

# More Than Just Pleasure

*A Study on Finnish Women's Use of Pornography*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyses Finnish women's experiences of using pornography. Pornography studies is a large and vibrant field of study but qualitative research on women's use of pornography is rare, particularly in the Finnish context. The aim of this thesis is to find out how Finnish women navigate the male-oriented world of pornography. The thesis analyses the experiences of 159 study participants who were recruited from a Finnish feminist Facebook group. All participants filled in a survey that included both open- and closed-ended questions and six participants were also interviewed. The thesis focuses on what the role of pornography is in the participants' lives, why they think that pornography is male-oriented and how they navigate the ethics of pornography. Participants described pornography's role in their lives in mixed terms. On the one hand, pornography has a primarily positive role in their lives and is seen as a useful tool for pleasure and sexual exploration. On the other hand, using pornography together with a partner or a partner's perceived addiction to pornography can complicate romantic and sexual relationships. Furthermore, while participants enjoy pornography, they also identify many problems with it. They describe pornography as male-oriented, a claim they base on pornography's portrayals of men and women, as well as aspects of pornography that they describe as fake. They are also concerned about violent and degrading content and how performers are treated in pornography production. Participants expressed frustration at how difficult it is to know how ethically pornography is made. As a result, some have resorted to assessing the ethicalness of pornography through its aesthetics rather than concrete information about working conditions.



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# 1. Introduction

If you are somebody's sister, wife, or mother-in-law and picked us up by mistake, please pass us along to the man in your life and get back to the Ladies' Home Companion. (Hugh Hefner, quoted in Dines, 1998, p. 39)

In the first issue of *Playboy*, Hugh Hefner made it very clear who he wanted to read his pornographic magazine. Women should not concern themselves with the magazine but ought to pass it along to men. The idea that pornography is only used by men and that women would not be interested in it is still alive. Pornography is still seen as men's domain and the content of pornography reflects it. Yet, women, too, are finding their way to pornography and their use of pornography challenges common assumptions about pornography and its users.

My interest in women's use of pornography was piqued after coming across articles about it in popular media and after discussing it with friends. Reading articles such as 'Why I Share My Favourite Porn with Other Women' on the news and entertainment site BuzzFeed and having conversations about our differing opinions on and approaches to pornography with my friends made me wonder what really lay behind women's use of pornography. I wanted to know why women were drawn to something so male-oriented, something so plagued by ethical problems and feminist concerns. Pornography does not have a reputation as a women-oriented or ethical field. On the contrary, it is criticised for prioritising men's pleasure and using unethical production practices. Furthermore, women's use of pornography poses questions about their position as users of a male-oriented medium. I wanted to find out if women faced special challenges as users of pornography because they are women.

To find answers to the questions I decided to look at the experiences that women have with using pornography. The inspiration for the project stemmed from my wish to show that women, too, use pornography and to find out what their experiences with it are. Quantitative research shows that women use pornography, but it does not tell us why they use it or what they think about their use of pornography. Qualitative research is good for examining the meanings of pornography use and its social, cultural and

political implications (Attwood, 2005). There is some qualitative research on women's use of pornography but, to the best of my knowledge, none has been conducted in Finland where the use of pornography has been studied mainly from a quantitative perspective (Paasonen, 2009, p. 595). Consequently, there is little knowledge of Finnish women's experiences with pornography use.

The decision to research Finnish women was also influenced by my wish to highlight a local context that rarely features in pornography studies. Pornography research is often centred on the Anglo-American context and the theories and debates common there. The same theories and research findings from this context are then applied to studies focusing on other contexts. While avoiding this is difficult due to the prevalence of English-language research and American research in particular, an attempt at diversifying pornography research is necessary. As the Finnish pornography researcher Susanna Paasonen (2009, p. 598) has pointed out, analyses of different local contexts diversify understandings of pornography itself and feminist engagements with it. For example, the American way of framing feminist approaches to pornography as either anti-pornography or anti-censorship/sex-positive does not work in every context. In Finland, pornography has not been raised as heated feminist debate, conservative Christian arguments against pornography are not as prominent and public discourse on sex is rather different from American discourse (Paasonen, 2009, p. 598). Research on pornography in Finland can thus diversify our understandings of pornography and its use. It also serves as a useful contrast to more well-known contexts, primarily the American and British contexts, and reminds us that the topics that dominate gender research on the Nordic Countries on the international stage are not the only interesting research topics these countries have to offer.

The main research question of the thesis is 'How do women navigate in the male-oriented world of pornography?' There are three sub-questions that guided this thesis. The three questions are:

1. What is the role of pornography in women's lives?
2. Why do women think that pornography is male-oriented?
3. How do women navigate the ethics of pornography?

In order to find answers to these questions, I conducted interviews with six Finnish women and published an online survey. In total, the study reached 159 women. The participants were recruited from a Finnish feminist Facebook group and therefore the results of the study offer a glimpse into what Finnish women with feminist-leanings think about their own use of pornography.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 2 includes a history of pornography, including the history of pornography in Finland, and a literature review of feminist debates on pornography and of qualitative research on women's use of pornography. The purpose of the chapter is to equip the reader with enough background knowledge to understand the analysis and give it some context.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods, namely interviews and an online survey, that were used to gather the data that the analysis draws on. It includes a discussion on ethical concerns and a description of the recruitment process and the sample.

Chapter 4 presents quantitative findings about the participants' use of pornography. The aim of the chapter is to give a general idea of what kind of pornography participants use, where they find it, how often they use it and with whom. The chapter provides a descriptive account that contextualises the analysis that follows it.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 offer a detailed analysis of the material gathered in the survey and interviews. Chapter 5 looks at the role of pornography in the participants' lives and thus offers answers to the first sub-question. The analysis covers the role of pornography both in solitary use and in use with sexual and romantic partners.

Chapter 6 examines the male-orientedness of pornography and covers the second sub-question. The chapter looks at the reasons why participants find pornography male-oriented and what their thoughts on it are. There is a particular focus on pornography's portrayals of men and women and what participants identify as fakeness in pornography.

The third sub-question is explored in Chapter 7. The chapter starts with a discussion on violent and degrading content. I use BDSM pornography as a case study to further explore the complexities of violence and degradation in pornography. The

chapter also includes a discussion of the ethical concerns participants have about the production of pornography and how they try to find ethically made pornography.

Chapter 8 provides some concluding remarks, highlights the most important findings of the research and discusses ideas for further research on the topic.

### **A note on translations**

The gathering of data was conducted in Finnish which means that writing this thesis has included a lot of translation work. The interviews were done in Finnish and the survey, consent letters and calls for participants were also in Finnish. I have done my best to translate everything as well as I could, and I believe that not much is lost in translation. Readers should keep in mind that translations of what participants said in the interviews or wrote in the survey are not word-for-word translations as I have attempted to capture the meaning and make the translations sound natural in English. This means that I have sometimes made small changes to the translations, for example to punctuation and sentence structure in survey answers. I have, however, paid great attention to retaining the style of both written and oral answers. For example, if a participant used colloquial Finnish, I have translated it to colloquial English. In some cases, translating a particular word or phrase in such a way that it perfectly captures the meaning of it is difficult. In such cases, I offer the original Finnish word or phrase in a footnote along with an explanation.

## **2. History and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Defining pornography and a brief history of pornography**

Although the meaning of the term pornography is not usually contested in everyday conversations, the term is more complex than is often thought and can be defined in many ways. Some define it simply as sexually explicit material (SEM), a term sometimes used by researchers. The term captures one aspect of pornography and is perhaps closest to the everyday meaning of pornography, as people tend to define pornography through its sexually explicit content. Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa (2007, p. 1) list four potential ways to define pornography. They write that pornography has been ‘defined in terms of content (sexually explicit depictions of genitalia and sexual acts), lack thereof (materials without any redeeming artistic, cultural or social value), intention (texts intended to arouse their consumers) and effect (texts arousing their consumers)’. This description of definitions touches upon the most common ways to define pornography. Not only can it be defined by its sexually explicit content, but also by its intention and effect. Furthermore, a lack of artistic, cultural or social value can also be used to define pornography. Some use the lack of these values to distinguish pornography from erotica, arguing that erotica is more artistic and, unlike pornography, has cultural and social value (Wosick, 2015, p. 415). This study, however, does not regard erotica and pornography as separate as I believe their similarities to be more significant than their differences.

Since pornography can be defined in many ways, I chose not to define pornography for the participants of my study. This approach ensured that the results would reflect the participants’ own understanding of pornography, rather than a pre-defined understanding that might limit the results. The definition of pornography used in this study thus reflects the understanding of pornography that emerged from the survey and interviews. In this study pornography means sexually explicit or suggestive material that has the effect of arousing its consumers, regardless of the intentions of its makers. Many participants reported using advertisements, non-pornographic films and other materials that are not meant to be pornography. They use these materials as pornography to arouse themselves. In this definition, effect is more important than

intention. Furthermore, it is good to remember that pornography is published in a variety of media, ranging from visual pornography (videos, photographs and drawings) to written pornography and audio pornography (sound recordings of sex and masturbation or recordings of stories). As video is the most prominent pornography medium, most pornography research is on videos rather than on other media.

The dominance of videos is reflected in this study, too. Even though the study analyses general pornography use and not just the use of videos, many of the references are to research on pornographic videos and it was sometimes difficult to use language that does not imply the use of videos. ‘Watching pornography’ is the most common phrase used to refer to the use of pornography and it was used by participants and sometimes by myself, too, even when I was not referring to videos. In this thesis I have decided on the phrase ‘using pornography’ as it can be used to refer to any medium. ‘Consuming pornography’ is another phrasing that is commonly used, particularly in research, but I wanted to avoid an association with consumption. Pornography is indeed a consumer product but pornography is also produced outside the consumer market, by independent makers who publish their pornography for free. This is particularly common for short stories and drawings. Not referring to consumption is not an attempt to downplay the role of pornography as an industry but to remind the reader that pornography can take other forms apart from being a consumer good.

Apart from the content of pornography and what its intention and effect are, pornography can also be understood as ‘an issue of genre, industry and regulation’ (Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 1). It is a genre in the sense that pornographic productions employ certain tropes that are recognised as part of the genre of pornography. The same way romantic comedies and westerns can be recognised from the tropes that are common in their genres, pornography can also be recognised from its tropes. One of the most recognisable pornography tropes is the money shot or cum shot, in which a man ejaculates on a woman’s body. Silicone implants and women’s loud moaning are other examples of pornography tropes. However, genre is also more than its tropes. Linda Williams (1999 [1989], p. 128) writes that genre is ‘a form of modern mythmaking – a way of doing something to the world, of acting symbolically upon it’.



The genre of pornography creates myths about sex and through this process it affects how we think about sex and, perhaps, also how we have sex.

Pornography is also an industry. The exact size of the industry is hard to estimate due to lack of accurate data and reporting from the pornography industry, but estimates put the global sex industry revenues between 50 and 60 billion dollars a year, and pornography's part of it is considerable (Wosick, 2015, p. 413). The fact that pornography websites are among the most popular websites in the world also shows how large the industry is and how popular the content it produces. In September 2019, LiveJasmin, a website dedicated to live camming, ranked as the 32<sup>nd</sup> most visited website and Pornhub, the most popular website for pornography videos, ranked as the 45<sup>th</sup> most visited site (Alexa, 2019). While this study focuses on pornography as content and genre, pornography as an industry is also relevant. Participants reflected upon it when they discussed the ethics of pornography production and the prevalence of pornography that is seen as male-oriented.

In addition to a genre and an industry, pornography is also a regulatory category. According to Walter Kendrick (1987), pornography is created by its regulation, confinement and concealment. Pornography is that material that those with power deem to be in need of regulation. Historically this has meant that white upper- and middle-class men have controlled material that they have seen as dangerous to women, children and the working class, while they themselves have been able to enjoy their private pornography collections. This approach to pornography emphasises regulation as the common characteristic all pornography shares and does not concern itself about the content. Pornography as a regulatory category is not central in this study but some of the participants' experiences reflect the fact that pornography's regulation has coded pornography as masculine and shameful for a woman to use.

A brief history of pornography is useful for understanding what the world of pornography that participants navigate is like and how it became what it is today. Erotic portrayals have been used in art and literature for as long as they have existed. However, the origins of modern pornography can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of affordable printing techniques and photography (Paasonen, Nikunen

and Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 2). The development of photography was particularly significant as mass-produced pornographic postcards made pornography, which had until then been mainly the upper classes' entertainment, available to the working class (Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 2). The invention of the moving image was the next big step in the development of pornography. In her influential account of hardcore pornography, Linda Williams (1999 [1989]) argues that pornography and cinema were intertwined from the very beginning of cinema. Drawing upon Foucault's concept of *scientia sexualis*, a Western construction of sexuality based on detailed scientific knowledge of sexuality, Williams sketches out a history of hardcore pornography that takes the photographic motion studies that preceded the moving image as its starting point. Rather than understanding hardcore pornography as the grandchild of erotic art, Williams argues that it is closer related to scientific motion studies that tried to capture the movement of the body. Since the first motion studies made by Eadweard Muybridge, first of horses and later of naked and semi-naked human bodies, people have found visual pleasure in looking at bodies in motion. Williams argues that people have a wish to see more and to know more about bodies through looking, a phenomenon she calls 'the frenzy of the visible'. Pornography is one of its expressions. The frenzy of the visible refers to the curiosity people have when it comes to bodies and sex. People want to know more about sex and bodies and pornography answers that demand by showing them.

Early pornographic films, also called stag films, were the hobby of well-off men. They were viewed in men's clubs, brothels and homes and often in groups of men rather than alone, as not many could afford the technology required to view films. Their primary role was to contribute to gender-based bonding among men (Williams, 1999 [1989], p.73) or, in the case of films shown in brothels, to arouse the viewers enough to make them buy the services provided by the establishment (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 74). The 1970s saw the popularisation and mainstreaming of pornography as pornography became increasingly acceptable and cinemas started showing pornographic films (Paasonen and Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 23). This era, called the Golden Age of Porn, was characterised by feature length American films, such as *Deep Throat* (1972) and *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976), which have later become classics of

pornography. The 1970s also saw the rise of Denmark and Sweden as significant producers and exporters of pornography but Finland, with its stricter laws regarding pornography, did not join in this Nordic heyday of pornography (Paasonen, 2009, p. 587). In addition to films, print pornography remained popular in the 1970s and 1980s, due to its accessibility and the possibility to use it in private (Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 4). The next big change in pornography took place with the advent of the VHS tape. Viewing pornographic videos no longer required a visit to the cinema as they could be viewed in the privacy of home.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Internet revolutionised pornography. With the Internet, the use of pornography became even more private as consumers no longer had to buy or rent VHS tapes. One did not even have to leave home to get pornography. The age of Internet has also brought about free pornography which now dominates the market and has radically changed the pornography industry. A key player in modern pornography industry is MindGeek, a Montreal-based company that is both a distributor and a producer of pornography. MindGeek has a near monopoly status in the pornography industry with close to a hundred websites, most of them free tube sites (Auerbach, 2014). A tube site is a pornography website that is modelled on YouTube. They have a large selection of free videos, many of them pirated, and are funded by advertisements. Pornhub is one the tube sites owned by MindGeek and the largest provider of free videos online.

Most free pornography websites offer so-called mainstream pornography. Mainstream pornography is a term often used in pornography research, but it is rarely defined. When mainstream pornography is defined, it is often juxtaposed with alternative or independent pornography. There seems to be an understanding that mainstream and alternative pornographies differ in both how they are made and what their content is. When it comes to the production of pornography, Tarrant (2016, p. 29) writes that alternative (or independent, as Tarrant calls it) pornography makes an effort 'to create equitable and ethical financial agreements' and mainstream pornography, while not bound to be unethical, is more likely to infringe on performers' rights. She further explains that mainstream (heterosexual) pornography videos are characterised by pornography tropes and follow an established model that prioritises male pleasure

(Tarrant, 2016, p. 31). When I use the term mainstream pornography, I refer to this type of juxtaposition between mainstream and alternative pornography. It is not a perfect definition, but it is a good working definition that serves its purpose.

Not only has the Internet made mainstream pornography available for free, but it has also contributed to the rise of alternative pornography. Paasonen (2014, p. 22) writes that alternative pornography has been marked apart from mainstream pornography through aesthetics, politics, ethics and economics. The alternative aesthetic is characterised by its opposition to the mainstream aesthetic of ‘unrealistic’ bodies with silicone breasts and Brazilian waxes that are common in mainstream pornography. When it comes to politics, alternative pornography embraces non-normative presentations of sex and sexuality, such as queer sexuality. Alternative pornography is also assumed to be ethically produced and to resist ‘the standardized commodity forms of the industry’ (Paasonen, 2014, p. 22) by, for example, being independent from large production and distribution companies. Alternative pornography is a large category that includes many very different types of pornography which makes the category hard to define. Furthermore, distinguishing between mainstream and alternative pornography can be difficult as the mainstream appropriates practices from the alternative and even mainstream websites have content labelled as alternative.

The most relevant subcategories of alternative pornography to this study are ethical and feminist pornography. Ethical pornography refers to pornography made ethically, which usually means that there is an emphasis on the performers’ rights, comfort and well-being. For example, the American production company Pink and White Productions pays performers a flat rate regardless of gender, experience or the acts performed, and performers are only asked to do things they want to do (Tarrant, 2016, p. 29). A flat rate puts less pressure on performers to do things they do not want to do as they will get paid the same regardless of the acts performed. While ethical pornography’s primary concern is fair labour practices, feminist pornography is concerned about the content of pornography, while also using an ethical production process. One way to define feminist pornography is offered in *The Feminist Porn Book*, a collection of essays and reflections on feminist pornography by researchers and feminist pornographers. The book defines feminist pornography as follows:

[F]eminist porn uses sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity. It seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex as an erotic activity, an expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics. (...) Ultimately, feminist porn considers sexual representation – and its production – a site for resistance, intervention, and change. (Taormino et al., 2013, p. 11-12)

According to this definition, feminist pornography uses representations of sex and sexuality to resist inequality and unjust norms. Feminist pornographers believe that pornography is not inherently sexist and patriarchal and that it can in fact be used to fight against sexism and patriarchy. Writing about pornography made by women, Linda Williams (1999 [1989]) applies Adrienne Rich's concept of re-vision to pornography. Re-vision (with a hyphen) refers to 'the act of looking back, of seeing again with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' and 'an act of survival' (Rich, 1972, p. 18). In pornography, a re-vision means creating a new type of pornography. Williams (1999 [1989], p. 232) argues that feminist re-visions of pornography mean 'transforming oneself from sexual object to sexual subject of representation'. Using the definition by Taormino et al. and Williams' description of re-visions, feminist pornography can be said to be a feminist appropriation of a traditionally misogynistic and male genre that furthers feminist aims by re-visioning pornography.

