Tokunaga, 2017; Yucel & Gassanov, 2010). Lack of sexual satisfaction for the male may be because pornography changes their expectations of their partner, resulting in less satisfaction with their partner's performance (Willoughby et al., 2015).

Although there is a large variety of research that examines the impact of male partners' pornography consumption on their female partner, most of it tends to look at general relationship and sexual satisfaction of one or both partners. Moreover, most of the research is quantitative, providing generalizable results but lacking depth and understanding of the issues at hand. Qualitative research on this subject provides more nuance, however, has been criticized for not providing representative samples, and seeking out participants based on their negative perception of their partner's pornography use (Wright & Tokunaga, 2017). In other words, qualitative studies usually include women that report heavy and frequent use of pornography by their partner.

Furthermore, qualitative studies are also largely based on women's perception of their partners' pornography patterns, and they may be unaware of their partner's actual pornography consumption, which can lead to issues or certain behaviors that women do not link to their partner's pornography consumption (Wright & Tokunaga, 2017). Additionally, there is a lack of research that focuses in-depth solely on women's experiences, specifically, on how their male partner's pornography consumption impacts women's feelings, self-image, performance, preferences, and attitudes not just in general, but during sexual activity with their partner. Therefore, this study proposes the following research question:

How are self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure of female partners affected during sexual activity by their male partners' pornography consumption?

Currently, there is little to no research focusing on male partners' pornography consumption specifically on women's self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure. Moreover, there is a lack of research looking at women's internalization of beauty standards and its relation to their male partners' pornography consumption (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014), which relates both to self-image and sexual preferences.

This study has multiple goals. Firstly, it aims to uncover the hidden ways in which pornography shapes the sexual experiences of women, and to unveil the extent to which women's sexual experiences are knowingly or unknowingly impacted by their male partners' expectations, preferences and desires influenced by pornography. Secondly, considering mainstream pornography places an emphasis on the male gaze and male pleasure, this research focuses on women's lived experiences, sexual preferences, and pleasure. Thirdly, this study can hopefully allow women to uncover aspects about themselves that have not yet come to light, provide a sense of community and feelings of being understood, and give a sense of autonomy over their sexuality. Additionally, it aims to provide insights for men who watch pornography to understand the effects it has on their relationships and female partners, recognizing the ways in which pornography translates into their sexual practices. Lastly, pornography producers can use this study to gain useful insights about how to create pornography that values the interests, needs and pleasure of both women and men, without favoring one over the other. Moreover, this study may be useful to the fields of both sociology and psychology, as both are increasingly interested in the effects of pornography on its consumers.

1. Theoretical Framework

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of male partners' pornography consumption on women's sexual experiences, and to further expand on aspects and research mentioned in the Introduction, three main theories are proposed. It is important to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather they complement one another and overlap in different ways.

1.1. Sexual Script Theory

Sexual script theory, developed by sociologists Simon & Gagnon (1986), provides instructions on different elements, such as determining what is sexually arousing, who to engage in sexual activity with, as well as behaviors during sexual activity and outcomes of sexual encounters (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022; Sun et al., 2014). In simple terms, sexual scripts are “guidelines for sexual roles and behaviors” (Wright et al., 2014, p. 255). Pornography provides sexual scripts, which produce and alter frameworks of behavior that consumers use as models for their own sexual experiences (Sun et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2017).

The creation or modification of sexual scripts formed through the consumption of pornography is most often an unconscious process, meaning that the information received from pornography creates sexual scripts that become internalized without much deliberate thought (Sun et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2014). Indeed, media has been shown to create memory structures that translate into real-life habits and behaviors which manage to find a way around critical thinking and evaluation (Sun et al., 2014). Therefore, those who often view pornography develop preferences for the sexual scripts presented in pornography, which are then performed in real-life sexual encounters (Sun et al., 2014). For example, when women respond positively or neutrally to men's dominating behaviors in pornography, the viewer sees the positive response and develops a belief that the type of behavior is

appropriate, which in turn encourages the man to mimic the dominating behavior in real life (Wright et al., 2014). This has serious implications, considering most mainstream pornography depicts aggressive and dominating behaviors towards women, and a lack of caring and affectionate behaviors (Wright et al., 2017).

The altering of sexual scripts can have serious effects on romantic and sexual relationships, leading to changes in expectations from partners and influencing their behavior towards each other (Willoughby et al., 2015). Sexual scripts developed from pornography can create unrealistic expectations for partners, resulting in possible dissatisfaction with the partner's performance and preferences during sexual activity (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022; Willoughby et al., 2015). For example, men implementing aggression and violence that is seen in pornography into sexual encounters with their partner may decrease women's sexual desire and satisfaction (Willoughby et al., 2015), in the case if men assume that all women enjoy this type of behavior because it is positively received in pornography.

Pornography that emphasizes women's pleasure, mutual respect, communication and caring behaviors is associated with higher sexual esteem and pleasure among women (Maas et al., 2023). However, pornography often elicits behaviors in male partners that female partners find unsatisfying (Wright & Tokunaga, 2017). Unfortunately, due to sexism in the porn industry that has placed women in roles which do not focus on their pleasure (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), it can sometimes be that women still engage in sexual acts that they do not find pleasurable, and "accommodate to varied sexual 'perversions'" (Simon & Gagnon, 1986, p. 107) created and sustained by men. For example, a study by Marston & Lewis (2014) concluded that women are often pressured into specific sexual acts, and sometimes end up participating in order to "conform to a stereotype of heterosexual male fantasy" (p. 5). Some women in the study revealed that they did not want to try anal sex, but ended up trying it because of pressure from their male partner. Some men even admitted that they ignored a

lack of consent from their female partners, with one stating that “I can be very persuasive [...] Like sometimes you just keep going, just keep going till they just get fed up and let you do it anyway” (Marston & Lewis, 2014, p. 3). Clearly, this shows not only that women may feel pressured to do certain sexual acts, but sometimes are even robbed of the autonomy to decline.

In short, sexual script theory proposes that behaviors and attitudes seen in pornography often become the preferences of its consumers, resulting in the execution of pornographic behavior in real-life sexual encounters. In relationships, this can often lead to a mismatch between two partners’ needs and desires, leaving one or both partners unsatisfied. Additionally, as empirical research shows, sometimes women amend their wishes and preferences because of pressure from their male partners, or in order to keep their partners satisfied. Based on sexual script theory and empirical studies, the current research aims to explore how male sexual scripts influenced by pornography create or alter female sexual scripts, and whether the possible impacts result in lower female sexual satisfaction, engagement in unwanted sexual behaviors, and shaping of female sexual preferences.

1.2. Self-Objectification Theory

Objectification theory has been a central theme in feminist discourse, analyzing the ways women are rendered as subordinate beings (Attawood, 2004). Objectification theory entails that when women are objectified by others, they begin to internalize this view, and adapt an outsider’s perspective of their own body, resulting in self-objectification (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014; Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Although men can also self-objectify, self-objectification is largely a gendered process, which is evident in more women than men (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). This is largely due to the sexual objectification in media, especially seen in pornography, in which women are often presented as sexual objects aimed to please men, and as targets of body evaluation (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014). Women in pornography are the embodiment of the male gaze, and are often

defined by specific acts performed on men and specific physical characteristics (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014; Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Moreover, women in pornography usually accept different forms of objectification, resulting in male consumers to believe that this type of behavior is acceptable, altering their sexual scripts (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014).