## **2.2 Feminist debates on pornography**

The debate on pornography within feminism is often seen as having two sides: anti-pornography and anti-censorship or sex-positive. This conceptualisation originates from the so-called sex wars that were at their height in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Anti-pornography feminists view pornography as violence against women, while anti-censorship feminists defend pornography on the grounds that it should be protected as free speech. They also want to protect women's right to express their sexuality in a variety of ways, including via pornography. The anti-censorship/anti-pornography

divide has become a defining feature of feminist discussions on pornography and much of the literature on pornography adheres to the divide.

Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon are two of the best-known anti-pornography theorists and they have published both together and separately. In 1983, they formulated a legal framework that treated pornography as sex discrimination and aimed to criminalise it on these grounds, instead of moral or obscenity grounds. The model law MacKinnon and Dworkin drafted is based on the notion that women are treated as second-class citizens because they are believed to be sexually submissive and to ‘provoke and enjoy sexual aggression from men, and get sexual pleasure from pain’ (Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988, p. 15). Under male sexual domination, women are nothing but ‘whores’ and men have a natural right to use their bodies for sexual and reproductive purposes (Dworkin, 1981, p. 203). Pornography ought to be banned because it reinforces discrimination against women and because it is one of the institutions men use to colonise and control women’s bodies (Dworkin, 1981, p. 203).

According to Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988, p. 25), pornography causes two types of harm. First, it harms the women who are involved in the production of pornography. Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988, p. 24) argue that pornography exploits women ‘through coercion or entrapment, or through exploiting their powerlessness, social worthlessness and lack of choices and credibility, their despair and sometimes their hope’. Not only do Dworkin and MacKinnon condemn pornography when women are forced to do it, but they also describe the pornography industry as taking advantage of women who due to financial hardship or other ‘lack of choices’ decide to enter the industry. The question of whether performing in pornography – or doing any kind of sex work to that matter – is ever a completely free choice is a question that is still discussed by feminists.

The second way pornography harms women, according to Dworkin and MacKinnon, is via a correlation between the consumption of pornography and violence. The assumption is that men who watch pornography become more violent toward women as a result of their consumption of pornography. Dworkin and MacKinnon write that mass consumption of pornography by men contributes to sexual violence, sexual abuse of children, battery, forced prostitution and unwanted sexualisation. In general, it

contributes to women's second-class status and blurs the lines between sex and sexual violence (Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988, p. 26). Regardless of the popularity of this argument, it remains unclear if pornography truly causes increased levels of violence against women. Anti-pornography feminists refer to research that tries to identify the effects of pornography use, but the results of such research are mixed. Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod (1987) identify a link between watching violent pornography and committing violence but the results are from laboratory testing and do not necessarily reflect real life. In the study, male research subjects were more likely to give electrical shocks to other people, especially women, if they had first been exposed to sexual violence on film. The results of the study were cited in the Meese Report, an American report on the effects of pornography that was ordered by President Ronald Reagan and published in 1986. However, in a book published a year later, Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod (1987, p. 174) criticise the report for drawing conclusions from laboratory experiments without evidence from field studies. According to the researchers themselves, one cannot detect a direct link between pornography and sexual violence from the research, but the research does show that pornography may have an effect on viewers' attitudes toward women and, for example, perpetuate rape myths. Yet, these attitudes do not derive solely from pornography as other media also perpetuate such attitudes (Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod, 1987, p. 174).

More recent research has also found a correlation between the consumption of pornography and violence, or negative attitudes toward women. In a meta-analysis of existing research on the effects of pornography, Wright, Tokunaga and Kraus (2016) found that frequent use of pornography is related to sexual aggression, both on the level of attitudes and behaviour. However, not all frequent consumers of pornography are affected in this way (Wright, Tokunaga and Kraus, 2016, p. 201). Similarly, a study on young Swedish men in upper-secondary school found that those who had coerced someone to sex were more likely to consume pornography almost every day or watch violent pornography (Kjellgren et al., 2010, p. 1164).

Other researchers argue that evidence for a correlation between pornography and sexually aggressive behaviour and attitudes is weak and may be biased by anti-pornography sentiments. For example, Fisher and Grenier (1994) argue that the results

of research that attempts to identify pornography's effect on its users are unreliable as the results are dependent on the sample that is used. Thus, the evidence for a correlation is unreliable (Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 27). In their own experiments with male subjects, they were unable to identify any link between pornography consumption and sexual aggression. In another critical study, Ferguson and Hartley (2009) present the inconsistent results of existing research and point out that the number of rapes in the United States has in fact decreased as pornography has become more widely available online. According to Ferguson and Hartley, the reduction in the number of rapes disproves the common argument that more pornography results in more violence against women. However, it should be kept in mind that studying rape is difficult as it is hard to know how many rapes go unreported, and that even if the number of rapes has gone down in the United States, it is hard to establish a correlation between the reduction and pornography use. There is also some evidence that pornography users may in fact hold more gender egalitarian views than non-users. In a study conducted in the United States, Kohut et al. (2016) found that users of pornography hold more egalitarian attitudes when it comes to women in positions of power, women working outside the home and abortion.

Leaving the matter of violence to the side, even non-violent pornography can be criticised for objectifying women. MacKinnon (1987, p.187), for example, argues that the admiration of beauty becomes objectification in pornography, and objectification is also mentioned in the law written by MacKinnon and Dworkin. It is worth noting that objectification is not limited to pornography only but is seen in other media too, such as advertisements and non-pornographic films. One of the most thorough analyses of objectification is provided by Martha Nussbaum (1995). She argues that there are different ways to objectify someone but what is common to them all is treating another human being as a thing rather than a person (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 257). While Nussbaum agrees with Dworkin and MacKinnon's argument that the instrumentalisation of people, that is, treating people as tools for one's own purposes, is morally problematic, she still argues that it is not always morally objectionable (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 290). She believes that by focusing on objectification on a macro-level rather than looking at it in individual situations, Dworkin and MacKinnon



unnecessarily condemn all kinds of objectification. To Nussbaum, whether objectification is wrong depends on ‘the overall context of the human relationship in question’. In the right context, objectification can be ‘a wonderful part of human sexuality’ (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 271). For example, Nussbaum argues that sadomasochism can include benign objectification when each party consents to it. Yet, when writing about *Playboy*, Nussbaum (1995, p. 283) argues that the commodification and fungibility (treating women as interchangeable) inherent to *Playboy*’s portrayal of women makes the objectification in it unacceptable. Nussbaum seems to argue that commodification of objectification is part of the problem with pornography.

Sex-positive feminism or pro-sex feminism emerged as a response to anti-pornography radical feminists, such as Dworkin and MacKinnon. Critical of Dworkin and MacKinnon’s portrayal of pornography as a great evil, sex-positive feminists argue that banning pornography contributes to creating one accepted female sexuality while condemning other ways of expressing female sexuality. This process of creating ‘the parameters for a properly “feminist” sexuality’ (Glick, 2000, p. 22) is criticised by sex-positive feminists as they consider sexual freedom a central issue to feminism and see personal sexual liberation as political resistance against women’s oppression (Glick, 2000, p. 22). As pornography can be used for sexual liberation, it should not be banned. In fact, many women enjoy pornography. Ellen Willis argues that defining pornography as the enemy will make women who enjoy pornography ashamed of it. ‘[T]he last thing women need is more sexual shame, guilt, and hypocrisy – this time served up as feminism’, Willis writes (1993, p. 352).

Gayle Rubin and other sex-positive feminists criticise anti-pornography feminists for conflating pornography with violence. Gayle Rubin (1993) brings up this point in her critique of anti-pornography politics. She argues that anti-pornography arguments are based on two false assumptions; that pornography is ‘characteristically violent and/or sexist’ and that pornography is ‘more violent and/or sexist than other media in its content’ (Rubin, 1993, p. 21). Anti-pornography arguments are indeed often focused on violence but there is little evidence as to how common violence is in pornography and how popular violent content is. In content analysis research, some have found that violence is both common and popular in pornography (Bridges et al.,

2010; Jensen and Dines, 1998; Sun et al., 2008), while others argue that it is not as common as is often believed (Klaassen and Peter, 2015; McKee, 2005; Shor and Seida, 2019). Varying definitions of violence and the differences in datasets have contributed to the inconclusive results of studies. Even if violence is common in pornography, it is notable that instead of arguing for non-violent pornography, anti-pornography feminists have chosen to advocate for the eradication of pornography. Rubin (1993, p. 19) writes that when it comes to film, literature, television and other cultural fields, feminists have tried to reform rather than eradicate them. Thus, it is somewhat peculiar that many feminists' approach to pornography has been based on abolition rather than reform.

Some sex-positive feminists also use freedom of speech arguments to defend pornography. These anti-censorship feminists believe that pornography is a legitimate way of expressing oneself so it should not be censored. They argue that people ought to have the freedom to use pornography and the freedom to do so without censorship from the government (Berger et al., 1990, p. 32). Anti-censorship feminists also worry that, considering the long history of society trying to control women's sexuality, censorship of pornography might end up hurting women. Censorship has the potential to maintain taboos about sexuality and condemn anyone who does not fit into what is considered acceptable sexuality (Willis, 1993, p. 357).

Laura Kipnis defends pornography exactly for its potential to break taboos and be transgressive. She refers to pornography as 'a transgressive realm' and 'cultural critique' that can serve as 'a counter-aesthetics to dominant norms for bodies, sexualities and desire itself' (Kipnis, 1996, p. 166). Pornography, according to Kipnis, breaks norms and shows alternative ways to express sexuality and is thus transgressive. She further argues that pornography is assumed to have no cultural value because it is low-brow culture and, despite it being used by all classes, it is seen primarily as something used by lower-class men (Kipnis, 1996, p. 175). Because its audience is assumed to lack complexity, pornography itself is also seen as lacking complexity (Kipnis, 1996, p. 177). As evidenced by her view of pornography as transgressive, Kipnis believes that pornography is more than just naked bodies and is in fact a complex cultural critique. Her critique of anti-pornography arguments, including feminist arguments, is based on the transgressive quality she sees in pornography.

### **2.3 Pornography in the Finnish context**

The American sex wars still define much of feminist debate and research on pornography, but it is notable that the sex wars have had little impact on conversation in Finland. The kind of concern over pornography that characterises American feminism never emerged in Finland. In her account of the history of pornography in Finland, Susanna Paasonen (2015, p. 142) writes that the Finnish women's rights movement was more concerned about gender equality in the work place and the family than about pornography or other issues regarding sexuality. Pornography was seen as objectifying women, but it never emerged as a key issue for Finnish feminism. Neither did objection to pornography take on moral arguments, as it did in the United States. In Finland, pornography was and still is seen as a matter of sexual health. In fact, public discourse on sexuality in Finland is characterised by a sex-positive approach. As Paasonen (2015, p. 144) explains, ideal sex in Finnish discourse is a form of self-expression and a way to maintain physical and mental health.

The positive approach to sex that is typical of Finnish public discourse does not apply to pornography. Pornography does not fit well into the idea of healthy sexuality because it perpetuates myths about sex and gender and often depicts women as subordinate to men (Paasonen, 2015, p. 144). Many public institutions, including the Ministry of Justice and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, are critical of pornography and have identified it as a threat to the wellbeing of citizens (Paasonen, 2015, p. 145). The negative approach to pornography was reflected in the strict legislation Finland had until 1999. The production, export, import, advertising, and distribution of pornography was illegal under obscenity legislation from 1927 and it was not until 1999 that pornography legislation was relaxed (Paasonen, 2015, p. 145). The decision to change legislation was influenced by changing attitudes toward pornography and the near impossibility to control material distributed online (Paasonen, 2015, p. 146).

Current attitudes toward pornography are quite accepting in Finland, despite the previously very strict regulation and public discourse disapproving of pornography. Compared to their Nordic neighbours, Finns hold more positive attitudes toward

pornography (Paasonen, 2015, p. 16). The positive attitude toward pornography is documented in the FINSEX research project. This research survey, first conducted in 1971, has been repeated four times since, most recently in 2015. The aim of the project is to follow sexual trends in Finland. The survey includes questions on relationships, sex life and sexual attitudes, among other related topics. Attitudes toward pornography have become increasingly positive throughout the years. In the 2015 FINSEX survey, 58% of women and 83% of men agreed that viewing pornography is very arousing (Väestöliitto, 2017). There has been a significant change in women's attitudes in particular. In the 2007 survey, 49% of women and 82% of men found pornography very arousing (Kontula, 2009, p. 63). The proportion of women finding pornography very arousing grew by 11 percentage points from 2007 to 2015, while men's proportion stayed virtually the same. For both men and women, the proportions are significantly higher than in 1992 when the statement 'I find viewing pornography very arousing' was first included in the survey (Kontula, 2009, p. 63).

Finns' positive attitude toward pornography and the previously strict regulation of pornography may seem like a strange combination. Paasonen (2015, p. 16) hypothesises that the high interest in pornography among Finnish people may be partly due to the very legislation that tried to hinder it. Banning pornography made it more appealing. Even during the time that pornography was heavily regulated, Finns found ways to get their hands on it. Magazines were the most popular type of pornography until videos started challenging their popularity in the 1980s. Magazines could be bought in kiosks or as mail orders, often from Sweden where pornography legislation was less strict (Paasonen, 2015, p. 136). Magazines included photographs and written stories. Stories were not limited to men's magazines only and erotic stories were popular among women as well (Paasonen, 2015, p. 138). Pornographic films were harder to come by and had to be ordered from Sweden or other countries. Even when VHS made films easier to watch at home, access to them was limited. A 1987 law banning all distribution of films rated unsuitable for those under the age of 18 made the distribution of pornographic VHS tapes difficult (Paasonen, 2015, p. 141).

After legislation was relaxed in 1999, pornography experienced what Paasonen (2015, p. 146) refers to as 'a small-scale porn renaissance' in the early 2000s.

Pornography was shown on television, and films made in Finland started emerging. Finnish pornography production at this time was characterised by women's presence not only as performers but also as directors and producers. The central role of women in the production process alongside the small budgets Finnish films from this period had have given Finnish pornography a reputation as more ethical and authentic than most pornography (Paasonen, 2015, p. 159). Women made famous by pornography became mainstream celebrities known by everyone. One of the most well-known Finnish porn stars, Rakel Liekki, appeared in television shows and magazines. Her appearances in mainstream, non-pornographic media blurred the boundaries of pornography and rebranded pornography as something natural and perhaps even cool (Nikunen and Paasonen, 2007). The porn renaissance, however, was short-lived and both pornography production and the media attention received by porn stars and producers have dwindled in the 2010s (Paasonen, 2015, p. 159).

#### **2.4 Qualitative research on women's use of pornography**

The beginnings of pornography research as a field of study can be traced back to the 1980s. Pornography had been researched before and feminist theories of pornography had received a lot of attention, but pornography had not attracted large scholarly interest (Attwood and Smith, 2014, p. 1). Linda Williams' book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (1989) is one of the earliest publications that could be labelled as pornography studies. Rather than engaging in the sex wars, Williams analysed pornography itself without moral claims for or against it. In the introduction to the first issue of *Porn Studies*, the first academic journal solely devoted to the field, Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith (2014, p. 1) explain that Williams' book started 'the gradual development of research focused on the history of pornography, the analysis of its production and consumption, its aesthetics, its significance for particular audiences, and its place in contemporary culture'. While porn studies can include the feminist debate familiar from the sex wars, it is also much more than that and tries to provide a more nuanced account of pornography.

Research on people who use pornography is an important subcategory of porn studies. Yet, this kind of research is rare (Smith and Attwood, 2014, p. 14). Reflecting

the assumption that men are the primary consumers of pornography, women as users of pornography are less researched than men and qualitative research on women's use is particularly uncommon (Ashton et al., 2018, p. 334). However, there are some notable exceptions.

Some of the research done on women's use of pornography suggests that women often have contradictory feelings about pornography. Even if they enjoy pornography, they often have negative thoughts and feelings about it too. In interviews conducted with British women, Karen Ciclitira (2004) found out that many women had been affected by anti-pornography feminism and Andrea Dworkin's writing in particular. Some of the women interviewed explicitly stated that they enjoy pornography but disagree with it politically, and these women expressed discomfort with their own contradictory thoughts and actions (Ciclitira, 2004, p. 292-293).

Z. Fareen Parvez's (2006) qualitative research in the US draws a link between pornography and emotional labour. Emotional labour is a concept originally developed to describe how service sector workers must control their emotions by suppressing negative emotions and inducing positive ones (Parvez, 2006, p. 606). The concept has later been applied to other occupations and areas of life. Parvez argues that it can be applied to both women who perform in pornography and women who watch it. Performers must convince the viewers that they really are enjoying the sex that is being filmed, while viewers identify with the actresses and are concerned for their well-being. Based on interviews with women, Parvez also argues that women viewers' enjoyment of pornography is affected by their socio-economic status and personal experiences of economic hardship. Low-income women who have struggled financially and perhaps also considered doing sex work are more critical of pornography than women who are not familiar with economic hardship (Parvez, 2006, p. 621). This seems to be due to their greater identification with the performers they watch and their familiarity with having jobs that require emotional labour. Parvez also notes that experience of sexual violence is a factor that may reduce women's enjoyment of pornography as pornography can bring back painful emotions and memories related to experiences of sexual violence (2006, p. 622).