Self-objectification causes women to become increasingly aware of their body, and place emphasis on how their body looks to the other, for example, their partner (El-Guebaly & Butterwick, 2016). This process leads to feelings of shame and anxiety about their physical appearance, resulting in a lack of attention to their own bodily sensations, which is crucial in order to experience sexual pleasure (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). In other words, self-objectification causes women to become hyper-aware of their physical attributes, to the point that they have no space to focus on their own satisfaction and needs.

It has been shown that male partners' pornography consumption precedes women's self-objectification. The awareness that their male partner is looking at other women's bodies in pornography places attention on how the woman's partner may be evaluating her own body (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014). Moreover, Bergner & Bridges' (2002) study, which interviewed women whose male partners consume pornography, found that these women felt like their partners are shifting the objectification of women in pornography onto them, were assessing their own bodies through the viewpoints of their partners, and provided increased attention to their appearance, including criticizing their flaws (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014).

Self-objectification can also be expressed through women's maintenance of their appearance and sexual performance for the sake of pleasuring their partner (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). The transferred objectification from pornography includes expectations that men place on women to participate in uncomfortable sexual positions and sexual acts that do not bring pleasure to women (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014), which was discussed in the previous

section. For example, a study by El-Guebaly & Butterwick (2016) interviewed women whose male partners consume pornography, and multiple accounts of women stated that they felt objectified, “experimented upon”, were expected to enjoy particular sexual acts and to “perform a certain way” (p. 75). Moreover, the majority of them believed that their partners are not able to separate behaviors in pornography and real life. One woman stated that she was sure that some of the sexual acts enacted by her partner were recreations of what is seen in pornography, and highlighted that “I seriously think he cared more about doing things that he thought ‘looked’ right rather than doing things the way he thought would feel good, like, feel good for me” (El-Guebaly & Butterwick, 2016, p. 75).

To summarize, objectification theory entails that the objectification of women in pornography may result in women objectifying themselves, by placing increased attention to their body and sexual performance. This most often results in reduced body satisfaction, as well as sexual satisfaction, and increased attention to their physical attributes in order to please their partners. Based on objectification theory and empirical studies, the current research aims to explore how and whether women adapt self-objectifying behaviors from their male partners who consume pornography, looking at how women evaluate their physical appearance, how their perception of their body impacts their sexual pleasure, and to what extent they feel the need to look or perform a certain way.

1.3. Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory involves “comparing oneself with others in order to evaluate or to enhance some aspects of the self” (Suls et al., 2002, p. 159), resulting in different levels of satisfaction with oneself (Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022). Although the original theory proposes that people largely compare themselves to those who are similar to them in some ways (Suls et al., 2002), it has been shown that people also compare themselves equally as much to others who are different in some ways (Peter & Valkenburg, 2014).

There are two different ways how someone might compare themselves to others - one is downward comparison, where a person compares themselves to someone they find in a lower standing, and the other is upward comparison, where an individual compares themselves with someone who is viewed as superior (Suls et al., 2002). Both can elicit positive or negative evaluations of the self, but individuals usually tend to rate themselves positively after downward comparisons, and negatively after upward comparisons (Journeay, 2023). Women in pornography are more often than not embodiments of idealized beauty standards, therefore, men in relationships may compare their female partners to the women seen in pornography, and feel dissatisfied with their partner (Journeay, 2023; Wright et al., 2017).

Women who are aware that their partners are consuming pornography may start to compare themselves to the types of women their partners watch, and considering the “perfect” women represented in pornography, women engage in an upward comparison of their body and body parts (Journeay, 2023; Peter & Valkenburg, 2014). This comparison often results in women feeling less satisfied with their bodies, less sexually desirable, less sexually adequate, and threatened within the relationship (Journeay, 2023). Feeling less physically attractive can also reduce sexual satisfaction, as one becomes more focused on their looks rather than feelings of pleasure (Wright & Tokunaga, 2017). Moreover, women may even try to alter their physical appearance to become more similar to women in pornography, as a way to appear more attractive to their partners (Journeay, 2023; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014). These modifications can include changing physical aspects, but can also be attempts to sexually perform in ways that their partner finds satisfying, for example, mimicking pleasurable facial expressions, moans, and sexual acts portrayed in pornography.

Bergner & Bridges (2002) analyzed letters by women whose partners consume pornography, and discovered that their partners’ pornography use made the majority of

women feel less sexually desirable and feeling inferior to the women seen in pornography, describing themselves with adjectives such as “fat”, “ugly”, “repulsive” (p. 9). One woman stated that “I am no longer a sexual person or partner to him, but a sexual object. He is not really with me, not really making love to me when we have intercourse. He seems to be off thinking about something or someone else—likely those porn women [...]” (Bergner & Bridges, 2002, p. 8). This statement reflects not only feelings of inadequacy compared to women in pornography, but also elements of objectification, which were discussed in the previous section.

A study by Wright & Tokunaga (2017) revealed that many women also expressed lack of sexual satisfaction, as they felt competitive towards the women in pornography, and felt like they were not a priority to their partners. A participant in El-Guebaly & Butterwick’s (2016) study, referring to pornography, claimed that “[...] it skews my perceptions of my own body; even my performance sometimes. Which is crazy, because you are doing what is supposed to be this highly pleasurable thing and yet you find yourself in your head worried about how you look or how you sound; if it’s at all like the girls in the videos, like maybe what the guys expect” (p. 76).

In sum, social comparison theory proposes that women compare themselves to women seen in pornography, which often leads to a lack of satisfaction with their own body and sexual performance, considering women portrayed in pornography usually represent cultural beauty ideals. Women also may develop feelings of competitiveness towards women in pornography, leading to less sexual satisfaction. Based on social comparison theory and empirical studies, the current research aims to explore how women compare themselves to women their male partners’ watch in pornography, and how this affects their self-image, emphasis on their own pleasure, and whether they attempt to look or perform in certain ways in order to appeal to their male partners.

1.4. Conclusion

A combination of sexual script theory, objectification theory and social comparison theory is useful for this research in order to gain a detailed understanding of women's sexual experiences with their male partners. While sexual script theory explains how pornographic material becomes internalized, objectification theory and social comparison theory delve into the aspects regarding women's self-image, sexual preferences, and pleasure, and how these are impacted by pornography.

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach in order to gain in-depth understandings and detailed insights, which cannot be gained through quantitative data. Although due to the small sample size a limitation of this study is its generalizability, the study's aim is not to provide statistical generalizations, but rather to expand on theoretical generalizations.

2.1. Data Collection & Analysis

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with women living in the Netherlands about their self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure in relation to their male partners' pornography use, with questions created based on the theoretical framework and previous research. Semi-structured interviews include the application of theory, but also allow for participants to reveal insights that might not come up otherwise.

Purposive sampling was used in order to recruit participants which meet criteria that are needed in order to answer the research question. Additionally, snowball sampling was used, as this is a sampling method often used for research that concerns sensitive or less openly discussed topics. Criteria for selection were individuals who identify as women, are in heterosexual relationships, are willing to discuss their sexual experiences and partners' pornography use, whose partners consume or have consumed pornography for any period of their relationship, reside in the Netherlands, and whose age is between 18-30. The justification for the specific age group is because women in this age range are more prone to use social comparison of their bodies, and have more societal pressure on how their bodies should look (Journey, 2023; Peter & Valkenburg, 2014).

Additionally, the women's male partners also contributed to the study by filling out two questionnaires. One questionnaire is the Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS) (see Appendix B), which differentiates between problematic and non-problematic pornography use, consisting of 18 questions that can be answered with a number between 1

and 7 (Böthe et al., 2017). A second questionnaire asked questions about their pornography use habits, specifically, frequency of pornography consumption and sexual preferences within pornography (see Appendix C). However, because the core of this research is women's experiences, the men's questionnaires were only used to determine whether the women's perceptions of their partner's pornography consumption are aligned. Therefore, the questionnaires were not utilized much, and were only given brief attention.

The sample in this study were 8 heterosexual couples. The researcher did not seek out couples specifically where the woman is negatively impacted by her male partner's pornography consumption, in order to include participants that may offer opposing or different insights.

The interviews were conducted in the following way. First, the man was asked to complete the questionnaires in a private space and send the filled out documents to the researcher. However, the findings of the questionnaires were not disclosed to the woman. Then, the woman was individually interviewed using largely open-ended questions based on the theoretical framework, without the man being present or having an opportunity to participate. Examples of questions were: "How do you feel about your body during sex with your partner?", "How aligned do you feel are your and your partner's sexual preferences?". All questions were formed in a neutral way, so as not to influence the woman's answers, and follow up questions were asked based on the woman's response. The interviews lasted between 20 and 48 minutes. 3 of the 8 interviews were conducted in-person, and 5 of them were online.

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. Then, they were coded using the coding software *Atlas.ti*. Inductive coding was primarily used, which created codes from the data, in order to identify any new insights or findings and relate them back to the theoretical framework. The process included a mix of in vivo and interpretative coding. After

the first round of coding, a second round of coding was done, in which the researcher adjusted codes where necessary. Further, the codes were organized and placed into broader categories. As the last step, these categories were placed into three broad themes related to the research question - self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure, which are presented in the findings.

2.2. Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that need to be taken into account within this research. Before conducting interviews, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, which includes information about this research (see Appendix A). By signing this form the participants granted permission to use the insights gained through the interviews for this research. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the form guarantees that any personal information that can be linked back to the participants, such as their name, is not included in the study, unless specified otherwise. Moreover, the form also states that the participant can choose to drop out of the study at any point, and that they have a right to refuse to answer any question. Considering the sensitivity of the topics at hand, as a researcher I did my best to ensure that my participants felt safe and comfortable, and free to express themselves.

It is also important to recognize my positionality as a researcher. Considering I have my own expectations about the findings, these expectations may have subconsciously influenced the analysis process, resulting in the favoring of certain findings that support what I hoped to find, while disregarding others that provide opposing aspects. Furthermore, because of the nature of qualitative research which emphasises interpretation, the results may be more subjective than objective. While it is impossible to eliminate these aspects, I remain conscious about the ways my own standing influences the findings of this study.

3. Results

This chapter presents the most important and relevant findings from interviews with women whose partners consume pornography. Overall, the majority of women expressed that they quite openly discuss pornography habits with their partners. Furthermore, the majority of women were aware of their partners' pornography consumption habits, although a few had more knowledge about the frequency rather than the content. Additionally, the majority of women expressed some form of discomfort towards their partner watching pornography, while others were not bothered by it.

All of the women's names presented in this chapter are pseudonyms and are in no way connected to the actual participants. This chapter is divided into four sections - subchapter 2.1. explores how the women's partners' pornography consumption affects the women's self-image, subchapter 2.2. discusses how the women's partners' pornography consumption affects the women's sexual preferences, subchapter 2.3. presents how the women's partners' pornography consumption affects the women's pleasure, and subchapter 2.4. presents the men's questionnaires alignment with the women's perceptions.

3.1. Self-image

This subchapter explores how women's self-image is affected by their partners' pornography consumption. It discusses behaviors related to self-objectification, body insecurities experienced by the women, comparison to women in pornography, as well as other pornography influences.

No women in this study reported feeling objectified by their partner, as opposed to El-Guebaly & Butterwick's (2016) study in which many women stated that they feel objectified. In the current study, two women explicitly mentioned that their partner has never made them feel objectified or degraded. On the contrary - almost all women reported that their partner

has never done or said anything to make them feel this way. However, one participant, Bea, expressed that she sometimes feels scared to be objectified:

I'm like, okay, what if for him, you know, he sees me the way this man on the video sees this woman, you know. . . . I will overthink it, I'll be like, okay, is he close to me right now? Like, you know, emotionally, you know, is it just for the sex or is it for me?

Although Bea sometimes feels unsure whether her partner wants her as a person, she did emphasize that these worries come from her own anxiety and that her partner has not done anything to make her feel this way.

Regardless of a lack of objectification from their partners, actions related to self-objectification were still observed in the participant's answers. Objectification theory entails that women engage in self-objectification when they feel objectified by others, for example, their partner (Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014; Zurbriggen et al., 2011). In the current study, self-objectifying behaviors do not stem from the women's partners, but rather from expectations derived from pornography. Self-objectification can manifest in a woman placing increased attention to how their body looks to the other (El-Guebaly & Butterwick, 2016). Although a few women reported that they can't recall experiencing this, most reported increased attention to their looks or sound to some degree.

This manifests in different ways such as having a "fear of . . . looking weird", wanting "to moan in a nice way" or "react vocally", saying things "that I wouldn't necessarily have the need to say", having to "make it seem more obvious that I'm enjoying myself" and thinking about how "you position yourself". Overall, many women in this study stated that they tend to focus a lot on how they look during sex. One participant, Alice, provided detail about how expectations from pornography have influenced this increased attention on oneself:

And I do know that sometimes I tend to do this for him because I know that it's stuff that he likes and if it's, like, the way it looks or how I use my mouth or, like, how I use my

tongue. . . . I try to, like, do things that I know he's told me he likes and I know that some of these things are usually done in porn.

Alice's experience shows that although not stated explicitly, she feels some form of pressure to perform in a manner similar to what her partner sees in pornography. This is another expression of self-objectification, where women alter their sexual performance in order to pleasure their partner (Zurbriggen et al., 2011).

Moreover, these findings also align with El-Guebaly & Butterwick's (2016) study in which women stated that they felt the need to "perform a certain way" (p. 75). One participant, Ella, even stated that sex to her almost always feels performative:

I have less times where I feel like I can just go wild and be myself than I feel like I need to be performative. . . . For me it always . . . feels . . . as a performance.

Similar to this, other women also reported that they sometimes have trouble feeling comfortable, free and fully in the moment. However, these women did not state that it was because of their partner but because of insecurities that stem from themselves.