In another interview-based qualitative study, Gurevich et al. (2017) interviewed young Canadian women. The researchers identify four approaches to pornography. First, women find pornography a 'ridiculous and recapitulated performance' that is absurd and unrealistic but at the same time sets expectations for their sexual practices and behaviours (Gurevich et al., 2017, p. 567). Second, pornography is an arousal tool that women feel uneasy with because they worry about the performers and the effects of pornography (Gurevich et al., 2017, p. 568). This finding supports the arguments by Ciclitira (2004) and Parvez (2006). Third, women see pornography as pedagogy and pictogram (Gurevich et al., 2017, p. 571). Women use pornography to educate themselves about sex and to get inspiration for their own sex life. Finally, women experience re-enactment pressure that they sometimes resist. Women often feel uncomfortable re-enacting sex acts their male partners have seen in pornography (Gurevich et al., 2017, p. 575).

Paasonen et al. (2015) have conducted one of the few Finnish qualitative studies on the use of pornography. Although the sample includes both men and women, the findings of the study are relevant for understanding pornography use in the Finnish context. In a memory-work project conducted in collaboration with the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literary Society, the researchers collected written accounts of pornography from both women and men. In the responses, participants recollect their experiences with pornography, including early encounters as children or teenagers, and write about what pornography is and what it means to them. The study reveals a considerable level of reflexivity among Finnish pornography consumers. They know their own preferences well and they are able to critically reflect on both their preferences and their concerns about pornography (Paasonen et al., 2015, p. 403). It is noteworthy that the anti-pornography and anti-censorship camps were mostly absent (Paasonen et al., 2015, p. 401).

### **3. Methodology**

The aim of this study is to analyse the pornography-related experiences of women who use pornography to understand what role pornography has in their lives, why they see pornography as male-oriented and how they navigate the ethics of pornography. Women's experiences are at the centre of this thesis. Following a long tradition of feminist research grounded in women's experiences (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002), I wanted to hear the experiences of women and base my research on them, in the hope that the experiences could tell us more about women and pornography. Qualitative methods are best suited for research centring women's experiences and I chose two methods for gathering data: interviews and a survey.

This chapter starts with a description of the steps I took to ensure the ethicalness of the research project. Ensuring participants' anonymity was particularly important considering the sensitivity of the research topic. I will also describe the interviews and the survey and explain where and how participants were recruited, as well as describe the most important demographic characteristics of the sample. The chapter ends with a brief reflection on my own position as a researcher and how that may have impacted the research.

#### **3.1 Anonymity and the storing of data**

Before starting to gather data, I applied for approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The NSD application was approved on 2 October 2018 after which I started recruiting participants. Recruitment was done in a Finnish feminist Facebook group. The survey used Nettskjema, a service provided by the University of Oslo, as its platform. To ensure that the data would be properly protected, responses were stored in Services for Sensitive Data (TSD), also run by the University of Oslo. Since pornography is a sensitive topic, the responses had to be stored on a separate server that only I could access. To ensure anonymity, survey participants were not asked to tell their names or any contact information. The only participants whose names and contact information I knew were the six interview participants. To ensure maximum anonymity, all participants were asked to give three options for a pseudonym, one of which would be used in the thesis. This measure ensured that I would not unknowingly



choose a participant's real name as her pseudonym and the three options made it possible to avoid more than one participant having the same pseudonym. Even though participants were asked to use either a name or initials as their pseudonyms, some participants chose pseudonyms that are more like usernames or nicknames, such as Kettunainen (Fox Woman) or Siilinpentu (Hedgehog Cub). In order to avoid risking these participants' anonymity, I have not altered these pseudonyms. In addition to giving their pseudonyms, I offer some basic information about participants whenever I refer to them in the thesis. The information is in brackets and the format is as follows: pseudonym (age, sexual orientation). If the participant's sexual orientation is in quotation marks, she chose 'other' in addition to or instead of the sexual orientations offered as answer options in the survey, and the text in quotation marks is the participant's own description of her sexual orientation.

All data was anonymised in July 2019. The process included deleting sound recordings of interviews, ensuring that interviewees' names were not included in any documents and deleting some of the data from the survey responses. At the advice of NSD, I deleted information regarding religion and looked through all the open text fields in the responses and deleted information that could lead to participants being identified, such as detailed descriptions of gender identity. After anonymisation the data was exported from TSD as the dataset no longer contained any identifying information.

### **3.2 Research methods**

I conducted six face-to-face interviews in Finland in November 2018. I was approached by 30 women who were willing to be interviewed but, since interviewing all of them was not possible due to the limited scope of a master's thesis, I settled on six interviews at the suggestion of my supervisor. When deciding who to interview, I paid special attention to age and location in Finland. I tried to include women of different ages which proved to be rather challenging as most volunteers were in their twenties or early thirties. The youngest interviewee was 20 years old and the oldest 48 years old, with the others being between 21 and 33 years old (see Table 1). Most volunteers lived in Helsinki or the surrounding area, but I wished to avoid a geographically homogenous

sample and therefore interviewed two women in a mid-sized town in Eastern Finland and four women in the capital region.

Table 1 shows an overview of the interview participants. Just like other participants, the interviewees were asked to choose a pseudonym. The interviews were conducted at the location of their choice. Malin’s interview was conducted in her home and in the presence of a friend who was visiting her. The fact that the interview was not conducted alone with her may have affected the results, but it seemed to me that she was speaking freely despite the presence of her friend. All other interviews were conducted alone with each participant. Participants filled in the survey beforehand and I familiarised myself with their answers before the interviews. This helped me decide what to focus on and saved time as I did not have to ask questions covered by the survey.

Before taking the survey, the interviewees had to read through a consent letter that included information about the survey and the handling of the data and tick a box to indicate their consent to participate in the survey. They also had to read and sign a consent letter before the interviews. The interviewees were also told that they could stop the interview at any time and that they did not have to answer any question that they were uncomfortable with. I tried to do my best to make the interviewees feel at ease so that they would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and that the interviews would be a positive experience for them.

**Table 1.** Overview of interview participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Relationship status</b>	<b>Place of interview</b>
Mia	21	bisexual/pansexual	cohabiting	home
Riitta-Kyllikki	33	bisexual/pansexual	single	interviewer’s accommodation
Alise	29	heterosexual	married	café
Marika	48	bisexual/pansexual	married	workplace
Iina	24	heterosexual	single	home
Malin	20	other: ‘lesbianish, mainly interested in women but somewhat also in non-binary people and occasionally in men’	cohabiting	home, in the presence of a friend

To get an overall sense of the use of pornography among women and to be able to see if the interviewees' experiences were similar to other women's experiences, I also published a survey. The survey included both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions with a set of answer options.<sup>1</sup> When appropriate, the closed-ended questions also included an 'other' option with an opportunity to write one's own answer. The open-ended questions were used to gather experiences and stories about pornography use, while the closed-ended questions were used to gather some quantitative data and to identify patterns. The closed-ended questions focused on what kind of pornography participants use, how often and with whom, as well as what participants' attitudes and opinions regarding pornography are. The survey was taken by 159 women, including the six interviewees, providing me with a large enough sample to draw some generalisations regarding women's use of pornography.

The first page of the survey included a consent letter with information about the survey, the participants' rights and the storing of data. This letter was the same as the one interview participants had to read before filling in the survey.

### **3.3 Participants and their recruitment**

Participant recruitment was done in a Finnish Facebook group called Rento Feministiryhmä (The Relaxed Feminist Group). According to the description of the group, its purpose is to be a space where members can discuss topics important to them (Rento Feministiryhmä, 2017). The group was started in November 2015 as a place where people could come to learn about feminism (Sarhimaa, 2017). The word 'relaxed' in the group's name emphasises that the group is a place for learning, and no one is expected to be an expert on feminism to join the group. When I recruited participants from the group in November 2018, the group had 8 655 members, making it the biggest feminist Facebook group in Finland. Anyone is welcome to join the group, but because the group has had problems with trolls – people who are only there to make fun of the group – potential members must answer a few questions about feminism and why they want to join the group before being accepted as members.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the survey.

The group serves as a place for discussion. Individual members can publish posts that are visible to other members who can participate in discussing the topic of the post. Common posts include members starting conversations about current events or popular culture, asking for advice or sharing experiences. All topics are somehow related to feminism. In November 2018, members had conversations about, for example, gender roles in children's literature, transgender people's rights, toxic masculinity, sexist advertising, feminist economics, sugar dating and many other topics. Members often use personal experiences or newspaper articles as conversation starters. For example, a member could share a link to a newspaper article about parental leave or tell about a time they felt belittled because of being a woman. Other members can comment on the posts and thus discuss it with others. Before being published, all posts must be approved by a moderator. Members are also asked to add trigger warnings if the post is about a topic that could be upsetting or shocking in some way.

The group defines itself as intersectional and asks new members to familiarise themselves with the principles of intersectional feminism. The group does not define what it means by intersectional, but the group seems to be a part of a wider feminist online movement that emphasises intersectionality as a counter force to 'white feminism'. White feminism is a term used of feminism that, in a nutshell, is for white, middle-class cisgender women. In the internet feminism that Rento Feministiryhmä is a part of, intersectionality means acknowledging that there are multiple oppressions one can face and that the goal of feminism ought to be to dismantle them all, not just women's oppression. Academic intersectional theory is rarely discussed. Conversations are more about personal experiences and practicing intersectionality in everyday life than about intersectionality as a theory.

I recruited from a feminist Facebook group because I thought that people with an interest in feminism might also be interested in my research topic. Pornography as a topic has divided feminists and there are feminist arguments both for and against pornography. My research also touches upon female sexuality, another topic that is relevant to feminism. As Rento Feministiryhmä is the largest Finnish feminist group on Facebook, I posted the calls for participants there. The call for interviewees was published on 18 October 2018 and the call for survey participants on 26 November

2018. After I had written the posts, they were approved by a moderator who released them a few hours later. The calls for participants were received well by the group. After I had published the call for interview participants, 30 women contacted me by email or with a private message on Facebook and wanted to be interviewed. Several of them said that they were glad to see pornography researched from women's perspective and that they had much to say about the topic. The call for survey participants was also well received. Within two days, I had gathered over 150 survey responses, the total count reaching 159 before I closed the survey in early January 2019. The large number of responses received in a very short period of time and the words of encouragement and support I received by email, Facebook and via the survey, show that the research topic tapped into something that the women wanted to talk about. Women were excited and eager to share their thoughts on the topic.

After deciding where to recruit participants, I had to decide on other criteria for participants. That participants would have to be women was clear from the beginning as I wanted to research women's experiences. I also decided to limit participants to Finnish women who are 18 years or older. Thus, participants had to fit the following criteria:

- Each participant must identify<sup>2</sup> as a woman
- Each participant must identify<sup>3</sup> as Finnish
- Each participant must be 18 years or older
- Each participant must use pornography

The above list of criteria was included in the consent letter participants had to read and sign before filling in the survey or giving an interview. In the calls for participants I wrote that 'you can participate in the study if you are a Finnish adult, identify as a woman and you use porn'.

I did not give participants a set of criteria to define what 'a woman' is or what it means to be Finnish. I let potential participants interpret it as they wished because I wanted the calls for participants to be as open as possible. Both gender and national identity can be difficult to define in a way that does not create feelings of exclusion or

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<sup>2</sup> The Finnish term *määritellä* was used. The word translates to 'to define'.

<sup>3</sup> See above.

dismissal. For example, transgender women can feel excluded in discussions about womanhood and ethnic minorities can feel excluded in discussions about what it means to be Finnish. I only used the minimum criteria that was necessary to get the kind of participants I needed. Participants were asked to clarify their gender identity in the survey, where one of the questions was ‘What is your gender<sup>4</sup> identity?’ The answer options were ‘cisgender woman (my gender identity matches the sex assigned to me at birth)’, ‘transgender woman’ and ‘other’, with an option to describe one’s gender identity in a few words. Out of the 159 participants, 151 identify as cisgender women, 4 as transgender women and 4 as other. The participants who identify as something else than cisgender or transgender women described their gender identity in non-binary terms. As all participants were required to define themselves as women and this requirement was clearly stated in both the call for participants and the consent letter at the start of the survey, the four participants identifying as something else than cisgender or transgender women were not excluded from the sample. They chose to participate in a study about women, so it can be concluded that they to some extent categorise themselves as women and are thus within the intended sample of the study.

Out of the 159 participants, 38% were 18-24 years old, 28% were 25-29 years old, 30% were 30-39 years old and 4% were 40-49 years old. The sample is quite young with 66% of participants being under 30 years old and no participant being 50 years or older. The large number of young participants and the lack of older respondents may in part be a result of where the recruitment was done. Young people are more likely to use social media than older people. The age distribution of respondents may also reflect the fact that a larger percentage of young women use pornography, compared to older women. In the 2015 FINSEX study, 70% of women under the age of 25 had used some kind of pornography in the past year, while only a third of women in their fifties had used pornography in the same time period, and the percentage decreases further the older women one looks at (Väestöliitto, 2017)

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<sup>4</sup> The Finnish word *sukupuoli* was used. The word can be translated to both ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ as there are no separate words for the two concepts in Finnish. Whenever I use the terms sex or gender when referring to something in the survey, interviews or my interaction with participants, the word *sukupuoli* was used in Finnish.

When asked about their sexual orientation, participants were shown a list of options and asked to tick all boxes that applied to them. 'Heterosexual' was the most common choice with 49% of participants stating they were heterosexual. 47% chose the option 'bisexual/pansexual', 6% chose the option 'homosexual/lesbian', 5% chose the option 'queer', 2% chose the option 'asexual' and 3% chose 'other'. 11% of participants chose more than one option. Half of these women chose both 'heterosexual' and 'bisexual/pansexual', making this combination the most common out of all combinations. Another two women stated that they were heterosexual while also picking the option 'other'. One of them explained that she was not sure of her sexual orientation, while the other stated that she is mainly heterosexual but also has bicurious characteristics. Taking the women who identify both as heterosexual and something else in to account, a total of 58% of participants identify as something else than purely heterosexual. Thus, those on the LGBTQ spectrum were highly represented in the sample.

A significant characteristic common to all participants was interest in feminism. Participants were not asked to elaborate on their interest in feminism or whether they would call themselves feminists, but it can be assumed that members of a feminist Facebook group share a common interest in feminism. It is possible that members of Rento Feministiryhmä shared the calls for participants outside the group, in which case it is possible that some people who do not have a particular interest in feminism also participated. However, as most if not all participants belong to a feminist Facebook group, it can be assumed that their answers reflect their interest in feminism. The participants are probably somewhat influenced by feminist thought and may be familiar with feminist discussions on pornography.

All the interviewees used language and brought up topics and themes that are common in feminism. The influence of intersectional feminism could also be detected. For example, Iina showed concern for LGBTQ people when I asked how important it is to be able to relate to characters in porn.

Somehow it is fairly easy for me as a heterosexual to relate to the portrayal of women in porn but if you were non-binary or something, then for many it can be a really important thing to have those relatable characters. But then it's also more difficult to find them.

By showing awareness of LGBTQ issues and reflecting on her privilege as a heterosexual woman, Iina demonstrated knowledge of feminism and intersectionality and showed that her thinking is influenced by feminism. She did not refer to feminism or intersectional theory but, reading between the lines, it is clear that she is familiar with intersectional feminism. A similar pattern could be found in other interviews as well. Yet, it should be noted that even though all respondents were recruited from the same Facebook group, their feminisms might differ from one another. Feminists do not always think alike, and all respondents do not necessarily subscribe to the same set of values and beliefs.

### **3.4 My position as a researcher**

Acknowledging one's position and its impact on the research one conducts is an important aspect of feminist research. As a feminist researcher, I reject the positivist idea of objective knowledge. I believe that a researcher should try to remain neutral but, at the same time, I accept that research without any bias is an impossibility. The kind of objectivity I believe in is what Sandra Harding calls 'strong objectivity'. Strong objectivity emphasises reflexivity and rejects the objectivity of male-centred knowledge production (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p. 50). Harding argues that this type of objectivity is less distorted than what is traditionally considered objective. By admitting our subjectivity, we can produce more objective knowledge.

Reflexivity requires the researcher to reflect upon her or his own position and background. When it comes to my position as a researcher, the similarities and differences between me and my research participants are relevant. In many ways, I am very similar to them. I am a young Finnish woman with experiences with pornography. I also consider myself a feminist, as many of the research participants undoubtedly do. I joined Rento Feministiryhmä in order to recruit participants from it but since joining, I have started frequently following the conversations there, although I have not taken part in them. Consequently, I could be considered an insider to the group at the time of writing the thesis. It is also noteworthy that, although there are some differences, my own experiences with pornography share many similarities with the participants' experiences and it is possible that my experiences have coloured my analysis. However,

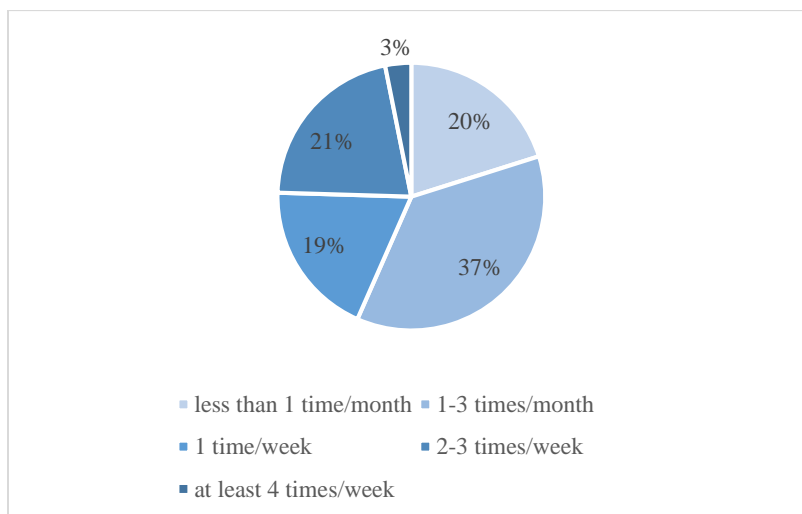


I did my best to ground the analysis in what the participants told me and leave my own opinions and experiences to the side.

## 4. Overview of the Participants' Use of Pornography

This chapter will introduce general findings about the use of pornography among participants. The results presented here are from the survey answers and include all 159 participants. The interviewees also filled in the survey and are thus included in the 159 participants. The section will discuss the key characteristics of participants' use of pornography, including frequency of pornography use, whether they use it alone or with other people and what kind of pornography they use. Knowing the basics about participants' use of pornography will provide context for the analysis following this chapter.