Regarding insecurities, the majority of women expressed that they experience periods of body insecurity, with only two women stating that they have an overall positive self-image. The insecurities mentioned included breasts, thighs, stretch marks, body hair, vagina, weight, and the way their naked body looks, which prompted some women to always have sex with the lights off. It is important to emphasize again that these insecurities are not directly prompted by their partners.

Overall, almost all women expressed that their partner makes them feel good about themselves, regularly compliments them and has helped them overcome certain insecurities. The insecurities largely come from the women themselves, as well as expectations from society and pornography about how bodies should look. For example, Ella explained how pornography affected her view on her vagina:

A lot of pornstars have either, like, cosmetic surgery to put their outer vulvas inside or they are just naturally born with a nice looking vagina. And that's why they're on TV and not a lot of people realize the struggles . . . mentally but also physically with an outie because I have one half of the vulva in and one out, which . . . makes me feel bad. . . . I don't shave in order for that to not be seen. . . . But whatever I do, my vagina still looks bad because either I don't shave, so I'm hairy and disgusting, or I shave and I have an outie and it's again disgusting. So yeah, it has been influenced by that [pornography] a lot. Ella's statement reflects the unrealistic expectations pornography portrays, aligning with Peter & Valkenburg (2014) and McKee et al.'s (2008) findings that women's bodies in pornography represent unrealistic beauty standards. Ella also stated that her previous partner used to mock her vagina, exposing how pornography can create false standards for men about how women's bodies should look.

Moreover, Ella's struggle between not shaving or having her vagina exposed shows how representations in pornography can leave women to feel as if no matter what they do, they cannot meet the standard. Another woman, Giselle, shared her experience of how pornography prompted her to shave:

I watched a porn video and it was, like, this close up of a butthole and it was, like, perfectly, perfectly waxed. I was like, damn. My ass don't look like that. . . . And then I also started shaving it. And so I was like, okay, that looks way better.

In Giselle's case, she feels happy that pornography prompted her to start shaving. It is unclear whether this was because of her own preference or whether she subconsciously felt pressure to do so, therefore it is difficult to determine whether this is a positive or negative influence from pornography.

Discussing less negative pornography influences, Alice stated that although she feels how pornography has impacted her partner's preferences for sexual acts and vocabulary, pornography has not given her partner false expectations:

One thing that porn didn't do for him is create a false expectation of women's bodies. . . . he never made me feel insecure about my body hair, or my body shape, or size of me in whatever point or place . . . I know that he also looked at women that were a bit bigger and maybe not as skinny as porn usually has. So . . . he found that attractive. . . . and obviously I compare myself and I'm insecure but those are my problems. Like, he, on his side, he never made that come across, so I would say that for sure didn't influence him negatively.

Alice's statement shows that pornography does not always exhibit influence in a negative way. She also mentioned that her partner watching women similar to herself in body size made her feel better. This introduces the topic of social comparison.

More than half the women stated that they have compared themselves to women their partners watch in pornography or thought about it in some way. For those who did not, it was mostly related to a lack of knowledge of specific women that their partners watch. This finding aligns with Journeay (2023) and Peter & Valkenburg's (2014) theory, which proposes that women who are aware of their partner's pornography consumption may compare themselves to the women their partners watch. In the current study, one woman also stated that she doesn't compare herself because she feels like those "are just porn actresses". Another stated that she doesn't compare men that she's watched in pornography to her partner, so she assumes that her partner wouldn't compare women he's watched in pornography to her. Additionally, one woman said that she doesn't compare herself because her partner doesn't have "a specific way that he wants them to look like".

Interestingly, the women who don't compare themselves also reported a more positive self-image and less insecurities. Moreover, a few women who have compared themselves

stated that it stems from their own insecurity, meaning that there is a possible link between comparing themselves to others and a more negative self-image. One woman, Diana, even explicitly stated that “maybe if I wasn’t so insecure, then I wouldn’t mind him that much watching porn”.

There are also differences in comparison based on the kind of content their partners watch. For example, one woman, Jasmine, who initially stated that she doesn’t compare herself, later on expanded upon this:

I guess I could be insecure about it if they are very cute. Yeah. If they’re very pretty . . .

Maybe I would be a little bit insecure if he would watch women with a larger chest.

In Jasmine’s case, she previously stated that her partner watches women who look similar to her. This finding proposes the idea that women are less likely to compare themselves if their partners watch women who are similar to them, which could be an addition to Suls et al. (2002) theory of upward and downward comparison. People who compare themselves to someone who is perceived as superior usually results in a more negative self-image, whereas comparing oneself to someone perceived in a lower standing results in a more positive self-image (Journeay, 2023). This theory could be expanded upon by adding a similar comparison, which results in a more neutral self-image, possibly, even a more positive one. This can also be seen in Alice’s experience:

[comparing herself with women her partner watches in pornography] in a way though it kind of made me feel better. . . . Like, not because these women were ugly . . . these women are gorgeous, right? And it felt that because he was seeking women that kind of looked like me, it made me feel better, you know? I’m like, okay, he’s looking for something similar to me. He’s not going for someone completely on the opposite side of the spectrum or someone that looks completely different than me. That would make me feel worse.

On the contrary, Giselle had a different experience:

Me and my boyfriend had a conversation about if you watch porn, do you have, like, a favorite person to watch? And then he did and then I looked her up and she was kind of looking nothing like me, so. That's where I'm like, mmh, mmh, that makes me a little bit insecure. . . . After the conversation we had about the pornstar that he really likes, I had a really bad dream about seeing him and her. . . . Of course, there's at least one second I'm gonna think about, oh, that's not me.

Although Giselle expressed that she usually does not compare herself, she did mention that there have been times where she has. On the topic of specific women in porn, Alice said that her partner used to follow a specific content creator:

That particularly made me uncomfortable because it wasn't just about seeing someone and having the idea of someone doing that to you, it's, like, actually looking at someone else and following that person in multiple videos and that kind of made me uncomfortable.

Besides these two women, the other participants did not compare themselves to specific women in pornography, but rather made general comparisons or compared themselves to types of women. Diana said that she has a problem with comparing herself to other people a lot. Alice stated that “the fact that I know that he's looking at someone else, that kind of started to bother me the more time went on”. Similarly, Ella emphasized that “it really affects me if I know that he's getting off to another woman's body”.

Additionally, previous research has found that women who compare themselves with women their partners watch in pornography results in women altering their physical appearance to make them seem more attractive to their partners (Journeay, 2023; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014). However, in the current study this was not observed. The only altercation was related to performance, for example, moaning nice or positioning oneself nice, which was discussed earlier in this section.

In summary, all women in this study emphasized that they have not felt objectified by their partners, although some reported that they were afraid to feel this way. However, they have still experienced different forms of self-objectification, such as increased attention to their looks during sex or pressure to perform a certain way. Furthermore, the majority of women struggle with specific insecurities to some degree, and many of them are influenced by unrealistic standards set by pornography. Additionally, some women have compared themselves to women their partners watch in pornography, while some have not given it much thought. These differences largely depend on their awareness of what their partners watch, the content and preferences of their partners, as well as the women's self-image.