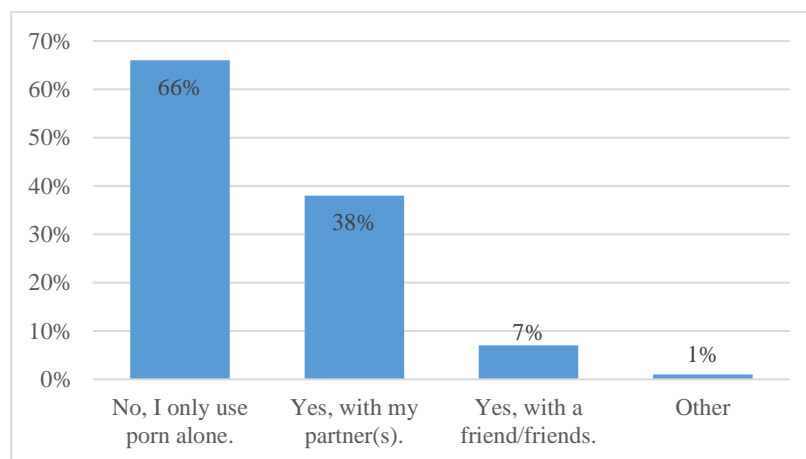
Participants in the study were required to be users of pornography but the frequency of pornography use was not defined, as I was not only interested in frequent users of pornography but wanted to have women with varying levels of pornography use. As many as 43% of participants reported using pornography on at least a weekly basis. 3% said they use it at least 4 times per week, 21% use it 2-3 times per week and 19% use it once a week. The most common answer from the options provided was 1-3 times per month. 37% chose this option. 20% said they use pornography less often than once per month. (See Figure 1.)



**Figure 1.** How often do you use porn?

Pornography is often seen as related to masturbation and as something that is primarily used alone. 96% of participants did report using pornography when they want

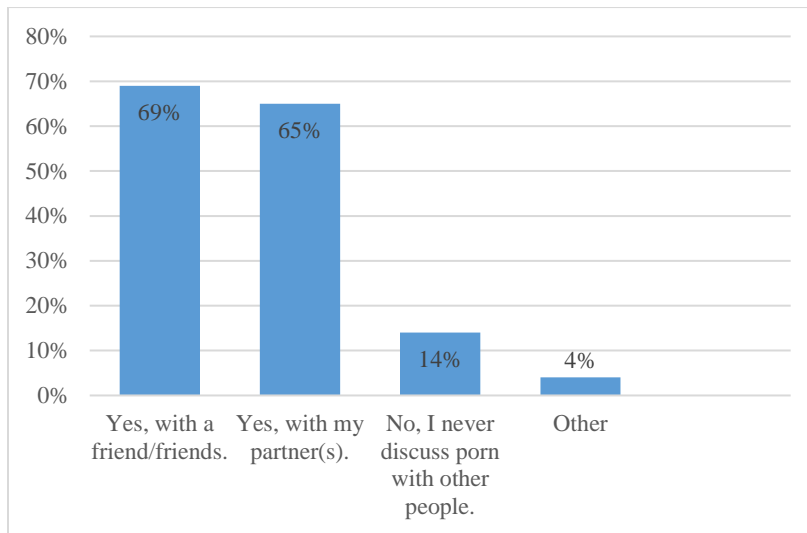
to masturbate (see Figure 4) but the fact that 38% use it together with partner(s) shows that it is not solely a masturbatory tool but can play a part in sexual relationships as well. 66% of participants use pornography only when they are alone, while 7% reported using it with friends. (See Figure 2). Two participants chose the option ‘other’. Tsuki (age 30-39, heterosexual) wrote that she uses pornography ‘occasionally with partners’. Thus, she could be included in the category ‘Yes, with my partner(s)’. E.K. (age 40-49, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she watches ‘porn films in public screenings’.



**Figure 2.** Do you ever use porn together with other people?  
 Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

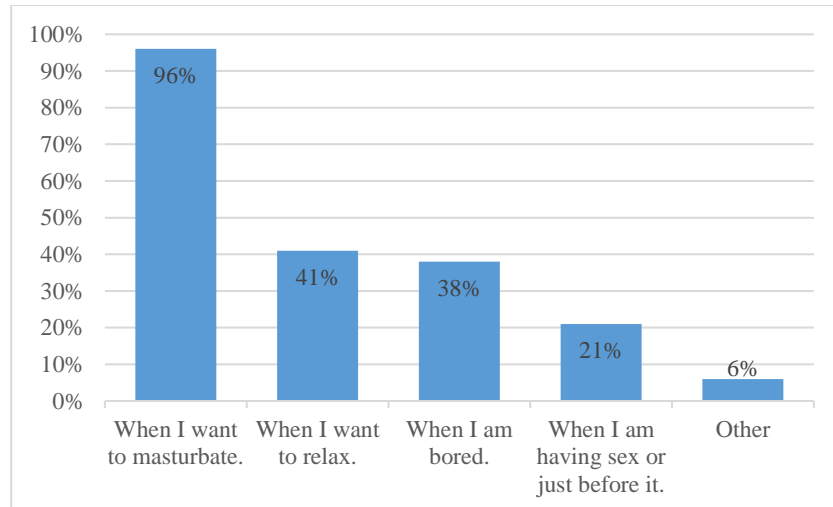
Despite being primarily used alone and perhaps seen as a private matter, participants discuss pornography quite liberally with other people. 69% reported talking about it with friends and 65% with partners. (See Figure 3.) The survey question asked about discussions in general without specifying what kind of discussions were meant by it. Consequently, we cannot know if participants discuss pornography in general or if they discuss their own use of pornography. However, pornography as a topic of conversation seems to be quite normal for participants. Only 14% reported never discussing pornography with others. 4% chose the answer option ‘other’. These participants reported talking about pornography with school mates, work colleagues or strangers on the Internet, as well as in groups of friends and acquaintances at parties. Two out of the three participants who have discussed pornography with school mates mentioned that pornography is somehow related to their field of study, meaning that

these conversations might have taken place in a classroom setting. For example, one of them said that she studies sexology.



**Figure 3.** Do you ever discuss porn with other people?  
Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

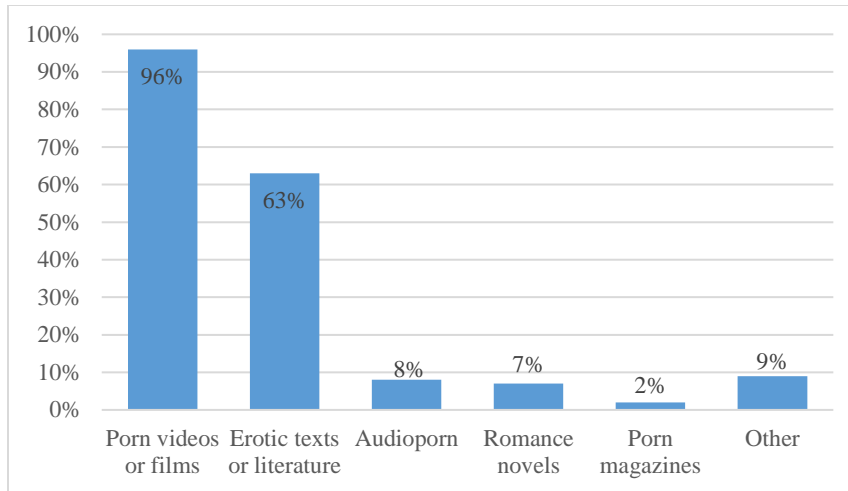
Nearly all participants, 96%, use pornography when they want to masturbate. (See Figure 4.) Participants were asked to choose all answers that applied to their use of pornography from a list of five answer options, including the option ‘other’. Using pornography when wanting to relax or when being bored is also common. 41% reported using pornography when wanting to relax and 38% reported using it when bored. 21% reported using pornography in connection to sex, either right before having sex or during it. The 6% that chose the option ‘other’ gave a variety of different answers. They include watching pornography out of interest to try to understand why others watch it and watching it as funny entertainment with friends. Some use it to fall asleep faster or reduce anxiety, while others use it when they want an orgasm or are looking for ideas for sex. It is also used as inspiration to write erotic stories, and as a way to search for oneself. Interviewee Marika only chose ‘other’ and wrote that she considers watching pornography a form of having sex even if it does not include masturbation.



**Figure 4.** When do you use porn?

Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

Videos are by far the most popular porn material, as illustrated in Figure 5. In the multiple-choice question ‘What pornographic materials do you use?’ 96% reported using videos or films. The next most popular material is erotic texts and literature, which is often also referred to as erotica. Erotic texts and literature are used by 63% of participants. Audioporn (pornography with only sound) is used by 8% and romance novels by 7%. Romance novels were included as their own category as they are distinct from erotic literature but often contain descriptions of sex and can thus be used similarly to pornography. Magazines are used only by 3% of participants. The popularity of videos is likely a result of readily available free Internet pornography. Finding pornographic videos online is easier, cheaper and more private than finding other materials. 9% of participants use pornographic materials not included in the list of answer options. The materials listed under the category ‘other’ include, but are not limited to, nude photographs, erotic fan fiction, pornographic comics and drawings, GIFs (short animations commonly used in, for example, the micro-blogging platform Tumblr), sex blogs and forums, and television series and advertisements with suggestive content. The wide variety of different materials reported in the ‘other’ answers demonstrate how broadly pornography can be understood and how materials not intended to be pornography can be used as pornography.

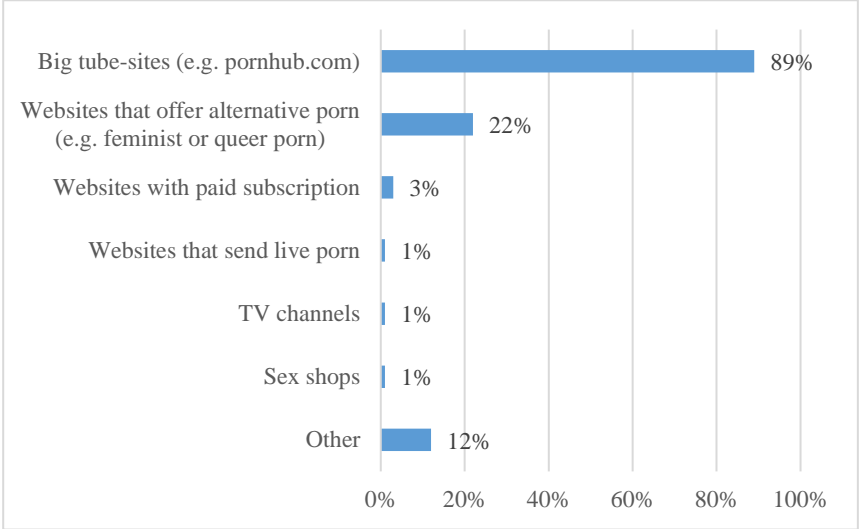


**Figure 5.** What pornographic materials do you use?  
 Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

The popularity of videos is reflected in where participants find their pornography. 89% reported getting it from big tube sites, such as Pornhub. The popularity of tube sites is not surprising considering that they offer free content and have a large variety of different types of videos. Pornhub is the most popular and well-known tube site which is why I included it as an example in the survey. Websites that offer alternative pornography (such as feminist or queer pornography) are also popular and used by 22% of participants. Other channels for getting pornography were only used by a marginal proportion of participants. 3% get pornography from websites with paid subscriptions. TV channels, sex shops and websites sending live pornography are only used by 1% of participants each. However, 12% percent reported getting pornography from places not listed as answer options. Ten participants mentioned websites with written erotic stories and three of these participants mentioned websites with fan fiction. Discussion forums, such as Suomi24<sup>5</sup> and 4chan, were also mentioned. Two participants mentioned Tumblr, which is mentioned by other participants in answers to other questions as well, meaning that even more participants used it. It should be noted that Tumblr, which used to be famous for its large selection of pornography, much of it popular among the LGBTQ community, banned pornographic content in December 2018 (Waterson, 2018). The survey was filled in by most

<sup>5</sup> 'Finland24', a popular Finnish online discussion forum

participants in November when pornography was still available on Tumblr. Due to the ban on pornography, the participants who reported getting pornography from Tumblr are no longer able to get it from there.

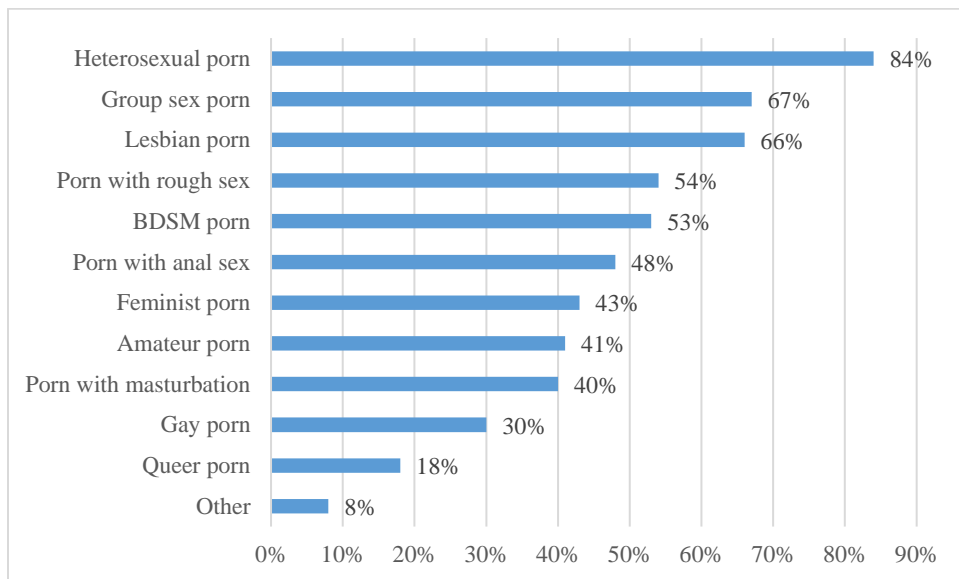


**Figure 6.** Where do you find the porn you use?  
Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

Participants reported liking a wide variety of different genres of pornography. They were asked to choose all that they like from a list of 11 genres and were also given an opportunity to choose ‘other’ to list any genres missing from the list. Heterosexual pornography is the most popular genre among the participants. 84% of participants reported liking it. Pornography with group sex was the second most popular choice with 67% and lesbian pornography was almost as popular with 66% of participants reporting liking it. Pornography with rough sex and BDSM pornography are also liked by more than half the participants. All listed genres seem to be quite popular with even the least liked genre, queer pornography, being liked by 18% of participants. (See Figure 7.)

The list of genres in the survey was by no means all-encompassing and I think that it would have been better to include more genres in it, even though it would have been impossible to include all genres imaginable. The answers of the women who chose ‘other’ offer some insight into what other genres women like. Four participants mentioned animated pornography. Participants also mentioned pornography with transgender women, interracial pornography, massage pornography, pornography where sex takes place in a public space or in secret, and pornography where there is an age-

difference between the people having sex. Participant A (age 18-24, heterosexual) mentioned ‘porn that has a story’, implying that she thinks most pornography does not have a story and, therefore, pornography with stories is a genre of its own. Another participant, E.K. (age 40-49, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) said that she sends photographs or videos<sup>6</sup> of herself to her partner and her partner sends similar material of themselves to her. E.K. likes using this type of material as pornography and asked if this counts as pornography when it is only meant for private use. The fact that she mentioned such material suggests that she herself sees it as a type of pornography. Veera (30-39, bisexual/pansexual) said that what genres she uses depends on what medium she uses. She explained that she likes a wider variety of genres in ‘audioporn/sex novels/comics/animation’, while in videos she does not like as many things. For example, she does not like rough sex or anal sex in videos but likes them in other pornographic materials.



**Figure 7.** What kind of porn do you like using?  
 Note: Participants could choose more than one answer option.

<sup>6</sup> E.K. used the verb *kuvata* which can mean both filming and photographing so it is not clear if the material she shares with her partner is photographs, videos or both.



## **5. Pornography's Role in the Participants' Lives**

Pornography is usually seen as a tool for masturbation. In media it is often depicted as smut used by people (who are assumed to be men) looking for solitary sexual gratification. The idea of pornography as a masturbatory tool is somewhat supported by the findings of this study. However, the role pornography has in these participants' lives is much more complex than just that. The participants see it as a valuable tool not only for sexual pleasure but also for sexual exploration and bonding with partners.

When participants were asked in the survey why they use pornography, the most often mentioned reason was pleasure, particularly through masturbation. Women wrote that pornography helps them get aroused and makes their pleasure better and more intense. Thus, the primary role of pornography in the participants' lives is to be a tool for pleasure. However, it also has a role in sexual exploration and empowerment. Participants use it to explore sexual desires and preferences, both their own and others'. They see pornography as a valuable tool for exploring sex and sexuality, and to learn more about themselves as sexual beings.

Pornography's role in masturbation was described in mainly positive terms by participants. Remarkably few participants described pornography as having a negative effect on their lives when they discussed it in relation to masturbation. Accounts of the role of pornography in sexual and romantic relationships were more mixed. Many wrote about pornography having a positive role in their relationships. They enjoy sharing their use of pornography and described it making them feel closer to their partners. Others described unpleasant experiences of trying to use pornography with a partner or talked about how their partner's use of pornography has a negative effect on their life.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the role of pornography in masturbation and the role of pornography in sex and relationships. The first section will analyse participants' discussions on pornography's role in masturbation, focusing on pornography as a tool for pleasure and pornography use as an exploration of sexuality. The second section will discuss the use of pornography together with partners and how pornography affects the participants' sexual and romantic relationships.

## 5.1 Pornography's role in masturbation

The women in my study show a clear wish to enjoy their sexuality through masturbation and to explore sexuality. Pornography has an important role in both processes. Participants use pornography to enhance pleasure in masturbation because they find pornography to intensify pleasure or make it easier to achieve. Many said that pornography helps them get aroused and reach stronger and better orgasms. At the same time, pornography also has a role in sexual exploration. Participants use pornography to explore their sexual desires and to find out what they find arousing. Some use it to find new things they like or to learn about what other people like, while others use it to explore the desires they already know they have. The dual role pornography has in the participants' lives is a source of pleasure, joy and self-discovery.