3.2. Sexual Preferences

This subchapter explores how women's sexual preferences are affected by their partner's pornography consumption. It considers how pornography has influenced the women's partners' real-life sexual preferences, and how these affect the women's sexual preferences, engagement in certain acts, and feelings of pressure. It also explores unrealistic expectations set by pornography.

When asked about whether the women have felt that their partners have been influenced by pornography, three participants stated that they haven't felt an influence or that it is hard to determine, whereas the majority of responses revealed that the women's partners have been influenced by pornography to some extent. Sexual script theory proposes that those who view pornography often develop preferences for the behaviors seen in pornography, and recreate those in real life sexual experiences (Sun et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2017). However, in the current study, not all of these influences were perceived by women as negative. For example, Bea shared her perception:

I've noticed him trying new stuff on me which we had never tried before. And I'm like, 'oh, where did you get that?' and he was like, 'oh, I saw it in porn'. And I'm like, oh, okay,

why not? You know, like, in that way porn is not always bad because it's interesting to discover new stuff. . . . I think in that way it has influenced him.

Bea finds that pornography can be helpful to discover new things. There is also research which shows that pornography consumption can offer benefits in relationships, such as trying new sexual acts (Willoughby et al., 2015). Other women in this study also mentioned that pornography can be used as an educational tool. For example, a few women have even instructed their partners to watch a specific type of pornography in order to educate themselves about their partners' interests, as well as female pleasure. Some participants did emphasize that not all pornography is bad, for example, there is pornography created by women, or pornography that portrays realistic and romantic couple sex.

However, many women pointed out issues with mainstream pornography such as lack of consent, lack of respect, portrayal of very young girls, rape fantasies, male-centeredness, a negative image of women, unrealistic portrayals and expectations, and problems within the pornography industry in general. These and similar issues have also been identified by previous research (Maas et al., 2023; Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Wright et al., 2014).

Some women in this study also pointed out how these negative aspects of pornography have influenced their partners. For example, the idea of sex, initiation of sex, expectations about how long certain acts should last, and vocabulary used during sex. Another example was shared by Ella:

A lot of times I'd say is the hand grabbing with, like, one arm like this, you know [raises arm up and puts it behind head]. But . . . in real life, it doesn't really work. Because the woman can easily get out of that. It's just kind of like a roleplay, you know. . . . I never really told him that. I never told him that I can get out at any time.

Ella's example shows how pornography can create false expectations of reality. Moreover, it showcases how certain acts done to women in pornography are not always enjoyed by

women in real life, even if they engage in those acts. Martson & Lewis' (2014) research found that sometimes women feel pressured into sexual acts and end up doing them to please their partner, and that sometimes men ignore a lack of consent.

Fortunately, all women in this study emphasized that their partners generally do not do things without consent. A common occurrence for all women is discussing certain acts with their partners before or after sex, as well as asking each other throughout if everything is fine and consensual. There were two exceptions nevertheless. One participant stated that her partner has pushed her head down while she's giving oral. However, she stated that they talked about this after, and her partner never did it again without her consent. Another example was when a participant's partner placed a finger in her butt without asking beforehand. However, the participant did not seem to be bothered by this, and stated that "it worked out great".

The majority of women in this study explained that they have not felt pressured by their partner to engage in sexual acts. By this, it means that their partners have not ignored them saying 'no' or continuously tried to make the women do an act their partner wants. There were still other forms of pressure felt either from themselves to please their partner or societal expectations. For example, Ella feels pressure to change her nail length:

I have long nails . . . which isn't really great for my partner because my partner wants . . . ear massages and stuff like that, which the nails hurt. So I kind of feel pressured into getting short nails because of it. He never, like, says it, you know, in person, but I do feel it.

Additionally, a few other participants mentioned that they have never been pressured by their partners to engage in sex. However, they have felt pressure from themselves to have sex in order to not let their partners down or make them feel like it's their fault. It is possible that this pressure to have sex could be influenced by expectations that pornography sets, in which

male pleasure is deemed most important, and women are objectified and made to feel that their main purpose is to satisfy men (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014).

Other participants have also mentioned these points. For example, Bea stated how depictions in pornography have raised women “to satisfy more than to be satisfied”. Similarly, Alice stated that pornography has set an expectation where women have to take care of the men and make sure that they’re enjoying, while men can be the passive enjoyers because “sex happens to you . . . as a man”. Another example prioritizing male pleasure comes from participant Clara, whose partner enjoys being in a more submissive role, and Clara experiences a sense of guilt for wanting to switch, as she feels like she’s “stripping him of an opportunity of . . . having what he enjoys”. Women’s experiences regarding pleasure are explored in the further section.

In summary, the women recognize both negative and positive influences of pornography on their partners, while also pointing out specific issues within the pornography industry. Although the participants have not been persuaded by their partners to engage in certain acts, the women have felt other forms of pressure stemming from unrealistic expectations created by pornography and society in general.

3.3. Pleasure

This subchapter explores how women’s pleasure is affected by their partners’ pornography consumption. It explores how women’s pleasure is influenced by pornography, the role their partners play in this process, as well as how pornography has influenced their partners’ perceptions related to female pleasure. It also discusses women’s engagement in unpleasurable acts, experiences of pleasure related to body-image and performance, and other factors that influence pleasure.

The majority of women in this study found their own pleasure to be important, whereas only two women stated that they don't focus on their own pleasure that much. One of these two women, Clara, explained:

I think I put it [own pleasure] on the back, to be honest. . . . I put on more of a caring role, because I have to make sure that he's getting what he wants.

She further explained that she tends to feel guilty and anxious when her partner focuses on her pleasure because it takes her longer to reach an orgasm. Although Clara did not say this explicitly, the lack of importance on her own pleasure could stem from internalized standards created by pornography which value male pleasure over female pleasure (Maas et al., 2023; Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Wright et al., 2014). Moreover, sexual script theory proposes that these kinds of norms are created unconsciously and without giving it much thought (Sun et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2014). Bea's experience also reflects how women are raised to value their own pleasure less:

It's been an entire journey for me. And I used to in previous relationships have, like, absolutely no pleasure but that's something I've learned to accept, the fact that I deserve also sexual pleasure when I'm having an experience.

Fortunately, Bea has come to a point currently in which she also finds her own pleasure important. She also stated that her partner has been a huge help in helping her get to this point. When it comes to the women's partners, most of the women claimed that their partners place enough focus on the women's pleasure. A few women even stated that their pleasure is the "core of sex", with their partners prioritizing their orgasm and incorporating new things into their sex life that can help women experience more pleasure.

Although most women found their partners to place enough focus on their pleasure, a few women said that it took some time. For example, Alice shared how she experienced pleasure in the beginning of her relationship:

He in the past wasn't as much [focused on her pleasure] and . . . I think this was because of the expectation of porn and how actually women get satisfied. . . . In the beginning it was a lot more centered around him and his pleasure. . . . It felt like I was a tool to get to a certain point rather than someone that he wanted to experience and explore, you know? So, yeah, I would say it was mostly focused around, like, blowjobs and, like, me doing stuff to him.

Alice emphasizes how pornography influenced her partner's perception of women's pleasure. Once again, the depiction in pornography that favors men's pleasure over women's has shown to influence how men believe sex should be like. Ella had a similar experience:

For oral or for female pleasure there was a bit of work there. . . . For example, shoving, like, more than two fingers up somebody's vagina is not pleasurable for the woman. It's just, you know, arousal of the man seeing how far he can get her. And sometimes the screams aren't out of pleasure, they're out of pain. And it's something that a lot of men got from pornography. The fact that 1, 2, 3, 4, like, it's the same, you know? . . . And when that happened I just let him go at it and then . . . I showed him physically, like, look how inflamed you made me.

Ella's experience is another example of how pornography creates false ideas of how women experience pleasure. Moreover, it goes back to self-objectification and shows how pornography's expectations sometimes lead women to engage in sexual acts that they do not find pleasurable (Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Tylka & Kroon Van Diest, 2014).

A few women said that they have participated in sexual acts that do not bring them much pleasure. Some examples mentioned were reverse cowgirl, ear massages and involvement of latex, all of which were said to be interests influenced by pornography. Multiple participants stated that they do not enjoy giving oral, but do it sometimes for the sake of their partners.

Although some women occasionally engage in less pleasurable acts, it was often said that their partners are also generally open to doing something that they're not too interested in for the sake of their partner. Therefore, this finding does not necessarily point to an imbalance created by pornography consumption that makes women more likely to engage in unpleasurable acts.

Another topic discussed with the participants was one regarding their pleasure in relation to their body-image and performance. Self-objectification theory proposes that women who criticize themselves and their body may experience less sexual satisfaction (Wright & Tokunaga, 2017). It can sometimes get to a point where a woman is so hyper-aware of her looks that she does not focus on her own bodily sensations and satisfaction (Zurbriggen et al., 2011).

Around half of the women have had instances where they're so much in their head that they can't enjoy themselves or feel reduced pleasure. However, some women mentioned that they have felt this in previous relationships and not currently. For example, Giselle spoke about her feelings with her first boyfriend, stating that "I was just so much in my head the entire time and just could not enjoy it". Alice expanded more upon these feelings she's had in her current relationship:

But I'm just really focused in my own brain and, like, in my own thoughts and I'm like, it feels really good but sometimes because I want him to know that it feels really good, I get a bit lost and I get too self-conscious and then I'm like, oh, am I making enough sound or am I not making enough sound? . . . Is this the right position? Do I look good? Is my double chin showing?

Although Alice sometimes feels distracted because she feels self-conscious, she said that it is not something that is related to her partner's actions. Other women who have felt this way also emphasized that it is not because of their partner in any way.

Additionally, the participants mentioned other factors that influence how much pleasure they can gain from sex with their partner. Aspects that reduced pleasure for the women included anxiety and stress, feelings of uncomfortableness and negative past sexual experiences. Ella also stated that performativity affects her pleasure:

It's just a tendency to look good during performing. It takes, like, the pleasure out of it because it becomes a show and kind of, like, performative. . . . I always put in a lot of effort, I think more effort into how I look than how I pleasure either myself or my partner which kind of sucks.

This example also showcases other points made in previous sections about how pornography has conditioned women to have increased attention to their looks and performance during sex. In Ella's case, it interferes with her sense of pleasure.

Moreover, factors mentioned that increased the participants' pleasure were feeling appreciated, enough foreplay, physical attraction to their partner, as well as involvement of toys and transitioning activities. However, the most common answer across the majority of participants was emotional connection. For example, Bea said that "it's normal as a woman to want that . . . to experience good sex is to feel emotionally connected". This finding can be connected to previous research, which shows that gentle and caring behaviors in pornography, such as talking after sexual activity and care for the other, are more important to women (Denney et al., 1984; Wright et al., 2014). The current study shows that these behaviors are also important to women in real-life sexual encounters.

Interestingly, a few women also mentioned that they prefer to read erotica or smut rather than watch visual pornography. This preference could be because written material can foster an emotional connection, for example, with the characters, which was something that was mentioned by Alice.

In summary, the majority of women's partners place enough emphasis on their pleasure, while a few had to be de-influenced from pornography in order to do so. Some women also have had trouble valuing their own pleasure because of the norms portrayed in pornography. Moreover, emphasis on their looks and performance has reduced pleasure for some women. However, it was generally stated that their partners have been helpful in experiencing pleasure.

3.4. Male Partners' Questionnaires

The men's questionnaires were generally aligned with the women's answers, with a few exceptions of consumed content mentioned in the questionnaires that were not disclosed by the women. It is unclear whether this is because the women did not mention it, were completely unaware of it, or their partners did not want them to know. The most common preferences in pornographic material for the men included amateur videos, blowjobs, big breasts, vaginal sex, female orgasm, among others. A few men did not have specific preferences.

As for frequency, the women's perceptions were also generally aligned with the men's answers. However, some men indicated a higher frequency than perceived by their partner. The men's frequency ranged between less than once a month to once a day, while a few men have stopped watching pornography altogether or are trying to stop.

According to the results of the PPCS (Bóthe et al., 2017), none of the men had a pornography addiction at the time of filling in the questionnaire. However, one woman stated that her partner does sometimes struggle with a pornography addiction, but this depends on the period.

In summary, there are not any major differences between the women's perceptions of their partner's pornography consumption and the men's actual pornography consumption, assuming that the questionnaires were filled out thoroughly and truthfully.

Discussion

This research aimed to explore the effects of male partners' pornography consumption on their female partners' self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure during sexual activity. Many findings align with the theoretical framework, while some present insights that are either an addition to existing theory or differ from previous research and theory.

Overall, women in this study revealed that their male partners have not explicitly done or said anything that fosters a negative self-image for the women. However, most women still tend to struggle with specific insecurities, with most being related to their body-image. These issues come from themselves, but are also created and maintained by unrealistic portrayals in pornography about how women should look and behave. This is also backed by the fact that some of the most common insecurities mentioned in this study were body parts that are usually portrayed to be "perfect" in pornography, such as breasts.

Not only that, but some women in this study also engage in self-objectifying behaviors, for instance, paying increased attention to their looks and performing in certain ways for their partners, which was predicted by theory. A few women also compare themselves to women their partners watch in pornography, aligning with the theory of social comparison. An interesting finding that was not mentioned in theory is a possible link between self-image and comparison. Women who present a more positive self-image may compare themselves less, whereas women with a more negative self-image or more insecurities may be more prone to comparing themselves to the women their partners watch in pornography.

Similarly, another addition to theory could be that the type of pornographic content consumed by the partners impacts levels of comparison. For example, some women stated that they feel better if their partners watch women who are similar to themselves, and a few mentioned that their partner watching someone who looks nothing like them causes feelings

of insecurity. Other women also said that they compare themselves less because their partners don't watch women who look a specific way, or because the women did not have much knowledge about specific characteristics of the women their partners watch. Additionally, looking at specific content creators created more insecurity for some.

Surprisingly though, no women reported that they alter their physical attributes in order to look more similar to women in pornography, which was observed in the theoretical framework. Yet some women still modify their sexual performance, influenced by how women in pornography act.