In the survey, the most often mentioned reason for using pornography was sexual pleasure through masturbation. Sini (age 18-24, heterosexual) wrote: 'Watching porn arouses me. Seeing it strengthens my imagination and I get better satisfaction through it and even stronger/more numerous orgasms than without porn.' Sini's description of why she uses pornography is a typical one and it captures well the role of pornography in masturbation. It aids arousal and supports imagination which leads to greater pleasure. 36% of participants mentioned arousal when asked to describe in their own words why they use pornography. They said that pornography makes arousal easier or faster, particularly when they masturbate. Arousal is connected to sexual pleasure and orgasms. 14% specifically mentioned orgasms as the reason for using pornography.<sup>7</sup> Pornography's role as a tool for pleasure is consistent with what Gurevich et al. (2017) and Z. Fareen Parvez (2006) have found in their studies. Both identify arousal and masturbation as the primary reason for women's pornography use.

The importance of pornography to masturbation and arousal tells that participants want to have sexual pleasure not just with partners but also on their own, and many find it easier to gain it if they use pornography. The important role pornography has in arousal suggests participants sometimes find it difficult to get

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<sup>7</sup> 14% includes all participants who mentioned orgasms or coming in their answer to the question 'Why do you use pornography?'. The Finnish terms *laukeaminen* and *tuleminen* were interpreted as corresponding to the English phrase 'to come' (i.e. to have an orgasm).

aroused when they want to masturbate. Phrases like ‘porn makes it easier to get aroused’, ‘porn helps me get aroused or ‘porn increases arousal’ were repeated in different ways by many participants. Abc (age 25-29, heterosexual and ‘mainly hetero but also bicurious characteristics’) wrote that she uses pornography to ‘get aroused faster/easier than by only using imagination’. Riitta-Kyllikki, who also talked about pornography’s ability to aid arousal and orgasms in her interview, wrote in the survey that pornography helps her ‘get aroused and getting orgasms becomes easier’. It should be noted that women talked about pornography as something that helps arousal, not as the *only* way to get aroused. For example, Ina said that pornography rarely works as the catalyst for arousal. She does not need pornography to get aroused as initial arousal comes from somewhere else, but she likes using pornography to get even more aroused before she has an orgasm.

Orgasms were mentioned by many participants and it seems safe to assume that women often use masturbation to orgasm. Amanda (age 18-24, heterosexual) said that pornography has a vital role in her ability to orgasm. She wrote: ‘It is difficult for me to get an orgasm and watching porn while masturbating is almost the only way I can have an orgasm.’ Most participants who mentioned orgasm as a reason for using pornography, however, did not describe it as the only way to achieve orgasm. Rather, they wrote that pornography makes it easier to get orgasms or that the orgasms are more intense. Not all even mentioned orgasms but used the more ambiguous word ‘pleasure’ instead or discussed arousal. Having orgasms is clearly an important reason to use pornography for many participants but, for these women, pornography’s primary role as a tool for pleasure is to enhance arousal. However, arousal is intertwined with orgasm and many women are likely to see arousal as a way toward orgasms.

Several participants mentioned that pornography makes it easier to achieve orgasm, suggesting that having orgasms can be difficult without pornography or even close to impossible, as in Amanda’s case. Using pornography to orgasm reflects what is known about women’s orgasmic difficulties. Difficulty to reach orgasm is a common problem among women (Meston et al., 2004; Rowland and Kolba, 2016). Many possible reasons for orgasmic difficulty have been identified and they vary from sexual skills to self-esteem and comfortableness with partners. Kontula and Miettinen (2016,

Discussion, para. 12) note that '[t]he keys to achieving more frequent female orgasms' are 'in the mind and in the relationship', meaning that factors such as sexual self-esteem, ability to focus on the moment, communication between partners and partner's sexual skills play a significant role in enabling orgasms. Importantly, achieving orgasm is often easier alone than with a partner. According to two studies on sex in Finland, the nationally representative FINSEX research project on sexuality and the ORGSEX internet survey on sexual pleasure and orgasms, women find it easier to orgasm via masturbation than via partnered sex. 48% of participants in these surveys reported that reaching orgasm is easier in masturbation than in intercourse<sup>8</sup>, 14% reported it being easier in intercourse, 17% reported achieving it equally easily in both situations and as many as 20% were not able to say which was easier (Kontula and Miettinen, 2016, *Orgasms and Sexual Techniques*, para. 4).

Achieving orgasm via masturbation may be easier because the pressure that comes from being with another person is absent as one does not have to feel accountable for a partner's pleasure as well as one's own. Prioritising a partner's needs is particularly likely to happen in heterosexual sex because of the power dynamics between men and women. Anna G. Jónasdóttir argues that the principal inequality between men and women is related to love and care. Jónasdóttir's concept of 'love power' refers to a transfer of socio-existential power from women to men (Dahl, 2008, p. 183). Due to their different social standing compared to men, women do not have total control over their love power (Halsaa, 2008, p. 61), so they give more love power than what they receive from men, giving men 'surplus worthiness', while women are dependent on loving and being loved 'in order to be socio-existentially empowered' (Jónasdóttir, 1994, p. 224). The exchange of love power is exploitative as men benefit from it more than women. In the context of sex this means that when a woman has sex

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<sup>8</sup> Kontula and Miettinen do not define 'intercourse' in their 2016 article, but they seem to use the term in a broad manner that encompasses all types of sexual stimulation between partners. In the FINSEX survey that their research findings are based on, two Finnish terms are used: *yhdyntä*, defined in the survey as vaginal intercourse (penetration with a penis), and *sukupuoliyhteys*, defined as vaginal intercourse, oral sex or using one's hands to stimulate a partner (Väestöliitto/Tilastokeskus, n.d.). Curiously, Kontula and Miettinen translate both terms as 'intercourse' in their 2016 article published in English, which leaves it unclear at times if the results relate only to vaginal intercourse or possibly also to other types of sexual activities.

with a man, she must take care of his needs before her own so that she can feel empowered.

The empowerment women get from giving their love power to men is of questionable value as empowerment from an exploitative transfer of power cannot be true empowerment. One could argue that masturbation offers a truer source of empowerment. Bowman (2014) has identified not only sexual pleasure but also sexual empowerment as reasons for why women masturbate. According to Bowman (2014, p. 364), women are sexually empowered when they resist 'the oppressive norms that would dictate their behavior'. She argues that masturbation has the potential to be sexually empowering because it lets women focus solely on their own pleasure. In other words, they do not have to give away their love power. Emmi (age 25-29, heterosexual) summarised the opportunity for selfishness pornography offers: '[Using porn] is based solely on my own satisfaction and arousal, as well as my own sources of pleasure. I get to be selfish in my own pleasure and use sex toys in a way that only I know how.' Used together with masturbation, pornography lets women focus only on themselves and their pleasure, without the pressure to please someone else.

Focusing only on oneself is easier in masturbation than in partnered sex but being alone is not the only prerequisite for being able to concentrate on oneself. There are two themes related to focusing on oneself that emerged from the survey and interviews that have to do with relaxation and immersion in pleasure, rather than being alone. Forgetting about one's everyday life and being able to completely relax can help in achieving orgasm and some participants specifically mentioned them as reasons for using pornography. Iina attributed pornography's appeal partly to how different it is from her own everyday life and how pornography offers a change from it. In her job she works with children and she explained that 'especially when you work in such a nonsexual environment, it [using pornography when masturbating] is nice. [It's] comparable to going for a beer or something'. Pornography offers Iina a welcome break from the everyday. Unna (age 25-29, heterosexual) put this directly when she wrote that she uses pornography to get her mind off 'everyday stress'. Concentrating on the moment, an important factor in achieving orgasm, is easier if one is able to not think about everyday stress. Omppu (age 25-29, heterosexual) also said that she often uses

pornography to relax. She wrote: 'porn offers a moment when I can concentrate completely on myself and my own body'.

The second theme, which is also present in the quote from Omppu, is an immersion in pleasure and in the moment. Stimulation from pornography plays a role in this. Yona (age 30-39, heterosexual) wrote: Visual stimulus or reading an erotic story promote arousal and coming during masturbation. Especially when I am stressed or my state of mind is otherwise too tense, pornography helps me concentrate and immerse myself in pleasure.' Pornography's role in Yona's life is to serve as stimulation that helps her 'immerse herself in pleasure'. She is not the only participant who mentioned visual stimulation. Visual stimulation was mentioned by 9% of participants as the reason for why they use pornography. The number is significant as the question 'Why do you use pornography?' was an open-ended question rather than a multiple-choice question, meaning that when given a chance to answer the question in their own words, nearly one tenth of participants thought of visual stimulation. Visual stimulation seems to facilitate an immersion in pleasure that makes orgasms easier and, for some, more intense.

Pornography is useful because it takes less effort than coming up with one's own fantasies to accompany masturbation. Many participants wrote that they use pornography to (visually) stimulate and support their imagination. Varpu (age 30-39, queer) wrote: 'I suppose I am lazy when it comes to using my imagination. (...) I enjoy visual stimulus.' The notion of the use of pornography as laziness emerged also from other participants' accounts. When I asked how their masturbation would change if they dropped pornography, Riitta-Kyllikki and Iina said that they would have to start putting more time and effort into it. Iina described pornography as 'a shortcut' and laughingly said that masturbation might even be better without pornography. She said that her own fantasies are much 'juicier' than pornography, but that pornography makes the process of masturbation faster. 'I myself don't have to come up with something or think more', she continued. Pornography is also easily available and always only a few clicks away. One does not have to use much effort to find it, unlike in the age before Internet pornography.

Seeing pornography primarily as a shortcut to immediate pleasure rather than as something that enhances pleasure was also mentioned by other participants. They find pornography helpful when they want to have an orgasm but do not have much time at hand or the patience to reach it gradually. Riitta-Kyllikki said in her interview that she uses pornography approximately half the times she masturbates and that she is especially likely to use it when she has very little time but would like to have an orgasm. Pornography helps her to quickly get aroused and have an orgasm. Lotta (age 30-39, heterosexual) uses pornography in a similar way and described it as follows: 'I use porn when I want to come fast by masturbation. When I want to enjoy masturbation and coming, I don't use porn but my imagination.' For Lotta, an orgasm that she achieves by a combination of masturbation and pornography is perhaps less enjoyable than an orgasm achieved slower, but she finds pornography a useful help for when she simply wants to get a quick dose of sexual pleasure.

In addition to its role in enhancing pleasure, pornography has another significant role in many participants' lives; it is a way to explore sexuality and sexual desire. It lets users find and explore different sexual practices and fetishes and to examine their own sexuality. It can assist in finding answers to questions such as 'What kind of sex am I interested in?' and 'What do I find arousing or attractive?'. In addition to exploring one's own sexuality, pornography is also used as a means to explore sex and sexuality more generally. Through pornography, one can learn about other people's sexuality and about different ways to have sex.

This kind of exploration of sexuality through pornography is largely absent in other qualitative research on women's use of pornography. In their study on Canadian women, Gurevich et al. (2017) found that the women in their sample use pornography to educate themselves about sex and to get ideas for their own sex life. Similarly, Parvez's American study participants reported being curious about different sexual practices and that pornography had taught them about sex and anatomy (Parvez, 2006, p. 616). One of Parvez's participants even said that 'having learned different tips and images' that she finds erotic from pornography had helped her have a healthier sex life (Parvez, 2006, p. 616). This participant's description could fit into the framing of

pornography use as an exploration of sexuality, but the emphasis on pornography as educational and as a source for sex tips differs from what I found in my study. Even though pornography as a source for sex tips was mentioned by some, the way participants in my study talked about pornography was more abstract and less focused on what they could bring from pornography to their sex lives. They talked about exploring fantasies and fetishes that they would not necessarily even want to explore with partners and described investigating their sexuality via pornography. When looking at how participants talked and wrote about pornography, pornography comes across as a way to practice sexuality, rather than as an educational source.

The participants' accounts of exploration are supported by how they answered the statements 'porn is a good way to explore one's sexuality' and 'porn is a good way to learn about sex'. 51% strongly agreed that pornography is a good way to explore one's sexuality and a further 37% somewhat agreed. 11% neither agreed nor disagreed and only 1% disagreed. The figures look quite different when it comes to using pornography to learn about sex. Only 6% strongly agreed that pornography is a good way to learn about sex and 24% somewhat agreed. 24% neither agreed nor disagreed, 35% somewhat disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed. Clearly, most participants do not think that pornography is a good educational tool, while as many as 88% think that it is a good tool for sexual exploration.

While still mostly used in combination with masturbation, exploration of sexuality through pornography does not have to take place during masturbation. Marika, whose use of pornography is closely related to exploration of sexuality, did not report using pornography for masturbation. Instead, she wrote in the survey that she sees using pornography as one way to have sex. She wrote: '[I use porn] when I, in a way, want to have sex and its form of manifestation is watching porn. I think it is one way to have sex, even if it isn't connected to masturbation etc.' Masturbation is one of the primary reasons for using pornography and Marika's stance is unique. However, her way of using pornography still serves as a reminder that pornography can be enjoyed without masturbation. Exploration of sexuality through pornography is not as simple as using pornography to masturbate, even if masturbation might be part of that exploration.



Exploration of sexuality through pornography can be roughly divided into two ways of exploration. They are 1.) using pornography to explore things one is not interested in trying, and 2.) using pornography to explore things one also does in real life or would like to try. In addition to these two main categories, participants also use pornography learn about sexuality and sex, but it is often mixed with one of the main categories.

Using pornography to explore sexual practices one would not want to try in one's own sex life seems to be fairly common based on survey answers. For example, Salajynkky (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual and queer) wrote that she uses pornography to fantasise about things that she would not really do. Sexual fantasies do not always reflect one's real sexual wishes, yet women might want to experience them through pornography. In fact, some participants wrote that pornography is a safe way to explore sexuality. Viola (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual and 'demi-pansexual') wrote: 'Through it [pornography] one can find new and even surprising tastes. I find it to be one of the most versatile and safest ways to explore myself.' Similarly, Ronaatti (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) said that pornography lets her explore her own preferences from a distance, without a need to participate in any action. For women who think like this, pornography offers sexual exploration without the possible risks related to real-life sexual exploration.

The fact that one's pornography preferences do not necessarily reflect what kind of sex one wants to have can lead to misunderstandings. Serafina (age 25-29, heterosexual) wrote about misunderstandings with partners: '[My worst experience with pornography has been] if a partner has found out what kind of porn I have watched. The content I watch does not reflect what I want in my own bedroom and this has caused misunderstandings that have been difficult to correct.' A partner can have difficulties to understand that pornography does not always reflect what one wants to do in real life. Thus, exploration of sexual practices and fetishes that one does not want to bring into one's own sex life is likely to happen in private, without partners. Despite it being a common theme for pornography use, no participant mentioned doing such exploration together with partners. When used together, pornography is more likely to serve as inspiration for what the couple might want to try in their sex life.

Pornography can also be used to explore sexual practices and fetishes one is interested in in real life as well as in pornography. Some might in fact be doing the things they see and read about in pornography, but many use pornography to explore sexual practices they are not currently able or willing to practice. For example, Liina (age 18-24, 'I don't identify with any known term for sexual orientation. I am closest to pansexual, but I usually feel only sexual attraction, not romantic feelings, toward women'.<sup>9</sup>) uses pornography to get aroused from bondage and submission sex because she is currently 'unable to/not wanting to' practice it with her partner. Liina did not specify why she is not able or willing to have such sex with her partner. However, what she wrote points toward pornography as an outlet for exploring sexual desires that one is not able to explore together with a partner. This role of pornography came across from other participants too. When describing the last time she used pornography, Kkk (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she uses BDSM pornography because her relationship is 'quite vanilla'<sup>10</sup>. For Kkk, pornography is a way to explore a side of her sexuality that she is not able to explore in her relationship with her partner.

Four of the participants who identify as bisexual/pansexual mentioned that they like using pornography to see sex between women because they either rarely have sex with other women or have male partners. They, too, use pornography to explore a side of their sexuality that they are not able to explore much in their sex lives but, instead of particular sex acts or types of sex, such as BDSM, they explore their sexual interest in women. Tykhe (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote: 'Porn is also in some sense my only sexual "contact" with women, I don't have sexual experiences with women, but I am interested in women too, so fantasies and porn support this side of my sexuality.' For Marika, bisexuality was one of the reasons she started using pornography. In the interview, she said that 'living in a monogamous society' she has been forced to think

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<sup>9</sup> Liina used the Finnish term *naisoletettu* which I have translated to 'women', in lack of a better English term. *Naisoletettu* can be roughly translated to 'assumed woman'. It is a term that is often used by Finnish feminists and it is common in Rento Feministiryhmä. It is used when a speaker wants to refer to someone who seems like a woman but the speaker does not want to assume that they indeed are a woman only because of their appearance. The term embraces the notion of gender as a social construct and is inclusive of non-binary gender identities. A similar term, *miesoletettu*, exists to describe people who are assumed to be men.

<sup>10</sup> 'Vanilla' is a common term used to refer to a person whose sexual life is very ordinary and 'tame' and has no special features. In the BDSM community, it is often used to describe people and relationships who are not into BDSM.

about how to lead a fulfilling life while being married to a man but also being interested in women and finding that an important part of her sexuality. She said that as she is able to have heterosexual sex in her relationship, she uses pornography to connect with her sexual interest in women. In the survey, she reported liking lesbian, group sex and feminist pornography and, in her interview, she talked about how pornography is also a way to learn about lesbian sex, as she has never had a long sexual relationship with a woman. For Marika, lesbian pornography has both an educational role, as for participants in the studies by Parvez and Gurevich et al., and an exploratory role, allowing her to explore her interest in women. Indeed, these two roles do not have to be separate but may overlap.