When it comes to sexual preferences, most women have felt different ways how pornography has influenced their partners. Although some examples were seen as positive, the majority were deemed as negative. Sexual script theory proved to be correct, and many men in this study transferred behaviors seen in pornography into real-life sexual experiences, many times unrealistic and sometimes harmful. For example, trying sexual acts portrayed in pornography which are not pleasurable and even painful for women. A few women did state that some pornographic material can be educational, such as content made by women or pornography that portrays realistic couple sex. Nonetheless, the women recognized the majority of pornography as harmful.

As opposed to previous research, women in the current study generally were not pressured by their partners to engage in certain acts, and had almost no experiences with a lack of consent. Still, again influenced by pornography's expectations, a few women had found themselves feeling other forms of pressure to do certain things. Moreover, some women discussed how pornography has skewed their perceptions of the role of women in sex, stemming from the fact that most pornography values pleasure of men over women.

On the topic of pleasure, one surprising finding is that the majority of men in this study place high emphasis on their partners' pleasure, considering most pornography values

male pleasure over female pleasure. In spite of that, a few women still had to de-influence their partners from pornography that does not accurately portray female pleasure. Moreover, this distorted portrayal in pornography also made some women prioritize their own pleasure less.

Most women stated that they have participated in some acts that they do not find pleasure in for the sake of their partner. Even so, they stated that their partners have done the same. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how well this aligns with theory, considering it is not clear whether there is an imbalance or if it's just certain sacrifices that both partners sometimes make in their relationship.

As self-objectification theory predicted, some women experienced a lack of sexual satisfaction due to hyper-fixation on themselves during sex. Additionally, other factors were mentioned that influenced how much pleasure the women gain, such as stress and emotional connection with their partner. These are also findings that were not mentioned in existing theory. Moreover, the majority of women stated that their partners place enough focus on their pleasure, and even prioritize it, although a few men needed some guidance. However, some women found it difficult to value their own pleasure due to the male-centeredness portrayed in pornography.

In short, the effect of male partners' pornography consumption on their female partners' self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure varies. Some women are unaffected, while others experience an influence that is not direct, but rather happens through different processes, such as self-objectification, sexual scripts and social comparison. Although the majority of women in this study view mainstream pornography as harmful, the findings reveal a more nuanced picture, resulting in both positive and negative experiences.

Conclusion

This research provides several contributions to the field of social science. First, it fills a gap in existing literature by using a qualitative approach to center the lived experiences of women whose partners consume pornography, specifically, how their self-image, sexual preferences and pleasure are affected. Second, it did not seek out women who explicitly reported issues with their partners' pornography consumption, therefore providing more diverse and differing perspectives. Third, this study provides additional information about the women's partners' pornography consumption habits and not just perceived pornography consumption by the women, therefore creating a more reliable view of the effects of male partners' pornography consumption on their female partners. Finally, this research revealed how women's sexual experiences and self-image are consciously and unconsciously shaped and influenced by expectations, standards and norms in pornography.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. Firstly, since a qualitative methodology includes a small sample size, the results are not generalizable to larger populations, but provide a deeper understanding of women's experiences. Secondly, due to the study's qualitative nature, the analysis process may have been influenced by the researcher's position and biases, therefore lacking a sense of objectivity. Lastly, the research generally focused on women's experiences with their current partners, and studies including past partners could point to different results. Future research could benefit from having a larger sample size to gain more diverse opinions. Moreover, future studies could possibly even incorporate women's partners into the conversation to create an even bigger understanding of the issue at hand.

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Appendix A



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: The Impact of Male Partners' Pornography Consumption on Female Partners' Self-Image, Sexual Preferences and Pleasure

Name, email of student: Aija Sjanīte, 736090as@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
4. 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.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO
6. 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
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
10. 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.

5. The topic that the study is about is in itself a sensitive topic, therefore possible negative emotions may arise. However, these would not be because of me as a researcher, but could possibly uncover aspects about the participants' lives that they were previously unaware of.
6. The topic itself covers themes related to sex life, therefore, it is unavoidable.

_What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.). The participants will be informed of the study's purposes, and it will also be stated beforehand that they can choose to withdraw at any point, or choose to not answer any question that they do not wish to answer.

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.

-

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.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

20 participants, 10 will be interviewed, 10 will be asked to fill out questionnaires.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

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

I will look at heterosexual couples living in the Netherlands. It is difficult to estimate an exact number.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

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 interview recordings and transcripts will be stored on my personal laptop, in folders, which are locked with a password that is only known by me. The questionnaires will be stored in a separate, sealed folder, which only I have access to.

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?

The researcher Aija Sjanīte.

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

Every day.

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

Any personal information of the participants that can be linked back to them will not be disclosed.

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: Aija Sjanīte

Name (EUR) supervisor:

Date: 07/03/2025

Date: 21/03/2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aija Sjanite', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a large final flourish.

APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form (if applicable)

Information and consent form

Introduction

My name is Aija Sjanīte and I am studying Social Inequalities at Erasmus University Rotterdam. For my Master thesis, I am conducting research on the effects of pornography, specifically, how pornography consumption influences individuals in heterosexual relationships.

Any further questions about this research and what it will be used for are welcome at any point before, during, and after the interview.

Please contact me if necessary:

Name: Aija Sjanīte

Phone number: +31628998910

Email: aijasjanite@gmail.com

Conditions

By signing this form, I

- Consent to participate in this research.
- Understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time.
- Understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question.
- Consent that I am at least 18 years old.
- Consent that any information gained during the interview can be used in this research, and if an answer can be traced back to you, permission will be asked first.
- Understand that any personal information unrelated to the research will not be included, unless specified otherwise.

Declaration of Consent

I, the participant, declare that I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and the questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to voluntarily participate in this research.

Name of participant _____

Email of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Date _____

Audio recording

I consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Yes ____ No ____

Research results

I would like the results of this research to be shared with me.

Yes ____ No ____

Information and consent form

Introduction

My name is Aija Sjanīte and I am studying Social Inequalities at Erasmus University Rotterdam. For my Master thesis, I am conducting research on the effects of pornography, specifically, how pornography consumption influences individuals in heterosexual relationships.

Any further questions about this research and what it will be used for are welcome at any point before, during, and after filling the questionnaires.

Please contact me if necessary:

Name: Aija Sjanīte

Phone number: +31628998910

Email: aijasjanite@gmail.com

Conditions

By signing this form, I

- Consent to participate in this research.
- Understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time.
- Understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question.
- Consent that I am at least 18 years old.
- Consent that any information gained from the questionnaires can be used in this research, and if an answer can be traced back to you, permission will be asked first.
- Understand that any personal information unrelated to the research will not be included, unless specified otherwise.

Declaration of Consent

I, the participant, declare that I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and the questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to voluntarily participate in this research.

Name of participant _____

Email of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Date _____

Research results

I would like the results of this research to be shared with me.

Yes ____ No ____

Appendix B

Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS)

Please, think back to the last six months and indicate on the following 7-point scale how often or to what extent the statements apply to you. There is no right or wrong answer. Please indicate the answer that most applies to you.