Learning about sex and sexuality is the third way participants use pornography to explore sexuality. Many use it to learn more about their own sexual desire and preferences. P.R. (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) wrote: 'Porn helps me find new ways to practice my sexuality. Finding the right kind of porn takes time but it is rewarding. It brings pleasure.' She is willing to put time into searching for pornography she likes because she finds it worthwhile to do that, so that she can develop her sexuality. Learning about pleasure and one's own body is a common factor in women's decision to masturbate (Bowman, 2014, p. 369) and, since pornography is often used to masturbate, the decision to use pornography is likely to also be influenced by the same wish to learn.

Pornography can also be a way to quench one's curiosity about other people's sexuality and their bodies. To look at naked bodies, of any sex, is pleasurable to both men and women, as Gertrud Koch (1989, p. 28) writes. Curiosity and interest about what other people like sexually were indeed mentioned by some participants. KY (age 18-24, heterosexual) wrote that she uses pornography 'out of interest toward different types of sex and different types of fetishes'. Marika wrote that she herself does not get much sexual satisfaction from pornography but that she is curious about other people's sexual behaviour. Similarly, Liisa (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual and asexual) wrote only 'curiosity' and nothing else in the answer field for the question 'Why do you use pornography?', perhaps partly due to her asexuality.

Pornography is also a source of amusement and joy. In the survey, Marika reported experiencing joy and amusement when using pornography and these feelings partly stem from learning new things about sex and sexuality. She is curious about other people's sexual behaviour, and sex and sexuality in general. Writing about her best experiences with pornography, she told about learning about squirting: '[My best experience with porn is] seeing a woman squirt for the first time in my life in a video on the Bellesa website<sup>11</sup>. Wow! I didn't even know such a thing existed.' When I asked about feeling joy and amusement, Marika said that it is related to doing something a little forbidden and that seeing women in pornography who really seem to have fun makes her happy. She also told me more about the reaction she had when she found out about squirting.

I was like [laughs and squeaks imitating her own reaction], eek, how is this possible? My goodness! What an interesting phenomenon! That's where feeling amused comes from too; here I am sitting in the living room on a Friday, while the kids are doing who-knows-what in their rooms, and I'm sitting with a tablet in the living room, gaping like, oh my goodness, I had no idea that a woman's body could work like that. And that's related to the thought that I guess you [the woman who squirted] are having a great time since that [squirting] happened. That's where the joy and amusement come in, that I believe that they're having fun, and also a little that I challenge my own bubble and actually see new things at this age.

Both what she wrote in the survey and what she said in the interview reflect a joyous or even exhilarating quality Marika sees in pornography. Exploring sex through pornography is fun for her. Looking at other women enjoying sex and simultaneously learning new things about female sexuality is a source of joy. Survey participants were asked about how pornography makes them feel and even though the list of answer options did not include joy or amusement, a few participants wrote them in the open answer field for other feelings. Johanna (age 25-29, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) wrote: 'Joy, sometimes I have even laughed.'

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<sup>11</sup> Bellesa is a porn website with women as its target audience. It features erotic short stories and pornographic videos, as well as an online shop that sells sex toys. In the mission statement on the website, it is described as a platform with 'easily accessible and true natured sexual content' and it aims to 'depict women as they truly are – as subjects of pleasure, not objects of conquest' (Bellesa, 2019). The mission statement is clearly meant to set Bellesa apart from the big tube sites that dominate the online pornography market.

The joyousness of using pornography as a woman is related to the assumption that women do not use pornography. As Marika said, doing something that is forbidden can be fun. The novelty and rebellious nature of pornography is identified as a reason for using pornography by Parvez (2006, p. 616). While not as prominent a theme as using pornography to enhance pleasure or explore sexuality, the rebellious nature of pornography was brought up by some the participants in my study, too. They talked about how they are attracted to pornography because it is a ‘forbidden fruit’ (Varpu, age 30-39, queer) and the feeling of doing something forbidden and secret is arousing. Additionally, Sarppa (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she wants to challenge the idea that women do not use pornography. The use of pornography can in some cases be an act of rebellion against the norms and expectations of what it means to be a woman and how a woman should express her sexuality. By using pornography and perhaps masturbating while using it, women resist the norms set for their sexuality.

## **5.2 Pornography’s role in sex and relationships**

While participants described pornography’s role in masturbation as almost exclusively positive, the role pornography has in relationships was discussed in more convoluted terms. Some described it having a positive effect on their relationships, while other participants’ worst experiences with pornography were related to using pornography together with a partner. Some also said that their partners’ use of pornography had negative effects on their relationships. It seems that whether pornography has a positive or negative effect on romantic and sexual relationships is highly individual.

Participants’ narratives on the positive role pornography can have in a relationship were related to using pornography together with partners. These good experiences can be divided into two categories. Some told about how using pornography makes them feel closer to their partners as they learn more about each other through their shared use of pornography. Others wrote that using pornography either during foreplay or during sex can lead to particularly great sex.

Some of the survey participants who wrote about using pornography together with a partner wrote that it had brought them closer together. Pornography has an

intimacy-increasing role in these participants' relationships. They described that they had learned more about each other, shared intimate experiences and felt more open and honest with each other. Tanja (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about a time she showed a video to her then-boyfriend: 'I watched porn with my ex-boyfriend, [and] I showed him a video that I liked particularly much. Somehow this brought us closer and my boyfriend thought that he had learned something new about me by seeing a video that I liked.' By watching a video together with her boyfriend, Tanja could show him something new about herself which made them feel closer to each other.

Showing a pornographic video that one likes to a partner can be a way to teach them something about one's fantasies and sexuality. Sexual self-disclosure, i.e. disclosure of one's sexual likes and dislikes to a partner, is an important factor in relationship satisfaction and leads to greater sexual satisfaction (Byers and Demmons, 1999; MacNeil and Byers, 2009; Rehman et al., 2011). However, opening up about one's likes and dislikes can be difficult. Pornography may help by being a conversation starter. For example, Jatta (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she has watched pornography with her partner without a sexual purpose, just to discuss what they see and to talk about what they would like to try. She described these conversations as her best experiences with pornography which suggests that pornography has an important role in her being able to freely discuss her sexual desires. Miina (age 25-29, heterosexual) wrote that when her partner suggested watching pornography together, she had very much enjoyed the open conversation about pornography preferences that ensued. That pornography can make sexual communication easier is consistent with the findings of Kohut, Fisher and Campbell (2017). In their study of 430 women and men in heterosexual relationships in which pornography was used by at least one partner, the positive effect of pornography on sexual communication was one of the main findings. Participants in the study reported that pornography made communication easier 'by increasing openness and honesty (...), by increasing acceptance of the sexual desires of others (...), by helping people be more direct (...), and by providing opportunities to have discussions' (Kohut et al., 2017, p. 596).

The open conversations about sex that pornography can initiate can also reduce anxiety about sex and pornography itself. Liina (age 18-24, 'I don't identify with any

known term for sexual orientation. I am closest to pansexual, but I usually feel only sexual attraction, not romantic feelings, toward women.’) wrote that she had been nervous about telling her partner that she likes BDSM pornography but that when they watched pornography together for the first time, it ended up being a good experience.

My best experience with porn was when I dared to watch porn for the first time with my current partner. I was nervous because I had not dared to tell them<sup>12</sup> that I usually watch only BDSM porn. I let them choose a video and we also used websites that I had never used, and I thought it was very exciting. I felt that this experience with porn slightly reduced the shame I have sometimes associated with watching porn. I was very aroused during the sex we had.

Not only was the experience exciting and made her feel less ashamed about using pornography, sharing an intimate moment watching pornography together also led to her being very aroused during sex. Similarly, Elsi S. (age 25-29, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) described a time when she watched a ‘well-produced and interesting erotic short film’ with her partner and talked about it at the same time. ‘Later we had particularly good sex, without a doubt inspired by what we had watched and discussed’, she wrote.

Pornography as an aide for good sex was mentioned by several others too. Some find pornography to have a relaxing effect similar to when used alongside masturbation. Pornography can help achieve the relaxation and ability to concentrate on the moment that are so important for sexual pleasure. Participant S (age 25-29, heterosexual) described a time both her and her partner felt more relaxed due to pornography.

When I watched porn together with my current partner before sex, we were both very relaxed and liberated during sex. Sometimes that point is difficult to reach because our needs for having sex don’t always match and everyday life increases stress, so that time sex felt truly careless.

Discrepancy in sexual needs and the stress of everyday life were forgotten as pornography allowed them to let go of them and enjoy sex. As pornography is, in some ways, subversive and considered a forbidden fruit, it is likely that some would find it to have a liberating effect, much like some women who use pornography to masturbate find it empowering. Liberation was also mentioned by H.K. (age 30-39, heterosexual) who wrote that the only orgasm she has had in intercourse came while she and her

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<sup>12</sup> The Finnish pronoun for third person singular (*hän*) is gender-neutral, so I have translated it as they/them as it is not possible to identify the gender of Liina’s partner.

partner were watching pornography as they were having sex. She wrote: ‘The orgasm was not as such related to the watching of porn, but porn somehow liberated the situation so that I could demand more for myself.’ Pornography’s liberating effect can encourage women to think of their own pleasure as equally important and thus encourage a more equal transfer of love power. However, pornography is unlikely to do this on its own. It can assist greater and more equal pleasure but, in the end, pleasure is largely dependent on the relationship between partners. Ghuleh (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that the best times using pornography are times when she uses it with a partner who has both good sexual and emotional skills.

In addition to having a relaxing and liberating effect, pornography is used together with partners also because it can set the right mood for having sex. It can be used together as foreplay but using it alone before sex can also help set the mood. Viola (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual and ‘demi-pansexual’) described a time when she used pornography before her partner came home: ‘I had read erotic stories before my partner came home. It had made me tune into the right mood for intimacy and that night sex felt better than for ages.’ Interview participant Malin said that she and her partner sometimes use pornography even if they are not in the mood for sex and sometimes it arouses their desire so that they end up having sex. In the survey, she wrote that pornography is a way to either keep her brain in ‘sex mood’ or get it there. Because she uses pornography as an initiator for sex, she said that the amount of sex she has would probably decrease if she stopped using pornography.

While pornography can contribute to better sex, sexual self-disclosure and liberation in relationships, not all participants share these types of positive experiences. For some, pornography has had a negative impact on their relationships. The negative experiences reported by participants can be divided into two categories: experiences related to trying to use pornography together and experiences related to a partner’s use of pornography. The first category includes experiences where using pornography together does not lead to feeling closer to each other, unlike in the positive experiences. For some, it is related to liking a different kind of pornography than their partners or to not feeling comfortable saying what kind of pornography they like. Tykhe (age 25-29,



bisexual/pansexual) said that it was disappointing to find out that her taste in pornography was different from her partner's which meant that they could not enjoy pornography together. She also said that she could not be completely honest about her preferences because she was afraid it would hurt her partner's feelings. She continued: 'I was too shy to say what I myself would watch because I was afraid that the "big black cock" theme would make him feel insufficient (in my mind without any reason, but size [of penis] seems to be important to my partner).' P.R. (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she did not yet feel comfortable opening up about her pornography preferences in the beginning of her relationship, so her partner chose 'very masculine material' when they used pornography together, something that she did not like.

Even if partners' pornography preferences match, using pornography together might not be enjoyable. For some, using pornography is private, something to do only alone and not with a partner. Maikki (age 18-24, heterosexual) told about a time when her boyfriend wanted to watch pornography and masturbate together. 'I found the situation awkward and not arousing, even though the video was good', she wrote. Marika has never used pornography with her husband and has no interest in it either. She told me that she and her husband like their own things and that they would probably just start laughing if they tried watching pornography together. She also said that her bisexuality complicates the situation: 'What would we watch? Some lesbian porn with him? I think it would be very awkward, because it's my side, my thing, not his.' Perhaps because pornography's role in her life is to help her connect to her bisexuality and interest in women, sharing that experience with her husband seems particularly unappealing. Pornography is her private thing and not something to share.

There are also those who might like to use pornography together but whose partners are not interested in it. Alise described her husband as 'shy' when it comes to pornography. Even though Alise has told him that she does not mind it if he uses pornography, he does not want to talk about his use of pornography, and it took him a long time to even admit that he uses it. With her partner not being comfortable with sharing his experiences with pornography, Alise has found it best not to try to use pornography together. However, it can be hard to know if one's partner is interested in using pornography together. If their reluctance to share pornography use is revealed

only after one has initiated it, it can lead to difficult situations. Kultakatriina (age 18-24, heterosexual) described a time when she tried to watch pornography together with her partner<sup>13</sup> as her worst experience with pornography and wrote about it at length.

One time I wanted to spice up our sex life and I suggested to my partner that let's watch porn. I put on what I thought was an interesting video. We watched quietly and I sensed that my partner was feeling awkward. I thought that he's probably just shy and so I said: 'you choose a video while I go to the toilet'. When I came back to the bedroom, he had not chosen a video. I was a little tipsy, so I felt hurt, closed the laptop and started sleeping. If I'd been sober, I would have accepted that my partner did not find the situation comfortable, but being a little tipsy, I took offense because we had not had sex in a long time, and I felt that my partner wasn't even trying to improve our sex life. As far as I can recollect, I didn't even really sleep but cried quietly and in secret while my partner fell asleep next to me.

Her partner's reluctance to use pornography was difficult to accept and made Kultakatriina feel hurt at first. As with sex and sexuality in general, navigating both partners' needs and wishes when it comes to pornography can be difficult in relationships.

The second type of negative experiences participants have with pornography in sex and relationships are related to partners' use of pornography. Pornography addiction and unwanted behaviour picked up from pornography are the most common issues that have resulted from a partner's use of pornography, as told by participants.

Pornography addiction is an increasingly used term and the phenomenon has garnered both popular and academic attention. Articles about it and its effects on sex and relationships have been published in Finnish media too, for example in the largest daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (Päivänen, 2019) and its entertainment-oriented online supplement *Nyt* (Mansikka and Peltomäki, 2018), on the public broadcasting company Yle's website (Rintanen, 2016) and on the website of the women's magazine *Me Naiset* (2016). The media attention is likely to have made the concept familiar to many. Indeed, a few participants described their partner's use of pornography using language that fits the discourse around pornography addiction, even if they did not use the term itself. TK (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that pornography has become

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<sup>13</sup> Kultakatriina's partner is a man. She used the Finnish word *mies*, which can mean both 'a man' and 'a husband'/'a male partner'. I have translated it as 'a partner', for simplicity's sake.

‘an obsession’ to her partner and S (age 25-29, heterosexual) wrote that her partner uses too much pornography which has made her feel inadequate as a sexual partner and less desired by her partner. Sususu (age 30-39, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) used the term porn addiction when she told about her worst experience with pornography. ‘Finding out about my cohabitant’s porn addiction after 6 months of living together (and after a year of being together) was a really tough thing, especially because our sex life in the relationship was not satisfying.’

Despite the widespread use of the term, a medical diagnosis of pornography addiction does not exist, and there is no academic consensus on whether pornography addiction truly is an addiction (Duffy et al., 2016; Love et al., 2015; Prause et al., 2015; Voros, 2009). However, the term pornography addiction is quite liberally used in popular discourse and health care professionals are approached by people who have self-diagnosed themselves as pornography addicts (Taylor, 2019, p. 2). As Taylor (2019, p. 2) writes, whether pornography really is addictive does not matter to these people, as the distress they are in because of their supposed addiction is real. The same applies to those who call their partners pornography addicts. They see pornography as having a negative effect on their partners and relationships, and pornography addiction is a useful concept for identifying the problem and making sense of it. Sususu wrote that her partner’s pornography addiction has made her more reflective on her own use of pornography too:

[My partner’s porn addiction] opened my eyes to the distancing reality of porn but it has taught me a lot and guided my own decisions on porn consumption and it has made me think more carefully especially about the questions why, when and how. I try to be a more aware viewer of porn so that I don’t become exposed to normalising a misogynistic worldview or start behaving submissively during sex. Unfortunately, watching porn teaches models [of behaviour] to women too, so being careful and aware are for everyone’s benefit here.

Sususu associates pornography addiction with learning harmful models of behaviour and a misogynistic worldview. The impact on behaviour is a common worry in discussions on pornography addiction, also exemplified in the 2016 article from the Finnish national public broadcasting company Yle. Based on interviews with psychiatrists and sexologists, the article describes the effects pornography addiction can have. Some of the effects discussed in the article are increased selfishness in sexual

interactions and diminished will to connect with a partner on an emotional level. From a partner's point of view, selfishness and a lack of emotional connection may translate into feeling objectified and being used as a mere tool for the other one's enjoyment. In Zitzman and Butler's 2009 study on women whose husbands use pornography, 13 out of the 14 interviewees had experienced 'deterioration and distortion of sexual intimacy'. They felt used and objectified. One of them described feeling like she 'was just there for his own gratification' (Zitzman and Butler, 2009, p. 226). Jatta (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) described feeling much the same way: 'My ex watched porn and it could be seen in [our] sex life, I was just a substitute for those women in the videos and just an object to use when he had some video/fantasy in mind. The ex also tried to make me moan etc., to be like the women in pornos.'

It seems that while pornography is a valued addition to masturbation and individual sexual exploration, things can get complicated when sexual and romantic partners are introduced to the mix. The varied experiences of pornography's role in relationships show that pornography can be either a positive or a negative force in relationships. As a positive force, it enhances participants' sex lives by bringing partners closer together and making women feel liberated and empowered in sexual encounters. However, if partners' pornography preferences do not match or both partners are not comfortable with using pornography together, trying to use pornography together can lead to awkward and unpleasant situations. Furthermore, a partner's excessive use of pornography can be upsetting, particularly if it seems to affect their sexual desires and behaviour within the relationship.

## 6. Pornography as Male-Oriented

Participants described pornography as problematic, despite the mainly positive role it has in participants' lives. For the participants, one of the most problematic aspects of pornography is that they see it as prioritising men's pleasure. The vast majority of participants think that pornography is made for men and therefore does not pay equal attention to women's pleasure. Out of the 159 participants, 63% completely agreed with the statement 'most porn is intended for men' and another 24% somewhat agreed. Only 3% of respondents strongly disagreed and 3% somewhat disagreed. 7% neither agreed nor disagreed. Consequently, the women in my sample, even though they use pornography, still find it to be something that is not made for them as women. They feel neglected as an audience.

Participants see the prioritisation of men's pleasure in, for example, what sex acts are depicted, what performers look like and what stories are like. Some sex acts, such as a man ejaculating on a woman's body, or sex positions that look uncomfortable to women were described as male-oriented. The participants think they are depicted in pornography because men are assumed to enjoy them. Some participants also said that pornography focuses a lot on what women look like, but men's looks do not matter as much. This makes women who like men feel like their needs are not as important as men's needs. They feel that pornography does not cater to their wish to see good-looking, attractive men. Finally, stories and plot-lines were mentioned as another example of pornography's neglect of women viewers. Pornography was criticised for being too much about sex acts and genitals and lacking realistic portrayals of people and their relationships. This focus was attributed to pornography's emphasis on men's pleasure.

That participants would find pornography male-oriented was expected as it is a well-known claim expressed in everyday conversations and research alike. Many participants repeated the idea that pornography, or at least mainstream pornography, is made for men. While talking about male-oriented pornography is useful, it runs the risk of essentialising both men's and women's sexuality. Some participants did in fact put forth the argument that all men like mainstream pornography and that women would prefer to see something different. However, most participants were more reflective than

that and rather stated that pornography is aimed for men<sup>14</sup>. Some participants even said that they like pornography that is aimed for men which demonstrates that pornography preferences do not follow gender lines. Anna (age 30-39, heterosexual) wrote about the problematics of talking about pornography and the gender of its audience:

I don't think that women and men like different type of porn. It [what one likes] depends on the person rather than gender. Watching porn has of course been socially acceptable for men for longer, so they are certainly the largest group consuming porn and therefore most pornography today is intended for them.

Anna's point about pornography being more acceptable for men is a good one. Since pornography's audience is assumed to be primarily male, most pornography is made with men as the assumed audience. Thus, it is justifiable to talk about male-oriented pornography and the prioritisation of men's pleasure that comes with it. This is not to say that mainstream pornography reflects what men really think about sex or that all men would like it. Neither is it a statement about men's sexual needs and desires. It simply means that the pornography industry sees men as its target audience and makes content that they think will appeal to men.

This chapter is divided into two sections that explore the reasons for why participants see pornography as male-oriented. The first section discusses portrayals of men and women in pornography. Participants are dissatisfied with these portrayals and the section looks at the reasons behind their dissatisfaction. The second section analyses a concept that participants see as the main attribute of male-oriented pornography: fakeness. Participants complained that pornography features fake bodies, plots and pleasure that make pornography unrelatable for women. This fakeness is seen as a result of male-orientedness

## **6.1 Pornography's portrayals of men and women**

The way men and women are portrayed in pornography is a major reason for why participants see pornography as male-oriented. They are dissatisfied with pornography's portrayal of women but, importantly, also with its portrayal of men. 20% of participants reported being very dissatisfied with men's portrayal in pornography and

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<sup>14</sup> Many participants used the Finnish phrase *miehille suunnattu*, which is best translated as 'aimed for men'.

45% reported being somewhat dissatisfied. 19% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 13% are somewhat satisfied and only 3% are very satisfied. When it comes to women's portrayal, 26% are very dissatisfied with it, 45% are somewhat dissatisfied, 18% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 8% are somewhat satisfied and 3% are very satisfied. Participants are a little bit more satisfied with men's portrayal but neither men's nor women's portrayal can be said to really satisfy participants. The main issue participants see with women's portrayal is that they think that women are portrayed not as active sexual agents but as existing to pleasure men. Men's portrayal, on the other hand, was criticised for presenting men as emotionless machines who do not show their pleasure.

Alise spoke at length about pornography's portrayal of women. Her views on pornography are partly influenced by her experience of reading erotic short stories written by a male friend of hers. She explained that she can clearly see that the stories are written by a man because they reflect men's desires and women's role in them is to please men. She said that, just like in pornography in general, the female characters are not relatable to her because they are 'doll-like and cliché' and their motivation to have sex is always somehow related to men's pleasure. She thought that, in pornography, men have sex because they are horny but women's motivation to have sex is often something else and related to pleasing men. Women's behaviour in pornography seems illogical and unrealistic to Alise who thinks that pornography should depict women's sexuality in a more honest, no-nonsense manner where the motivation to have sex could simply be that 'the woman is horny and the woman is desiring and that's why she has sex'.

Alise is not alone with her opinion on women's portrayal in pornography. Nik (age 30-39, heterosexual) is annoyed by women's portrayal in pornography because she thinks women are always portrayed either as very innocent or as sluts. She described this dichotomy in the survey:

I have hardly ever encountered porn in which action would be presented so that an ordinary woman has sex out of her own free will and enjoys it. If a woman in porn is innocent, the activities are almost rape-like. On the other hand, if a woman is horny, she is a terrible slut who needs to be subordinated by, for example, slapping her in the face with a penis. Could there not be, in porn, an ordinary, 'nice' woman who still wants sex?

According to Alise and Nik, pornography's portrayal of women is limited to two options: the slut and the innocent. This type of dichotomy is often referred to as the Madonna/whore complex. I call it a dichotomy to emphasise that portrayals of women in pornography rarely mix the two, but rather set them in opposition to each other. The Madonna/whore dichotomy refers to the two ways women can express their sexuality. They can either be 'good girls' who 'submit themselves to a male-defined double standard that says women should not consummate a sexual relationship too often, too quickly, with too many men, or under the wrong circumstances' or 'bad girls' who 'proudly defy this standard, only to find they have been played as pawns in a sexual game conceived and controlled by men' (Conrad, 2006, p. 310). Since both options benefit men, neither of them is ideal for women.

In the survey, Alise referred to the Madonna/whore dichotomy. She described Madonnas and whores in pornography as follows:

A woman is either a wanton slut who mindlessly desires every cock, but whose promiscuity's aim is not her own pleasure but solely men's pleasure, or she is innocent and chaste, a virgin girl-next-door, who is first shocked by her sexuality but then learns to enjoy it – of course by first and foremost giving pleasure to men instead of herself.

Alise's description emphasises a vital factor in participants' dissatisfaction with women's portrayal in pornography. She writes that regardless of whether a woman is portrayed as a Madonna or a whore, her interest in sex originates from her wish to please men. The lack of women who have sex for their own sake is one of the key problems participants see in pornography's portrayal of women.

During her interview, Alise suggested that whether porn portrays a whore or a Madonna may depend on the gender of the person making porn. According to her, pornography made by women is more likely to portray Madonnas, while pornography made by men is more likely to portray whores. Alise said that pornography made by men portrays women as horny sluts and nothing else. Women do not have actual personalities as their only known characteristic is always being ready for sex. Women, on the other hand, are likely to portray women as Madonnas. The claim that pornography made by women is different from pornography made by men is a common one. The self-proclaimed feminist pornographer Erika Lust believes that more women



entering the business would fundamentally change pornography. She writes that the industry is male-dominated and that the first goal of feminist pornography should be to get more women into positions of power as directors, producers and script-writers (Lust, 2014, p. 218). Some argue that pornography made by women would ensure truer portrayals of women and their sexuality (Assiter and Carol, 1993). Alise, however, seems to disagree as she argues that, instead of portraying women in a realistic way, pornography by women often portrays Madonnas.

Alise mentioned *50 Shades of Grey* as an example of pornography made by a woman where the female character is presented as a Madonna. The series of books written by E. L. James and its film adaptations describe the sadomasochistic relationship between a recent college graduate and a business man. Alise had not finished any of the books and admitted that her analysis may not be fully accurate, but she said that the main character Anastasia is presented as a very innocent young woman in the beginning of the story. Even though she starts practicing BDSM and is thus sexually adventurous, she is still monogamous and does not desire other men. Eventually she ends up marrying. Alise described the story as ‘a dirty Disney princess fairy tale’.

Marika also brought up *50 Shades of Grey* in her interview and had very similar thoughts on it. She said she had been quite excited to start reading the book but had not read more than 100 pages because she did not like the premise of the book. Even though she did not mention the Madonna/whore dichotomy, her description of the book and its main character fits the Madonna stereotype described by Alise. Marika was disappointed that ‘once again a rich older man teaches a young inexperienced woman’ and that the premise of the book was ‘Lolita-like’<sup>15</sup>. She also thought that Anastasia was portrayed as very passive. She is like the girl-next-door Alise sees as the typical Madonna in pornography. She is innocent but ready to be initiated to sexual pleasures by a man, yet she remains passive and does not have sex for her own sake.

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<sup>15</sup> *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov is a novel that describes the sexual relationship between an adult man and a 12-year-old girl. In *50 Shades of Grey* Anastasia is 21 and her lover Christian is 27. Thus, their age difference is not as big as the age difference in *Lolita*, in which an adult sexually abuses a child. Marika seems to use the phrase ‘Lolita-like’ to describe a sexual relationship between a young woman and an older man, who teaches the woman about sex.

The participants' dissatisfaction with men's portrayal is not due to a lack of sexual agency as is the case with women's portrayal. When it comes to men's portrayal in pornography, participants complained that they are depicted as 'expressionless fuck-machines', as Yona (age 30-39, heterosexual) put it in the survey. Women in porn videos often make their pleasure obvious by, for example, moaning, and showing facial contortions. Hyperventilation and other indicators of orgasm are considerably more common for women than men in pornographic videos (Ségun et al., 2018, p. 352). Many participants expressed a wish to see and hear men's pleasure the way they can see and hear women's pleasure. Ejaculation is often the only indicator of a man's pleasure in pornography, but many participants would like to have more than that. Sandybell (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that 'men, too, should moan and make noises'. What makes participants so dissatisfied with this type of portrayal of men is that it does not correspond to the participants' own image of men and how they wish men were.

Yona wrote:

Sex acts are depicted in detail in porn but men and men's enjoyment are barely shown at all. To me it's important in sex to see my partner enjoying it too, so it would be nice to see this in porn too instead of/in addition to the expressionless fuck-machines.

What is strange about the way participants discussed men's portrayal in pornography is that the fuck-machine portrayal seems counterintuitive if pornography is male-oriented as many participants believe it is. If pornography was truly intended for men, then surely its portrayal of men would be more realistic and make men's pleasure obvious instead of barely showing it. Arguably, men would enjoy such pornography more than pornography that portrays men as fuck-machines. While the question of whether men like their portrayal in pornography is a relevant question to the discussion in this chapter, finding answers to the question would require a different study. Suffice to say that while some participants, such as Alise, believe that men are happy with mainstream pornography, others think that it only caters to some men. Lotta (age 30-39, heterosexual) wrote that 'porn is clearly made for male consumers and only for those who consume a certain type of material'. Marika also thinks that while pornography may be made for men, it is not necessarily what men want to see. When she talked

about the portrayal of men and women in her interview, she described being unhappy with women's portrayal and then continued:

But I want to emphasise that I don't believe that for men either... Porn, mainstream porn, answers to a certain sexual need but I believe that men too have a lot that they would like to watch or a lot that they would like to tune into than just the simple always-ready-for-action stallion. It [the portrayal of men] feels one-sided.

A possible explanation for why men's portrayal in pornography is not much more realistic than women's portrayal could be that pornography's portrayal of men is based on hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to an idealised form of masculinity that is hegemonic over both femininity and other forms of masculinity and maintains women's subordination. Those who personify hegemonic masculinity have power over women and other men. It is not the most common or normal type of masculinity as very few men enact it, but it is the norm that embodies 'the currently most honored way of being a man' and it requires 'all other men to position themselves in relation to it' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). The exact form of hegemonic masculinity varies from culture to culture and changes over time, so it is not possible to pinpoint what the perfect manifestation of hegemonic masculinity is. However, it could be argued that the portrayal of men in mainstream pornography is a portrayal of hegemonic masculinity.

Applying the concept of hegemonic masculinity to pornography, sociologist Steve Garlick argues that hegemonic masculinity answers the question of 'what is needed to maintain control' (Garlick, 2010, p. 608). In pornography, men must be in control of both themselves and women and especially their own bodies. Using language similar to Yona's phrase 'expressionless fuck-machine', Garlick (2010, p. 608) writes that the 'male body in pornography is almost always figured as a machine that functions with an almost emotionless, technical efficiency'. One commonly used convention that highlights the machine-like character of men in pornographic videos is to show the male torso, legs and penis but not much of the face. Compared to the female body, the male body is shown in a more fragmented image (Hirdman, 2007, p. 166). Survey participant Alisa (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) has noted this:

[C]urrent mainstream pornography is, in my opinion, even toxically masculine; sex is shown only as an act, where genitals are shown in detail. The man's face is not always even visible, he is like some kind of a faceless actor.

Anja Hirdman (2007, p. 166) argues that the male body is 'amazingly absent as a motivated sexual self' in pornography. The female body receives much more camera attention than the male body and it is allowed to express pleasure more than the male body. Hirdman sees this as connected to the idea that men, and to be specific, white men, cannot be reduced to the body. White men are always more than the body and its needs, while women and men of colour can be reduced to their bodies. Pornography as a genre seems to require not being in control of one's body which creates a conundrum for the male body. As it must remain under control, desire is placed outside the male body and into the female body, hence the intense depictions of female pleasure and the fuck-machine portrayal of men (Hirdman, 2007, p. 167).

Another explanation for why the camera focuses more on women than men in pornographic videos is linked to their assumed audience. As the viewers of heterosexual pornography are assumed to be heterosexual men, the videos focus on the female body as a source of pleasure for men. Yet, women who like men may also wish to look at the male body as a source of pleasure. Some participants expressed this wish and said that the camera focuses too much on women. Many participants see this focus as a prioritisation of men's pleasure. Riitta-Kyllikki said in her interview that one of the reasons she finds searching for pornography so frustrating is that videos focus too much on the female body. She gets annoyed when videos like this remind her that pornography 'is so much for men'. She described feeling frustrated when what seems like a nice video suddenly focuses exclusively on the female performers' face without paying equal attention to the male performer. Riitta-Kyllikki also explained that in some videos it seems that the looks of the male performer do not matter at all. Attractiveness is of course subjective, but there seems to be a consensus among some participants that pornography producers do not put as much effort into casting attractive looking men as they do into casting attractive looking women. For example, Sara (age 25-29, heterosexual), wrote that, in her mind, male performers 'are poorly chosen and not sexually attractive'. Seeing attractive men in pornography is important for at least many

heterosexual and bisexual women, and the little attention paid to the male body in videos makes them feel that their sexual needs are overlooked.

Sonja (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) discussed the lack of attractive men in pornography and offered a possible explanation for it:

I have been frustrated countless times by how poorly the porn industry takes women [viewers] into account. Neither content-wise nor when it comes to performers: porn actresses are always made up perfectly, while men are purposefully normal people because porn is primarily targeted for men and what they [the porn industry] want to communicate by it is that a normal man can also get himself a woman who looks like a porn actress.

Sonja argues that by not having particularly attractive male performers, pornography can reassure male viewers that they can be sexually successful and attract beautiful women. The fragmented presentation of the male body may serve a similar purpose. Focusing on the performance of the penis rather than on the full male body is a way to downplay the importance of the male body and what it looks like. It suggests that women are attracted to all men, regardless of their appearance, ‘as long as the penis does the job’ (Hirdman, 2007, p. 166). This message can be appealing to men who are not considered to be sexually successful and thus do not fit the model of hegemonic masculinity.

On the other hand, the fragmentation of the male body can also be appealing to men who are sexually successful as it makes it easier to imagine oneself as the man in the video. Dennis Giles (1977, p. 56) argues that male viewers identify with the man in pornography not so much as a character but as ‘the possessor of *it* – the penis’. If identification is based on having the same genitals, there is no reason to show the full body to what is assumed to be a male audience. The penis is enough. The popular genre of point-of-view videos exemplifies this idea. In point-of-view pornography, the camera is placed so that the viewer sees the sex act as if they were experiencing it themselves. The idea of point-of-view pornography is to let the viewer really immerse themselves in the sex act. When point-of-view pornography is filmed from a man’s point of view, the only part of the body fully visible is the penis, further reiterating the point that the penis is enough. At the same time, it makes it clear that the video is meant for men rather than women. Ina pointed out that camera angles in videos are often such that they show

what a man would see and seem to be aimed for male viewers' pleasure. 'In some ways, I have become accustomed to watching porn from a man's role', she said.

Filming a video from a man's point of view is an extreme example of the male gaze. The male gaze has been discussed by numerous feminist theorists, most famously by film theorist Laura Mulvey (1999 [1975]) in the context of narrative cinema. The concept refers to the sexualised way men look at women and how film and other media recreate that gaze. Mulvey (1999 [1975, p. 837]) writes that women under the male gaze are characterised by 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. They are exhibited as objects of desire to be looked at by men. Women's to-be-looked-at-ness can be identified not only in cinema but also in oil paintings and advertisements, as John Berger (1972) has demonstrated. He writes:

In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there, it is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. (Berger, 1972, p. 54)

A woman in a nude painting is not the subject even if she is the only person in the painting. The real subject is the man viewing the painting. Participants' view of women's portrayal in pornography follows the same line of thought, as they think that pornography portrays women as existing for men's pleasure.

## **6.2 Fakeness and the struggle to find relatable pornography**

The portrayal of women and men is not the only sign of male-orientedness that participants detect in pornography. Another related issue is a lack of relatability. Many women described relatability as an important aspect of pornography. They described wanting believable stories with relatable characters that behave in a realistic way. However, many complained that finding such pornography is difficult. The lack of relatability was seen as a symptom of male-oriented pornography. Survey participant Ai\_k's (30-39, bisexual/pansexual) views illustrate the wish to have relatable pornography:

I find most live porn (pictures, videos) problematic because it is often made by men, aimed at men and very stereotypical. Often such porn is also completely

detached, without any kind of emotional connection. I need to be able to relate to porn on an emotional level in order to enjoy it.

What makes a character or a story relatable is largely individual, but stereotypical characters and stories are a major factor when it comes to women not finding pornography relatable. Participants did not describe stereotypes in detail but referred to them in a rather ambiguous way. Marjatta (age 25-29, heterosexual) mentioned 'a blonde with big tits' as an unpleasant stereotype and Marika referred to stereotypical female characters as 'silicone blondes' and to stereotypical male characters as 'hunks' in her interview. Similar language was used by many participants when talking about performers' looks and many also expressed dissatisfaction with the use of typical pornography tropes, such as the so-called cum shot. The stereotypes participants referred to seem to be linked to a perception of fakeness. In Parvez's (2006) study of American women's thoughts on pornography, many women brought up fakeness and they often used it as a euphemism for male-oriented pornography. The concept of fakeness was used very similarly by participants in my study. They see fakeness as a symptom of pornography that is made with men in mind. They think that fakeness is something men like in pornography or at least something porn producers think men like.