	1- <i>Never</i>	2- <i>Rarely</i>	3- <i>Occasionally</i>	4- <i>Sometimes</i>	5- <i>Often</i>	6- <i>Very often</i>	7- <i>All the time</i>					
						1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I felt that porn is an important part of my life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I used porn to restore the tranquility of my feelings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I felt porn caused problems in my sexual life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I felt that I had to watch more and more porn for satisfaction	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I unsuccessfully tried to reduce the amount of porn I watch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I became stressed when something prevented me from watching porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I thought about how good it would be to watch porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Watching porn got rid of my negative feelings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Watching porn prevented me from bringing out the best in me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I felt that I needed more and more porn in order to satisfy my needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. When I vowed not to watch porn anymore, I could only do it for a short period of time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. I became agitated when I was unable to watch porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I continually planned when to watch porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. I released my tension by watching porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. I neglected other leisure activities as a result of watching porn	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. I gradually watched more "extreme" porn, because the porn I watched before was less satisfying	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I resisted watching porn for only a little while before I relapsed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I missed porn greatly when I didn't watch it for a while	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Scoring: Add the scores of the items of each factor. For the total score add all the scores of the items. 76 points or more indicate possible problematic pornography use

Salience: 1, 7, 13

Mood modification: 2, 8, 14

Conflict: 3, 9, 15

Tolerance: 4, 10, 16

Relapse: 5, 11, 17

Withdrawal: 6, 12, 18

Appendix C

Pornography Consumption Habits

Please choose one answer for each question which applies to you the most. The answers are confidential and will only be seen by the researcher. If you currently do not watch pornography, skip to question 3.

1. On average, how often do you watch pornography currently?
 - a. Less than once a month
 - b. 1-3 times a month
 - c. Once a week
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Once a day
 - f. Multiple times a day

2. Think back to a time before you were in your current relationship. On average, how often did you watch pornography then?
 - a. Less than once a month
 - b. 1-3 times a month
 - c. Once a week
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Once a day
 - f. Multiple times a day

3. If you currently do not watch pornography, think back to a time in your present relationship when you did watch pornography. On average, how often did you watch pornography?
 - a. Less than once a month
 - b. 1-3 times a month
 - c. Once a week
 - d. 1-3 times a week
 - e. Once a day
 - f. Multiple times a day

4. Please write down your preferred pornography category (or multiple). If you currently do not watch pornography, answer based on a period when you did watch pornography.

5. Please write down your preferred sexual acts in pornography (or multiple). If you currently do not watch pornography, answer based on a period when you did watch pornography.

6. Please write down your preferred characteristics of women in pornography (or multiple). If you currently do not watch pornography, answer based on a period when you did watch pornography.

7. Below is a list of different acts, characteristics and behaviors seen in pornography. Please circle those that you prefer to watch. If you currently do not watch pornography, circle the answers based on a period when you did watch pornography. Multiple answers are possible and encouraged.

- a. Big breasts
- b. Slim woman
- c. Small breasts
- d. Curvy woman
- e. Spanking
- f. Name-calling
- g. Male dominance, female submission
- h. Female dominance, male submission

- i. Kissing
- j. Giving compliments
- k. Hair pulling
- l. Choking
- m. Facial ejaculation
- n. Male orgasm
- o. Female orgasm
- p. Cuddling
- q. Female receiving oral
- r. Male receiving oral
- s. Vaginal sex
- t. Anal sex
- u. Fisting
- v. Slapping
- w. Loud moaning

If anything else comes to mind, please write down any other acts, characteristics or behaviors that you frequently watch in pornography.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a bit about your relationship?
 - How and when did you and your partner meet?
 - How long have you been together?

How satisfied are you currently with your relationship?

Pornography habits & sexual life

2. How openly do you and your partner discuss your sexual life?
3. How openly do you and your partner discuss your pornography habits?
 - What is your general stance on watching pornography while being in a relationship?
 - How much knowledge do you have about your partner's pornography consumption? For example, do you know how frequently your partner watches pornography and what kind of pornography he views?
 - Do you watch pornography yourself? If yes, how often do you watch it and what genres/types of pornography do you consume?
 - Do you and your partner ever watch pornography together?
4. At the moment, how do you feel about you and your partner's sexual life?
 - Are you satisfied? Is there something that you would like to be different?
5. How has your and your partner's sexual life been in the past?
 - Have there been any changes throughout the course of your relationship?

Sexual preferences

6. Do you feel that your and your partner's sexual preferences are generally aligned?
 - For example, do you have specific positions or acts that you both like to engage in frequently?
 - If you feel like they're not always aligned, please explain.
7. To what extent have you ever felt that your partner's interests and preferences during sex have been influenced by pornography?
 - For example, have you ever felt like your partner is trying to recreate something often seen in pornography?
8. How open are you to trying new things during sex that your partner enjoys?
9. Have there ever been instances where your partner wants to try something that you're not too interested in?

- Or vice versa

10. Have you ever felt pressured to engage in a sexual act your partner wants to try?

- It doesn't necessarily mean that you feel pressure from your partner, but perhaps that you don't want to disappoint him by saying 'no'.

11. Have you ever engaged in a sexual act that your partner likes but isn't very pleasurable for yourself?

12. Have there ever been instances when your partner does something during sex that you have not done before or discussed previously because he assumes you might like that?

Self-image & comparison

13. How do you feel about your own body during sex with your partner?

14. Have you ever felt pressured to look or perform a certain way during sex? Perhaps influenced by how women in pornography look and act.

15. Have you ever found yourself paying increased attention to the way you look or sound during sex? If so, why?

- Has it ever gotten to the point that you're so focused on how you look/sound that you have difficulties enjoying sex?

16. How confident are you about your sexual abilities?

17. Have you ever found yourself, consciously or unconsciously, comparing yourself to women your partner watches in pornography? How does that make you feel?

- Comparing physical attributes, facial expressions, sounds etc.

18. Have you ever felt like your partner feels unsatisfied with your performance during sex?

Pleasure & satisfaction

19. How important to you is your own pleasure during sex?

20. Do you feel that your partner places enough focus on your pleasure during sex?

- In what ways does your partner do this?

21. What are some factors that influence how much pleasure you gain from sex with your partner?

Conclusion

22. In general, how well do you think your partner is able to separate your sex life from what he watches in pornography?

23. After this interview, have any of your views regarding the consumption of pornography in relationships changed?

Appendix E

Here are some examples of how I conducted the coding. I only included a few examples because I developed hundreds of codes, therefore I did not want to flood the document with all of them. I did want to provide a glimpse of how the process went for me.

Theme	Category	Codes
Pleasure ->	Partner's influence on pleasure ->	● Partner helps experiencing pleasure ● Partner working on female pleasure ● Woman's pleasure core of sex
Sexual preferences ->	Partner's sexual acts influenced by pornography ->	● No porn influence ● Partner tries new stuff from porn ● Vocabulary influenced by porn
Self-image ->	Women's insecurities ->	● Body hair insecurity ● Insecurities stem from self ● Porn influenced view on vagina