Fakeness is difficult to define as it is more of a feeling that participants get from some pornography than something that can be described in detail. However, it clearly stands in opposition to realness, another term difficult to define. Realness could mean real sex or real pleasure, but such a definition is somewhat at odds with the nature of film pornography, which is usually acted. Amateur pornography made by non-professionals may be an exception, although it, too, is performed and the realness of pleasure in it cannot be confirmed by the viewer. Such a definition does not sit well with other types of pornography either. For example, a pornographic drawing can never be real in this sense. Thus, I define realness in pornography as portrayals of sex and sexual relationships that appear as real to the audience. Orgasms, for example, do not need to be real but they must look real, and stories must be plausible. Real is thus subjective, as what seems real can vary from one individual to the other. Fakeness must be understood in relation to this definition of realness.

It is important to note that both fakeness and realness are socially constructed. Why many participants in this study find ‘a blonde with big tits’ fake might be a result of their educational or class background or their views might be influenced by their involvement in feminist discussions, which are often critical of the beauty ideals that are commonly depicted in pornography, such as female bodies with no body hair or bodies that have undergone plastic surgery. When participants call something real, they are in fact making a moral claim. Stating that some type of sex is real is a way of saying that other ways of expressing one’s sexuality are not real (Bakehorn, 2016, p. 466). Thus, they are not as good or correct ways to express one’s sexuality. The following discussion on fakeness should not be read as support for such an essentialist ranking of sexual expressions. I am not making claims about what *is* fake or what *is* real. Rather, I am discussing them as ideas of what *seems* fake or real to the study participants.

Fakeness is identified on three levels; there can be fake bodies, fake plots or fake pleasure. Female performers are seen as having fake bodies if they look like they have had plastic surgery, wear a lot of makeup or simply look too perfect. Heidi (age 30-39, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) described a performer as ‘plastic’. The word ‘plastic’ may refer to either plastic surgery or to an appearance so flawless that the performer looks plasticky to the viewer. Alise also described pornography as plasticky in her interview. She said that ‘a typical porn star look’ with ‘massive silicone implants and very heavy and messy makeup’ does not appeal to her and makes it harder to relate to female characters. This kind of plasticky look described by participants is so far from how they believe most women look like that it makes it harder to relate to characters. It is also linked to a perception of naturalness. In her study on women pornographers, Jill Bakehorn (2016) discusses the wish to see ‘real bodies’ in pornography. She found that bodies are vital in alternative pornography’s critique of mainstream pornography. The women pornographers she interviewed frame real bodies as “‘natural” bodies, bodies that reflect “real” women’ (Bakehorn, 2016, p. 463). A natural body was described as an ordinary or average body. It is seen as the opposite of a fake body with ‘fake breasts, fake hair, fake nails, fake tans’ (Bakehorn, 2016, p. 464).

Plots are seen as fake when they are weak and do not provide enough information about the characters and their relationships with each other. Bad acting can



also be categorised under this section as it often contributes to a weak plot. Alise complained about poor plots and a lack of attention to interpersonal relationships in pornography. Evoking a typical pornography trope, she said that pornography does not usually have a plot more complex than ‘a pizza delivery guy comes and a woman opens the door naked’. Such a story is too unrealistic to be relatable. A plot can also be deemed fake if it is simply missing and the story jumps right into sex without showing why it is happening. Yona (age 30-39, heterosexual) wrote that the ‘chemistry and sexual tension between people is left unacted/unshown in porn, even though that would often be most arousing, when they always go straight to the [sex] act’. Showing only sex acts without any background story is not only unrelatable but can also make pornography less arousing to some participants. In addition to fake plot lines, KY (age 18-24, heterosexual), Jatta (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) and FL (age 25-29, homosexual/lesbian) mentioned bad acting when describing their worst experiences with pornography. Bad acting can make a character less relatable in any film and it is no different in pornography where ‘over-acting’ can be a big turn-off.

The complaint about a lack of narrative may be a contemporary complaint. In her analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century American pornography, Williams identifies narrative as an important part of the feature-length pornographic films of the 1970s and 1980s. In these films, the sex act serves a similar purpose to the musical act in musicals. It breaks up the narrative but is also an integral part of it (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 134). Its purpose in the film is to serve the narrative. In the era of Internet pornography in which videos are often short clips rather than feature-length films, the importance of narrative has been diminished. Viewers can so easily jump over parts of the video or switch from video to video, that a good plot has lost its importance. Why bother writing a good plot if viewers are likely to jump over it anyway? Yet, many of the women in my study wish that narrative still mattered in pornography.

Finally, pleasure can also appear fake. Women are not sure if performers are actually enjoying themselves and complain about pornography where no one seems to be enjoying themselves. The word ‘plastic’ was used to describe pleasure too. Veera (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) referred to ‘plastic shagging’. Performing in pornography is acting, so it is natural to suspect that performers are only acting their

pleasure and not really feeling it. In fact, there may be nothing wrong with only acting pleasure, as real pleasure is not a precondition for viewers' enjoyment, as viewers can never really know if, for example, an orgasm is acted or not. However, pleasure must at least *seem* real to viewers. Emmi (age 25-29, heterosexual) addressed the importance of real orgasms while also being mindful of the fact that pornography is acted.

I agree that mainstream porn is often made from men's point of view. Woman's pleasure and naturalness are things I wish to have more in porn. For example, I usually doubt [the realness of] porn actresses' orgasms, porn is of course acting, but I believe that acting is mostly enjoyed in porn [by performers].

More than acting, the problem with pleasure is that pornography does not show sex women think is enjoyable. Sofeli (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about the disappointment she feels whenever she watches an otherwise nice pornographic video that ends with 'the same age-old thing': a man ejaculating on a woman's face or breasts. 'Nobody in the video looks like they are enjoying anything', she added. Another survey participant, Lotta (age 30-39, heterosexual), wrote that sex scenes in pornography are 'boring, repetitive and predictable' and that if she got as poor sex at home, she would cry. Describing sex scenes, the very *raison d'être* of pornography, like this, illustrates how dissatisfied some women are with the sex depicted in pornography. It is no wonder they find pleasure fake if the sex acts that are supposed to be bringing it about seem unenjoyable.

Some participants described being disappointed in lesbian pornography because of fake pleasure. They see it as a result of lesbian pornography being made for men rather than women. For example, Niina (age 18-24, heterosexual) wrote that 'lesbian porn is a men's commodity and made for men' and Karin (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote that she mainly watches lesbian pornography even though 'most of it is made for straight men'. Mkettunainen (age 18-24, homosexual/lesbian) described a rare occasion in which she found a video that showed what to her looked like real lesbian sex.

I *once* found a video reflecting my own sexual experience where a lesbian couple had sex. They looked like 'real' people, not perfectly polished and perfect. The sex between them also looked real and not like acting between two

straight actors. For example, there was no ‘tribbing’<sup>16</sup> in the clip, which is a good thing, as it always gives a ‘fake lesbian’ feeling to me.

Mkettunainen’s example illustrates the importance of real pleasure and bodies and highlights the fact that performers’ sexual identity matters to viewers. Viewers can never really know the sexual orientation of a performer, but they make assumptions based on performance and the way bodies look (Bakehorn, 2016, p. 465).

Mkettunainen’s assumption that the performers were not heterosexual is based on the perceived realness of the sex and the bodies of the performers, which looked truly lesbian to Mkettunainen.

If fakeness is what prevents relating to pornography, realness must be what makes it possible. ‘Real’, however, is not easy to define. Ulla (age 30-39, heterosexual) described the kind of pornography she could relate to as ‘passion based on reality’. She wrote: ‘I would like to watch porn where ordinary people are in ordinary situations. I would like to see red cheeks, sweat, no make-up, tangled hair, in other words: everything one can relate to, passion based on reality.’ It is important to note that she does not talk about reality itself but about passion *based on* reality. What matters is the appearance of realness. When pornography seems to be based on reality, it feels real and thus it is easier to relate to it.

In her quote, Ulla writes about ‘ordinary’ people and situations. It is understandable to find it easier to relate to pornography that is relatively close to one’s own sex life or to what one might imagine other ‘ordinary’ people to be doing. It feels more real because it is close to one’s own reality. Iina told in her interview that she likes seeing things that she herself would also enjoy doing. In addition to sex acts she would enjoy, she also likes seeing performers with a similar body to hers. Seeing a person who looks like her having sex that she would enjoy helps her relate to the character. She said that she prefers ‘organic women’<sup>17</sup> and that strong make-up and ‘a traditional flashy porn star’ look do not appeal to her. Her use of the term ‘organic’ emphasises the difference between what she likes and dislikes. Even though she does not use the word

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Tribbing’ refers to the act of two women rubbing their vulvas against each other. It is also referred to as ‘scissoring’.

<sup>17</sup> Iina used the Finnish word *luomu* which is used to refer to organic food. ‘Organic women’ thus refers to natural looking women.

‘fake’, it is implied that she dislikes fakeness. Organic alludes to something authentic and real, something that is natural as opposed to fake.

The wish to see someone like oneself that Ulla and Iina expressed is related to the notion of representation in media. The under- or misrepresentation of women and other marginalised groups is a well-known phenomenon. For example, older women are underrepresented in Hollywood films as young and attractive women dominate, and films typically show men in more powerful positions than women (Lauzen and Dozier, 2005; Neville and Anastasio, 2019). Participants in my study identify representation as one of the problems with pornography. All interviewees touched upon the topic in some way. For example, Malin and Iina said that they wish pornography would show more diverse body types so that everyone could find pornography that pleases them and represents them. As participants find women’s looks in mainstream pornography fake and thus not representative, finding pornography where women look real is a positive experience that stands out from other experiences with pornography. Seeing bodies of different sizes is particularly important (Bakehorn, 2016, p. 646) and it came up in some survey answers. JKA (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about a time she found a website that emphasised body positivity in its pornography. She wrote that it made her realise that pornography can empower her. Similarly, Sonja (age 18-24, heterosexual and bisexual/pansexual) once found a performer whose material she particularly liked. ‘It felt good to see that also a woman with a “normal” body can be successful’, Sonja wrote. Seeing all kinds of women and particularly women that one can relate to can be empowering and encouraging.

Ordinariness can make pornography more relatable and it can feel real, but realness does not equal ordinariness. Riitta-Kyllikki, who was generally satisfied with mainstream pornography, mentioned that, for her, pornography is first and foremost fantasy. She said that she does not think that pornography should be close to ‘normal sex’ because for her pornography is all about fantasy and dreaming. Realness should not be conflated with ordinariness, even if ordinariness can be real. Relatable pornography does not need to feature only things that could happen in the user’s own life. Pornography as fantasy can include the most unlikely events or take place in a fantasy world or hundreds of years in the future and still feel real and relatable, as long as plots,

bodies and pleasure do not seem fake. Fantasy is not the same as not real. As Judith Butler (1990, p. 105) points out in relation to feminist fantasies, fantasy can be ‘what is not *yet* real, what is possible or futural, or what belongs to a different version of the real’. Pornography that feels real but is outside of the ordinary belongs to this notion of the real.

It should be noted that even though there is a strong wish for relatability among the study participants and fakeness is certainly a cause for dissatisfaction with pornography, not all women think realness or relatability are important. Malin, for example, explained that she does not need to have a realistic plot in pornography and that, in fact, attempts at being real often bother her because pornography rarely manages to feel real. Her indifference to pornography that feels real can thus be partly attributed to the fact that she has not seen successful attempts at it. However, Malin also said that she does not feel a need to relate to characters in pornography as she does not usually relate to characters in other films either. She sees pornographic videos as mere ‘visual entertainment’ and watches them firmly from an outsider’s point of view. She said she does not usually relate to characters or imagine herself in the scenario they are in. If one watches pornography from this kind of position, fakeness is not such a big problem. Malin herself described pornography as fake but she presented it as a neutral characteristic of pornography, rather than a problem as such. What makes fakeness a problem is that it makes it very difficult to relate to the story and characters. Consequently, if one does not want to relate to stories and characters, fakeness ceases to be a problem.

The lack of relatability that fakeness causes is starkest in pornographic videos, while other types of pornography seem to fare better. Participants talked mainly about videos when they touched upon fakeness. Alise also mentioned drawings and comics as examples of material that she often finds fake, but they are similar to videos in the sense that they, too, are visual. It can be concluded that problems with relatability mainly arise when women use visual pornography. Videos are clearly the most popular type of pornography, used by 96% of participants, but the second most popular type of pornography is written pornography. 63% of participants reported using erotic texts and

literature. Additionally, romance novels, in which sex often plays a significant role, are used by 7% of participants.

I believe that written pornography is popular because it is easier to relate to characters and stories in written stories than in videos, and thus they compensate for the fakeness described by participants as typical of videos. Pornographic videos show the viewer everything and leave little space for imagination. The viewer sees what the characters look like, the way they look at each other and touch each other. She usually sees even the characters' genitals up close. In written pornography, characters' looks and actions are described, but because they are not shown visually, the reader can imagine them the way she wants. Marika likes reading stories, partly because they leave room for imagination and therefore offer a better opportunity to relate to characters than videos do. She explained in her interview that it gives the reader freedom to decide what the characters look like, how old they are and what kind of milieu they are in. She continued:

On the websites where I watch porn, you can see that they [the performers or characters] are not Finnish, you can see that they are often filmed in a very clinical place, that they are not in a home or an office or something. In some way it is distancing. (...) But stories, in my opinion, offer a better opportunity for imagination and, through that, for relatability too. You can set them a little in your own life in your mind's eye and there are easily connections, like oh yes, a redhead like that, now I thought of someone [that I know]!

Katherine (age 25-29, heterosexual) also thinks that written pornography makes it easier to relate to characters. She likes written pornography also because she sees its production as more ethical and less market-driven. She wrote:

I especially like fictive written porn because it leaves room for the development of one's own imagination, is as a rule ethically produced, and, as free online content, it is usually beyond the reach of market forces. It is easier to relate to and immerse oneself in reading than in visual material.

While videos offer visual stimulation that can be pleasurable and helpful, written stories play a different role in the participants' pornography use. They give the reader the building blocks of the story and the sex taking place within it but give the reader the freedom to create her own story with them. In this sense, reading pornography is more active than watching it. It requires more from the reader, in the form of imagination, but can also give more by letting the reader relate to the story. Many women seem to prefer

their pornography this way, or at least they like to have it alongside the more passive watching of pornography. Enjoying written pornography due to the opportunities it gives for imagination does not exclude enjoying videos and other types of visual pornography. Most of the women reported using both videos and written stories, so they may complement each other. While videos offer visual stimulation that can enhance sexual pleasure with minimal effort from the viewer, written pornography offers relatability and a refuge from fakeness.

Fakeness and the poor portrayals of women and men that participants find male-oriented remind women that mainstream pornography is not made for them. The fact that they still use pornography demonstrates that pornography has an important role in their sexual lives. Because they find pornography to be a good tool for pleasure and sexual exploration, they are willing to withstand its male-orientedness. However, participants experiences demonstrate that male-orientedness makes it more difficult to enjoy pornography. They have to contend with using pornography that is not completely to their liking or spend time looking for less male-oriented pornography, which can be hard to find.

## **7. Violent and Degrading Content, and the Ethical Use of Pornography**

Pornography is often criticised for being violent and degrading towards women, and participants in my study shared many thoughts and experiences related to violence and degradation. Despite the mainly positive role pornography has in participants' lives, many have stumbled upon content they find violent or degrading and described being disturbed by these encounters. An additional worry is the working conditions and treatment of performers. Participants wrote about their ethical concerns in the survey and interviewees talked at length about their thoughts on ethicalness and how to find ethically made pornography.

This chapter looks at participants' experiences of violent or degrading pornography and their thoughts on the ethicalness of pornography production. The chapter starts with an overview of participants' experiences with violent and degrading content. Defining what is violent and degrading in pornography is difficult and it may not be possible to draw a clear line between what is acceptable and what is not. The second section of the chapter uses BDSM pornography as a case study to discuss this dilemma. The final section of the chapter looks at how participants try to make sure that the pornography they use is ethically made.

### **7.1 Violent and degrading content in pornography**

The prevalence of pornography that participants find violent or degrading is one of the main concerns participants have about pornography. Many described stumbling upon content that they find horrifying in some way, often due to violence. Violence in pornography is indeed a common theme in pornography debates, particularly from the anti-pornography side. Pornography is criticised for depicting violence or even showing real violence. Anti-pornography feminists are worried about both the performers' safety and the effect such content might have on viewers. Marika, who used to be quite opposed to pornography before she started using it, seems to have been influenced by anti-pornography thought. She said in her interview that 'I too have held for a long time the view that it [pornography] is a men's thing and I've also been quite a bit against



porn'. She also said that the world of pornography used to seem 'nasty' and 'degrading to women'. In Karen Ciclitira's (2004) study on British women's use of pornography, the women interviewed had been greatly affected by radical feminist anti-pornography thought, particularly by the writings of Andrea Dworkin. The women felt conflicted about their use of pornography because they were familiar with feminist thought that condemns pornography.

Anti-pornography feminist arguments did not feature as prominently in my study as in Ciclitira's. As sex-positive discourse is common in Rento Feministiryhmä, I was also expecting that anti-pornography feminism would not be a prominent theme in the interviews and survey answers. The lack of anti-pornography sentiment may be due to the young age of most participants. Women who have grown up in the 2000s are less likely than Ciclitira's participants to be familiar with the work of Dworkin and other anti-pornography feminists who published mainly in the 1980s and are not as widely read anymore. Anti-pornography feminism may seem outdated to young feminists who are likely to be more familiar with sex-positive feminism, even if its roots, too, can be found in the 1980s. Despite the participants' primarily positive view on pornography and lack of explicit references to anti-pornography feminists, echoes of anti-pornography concerns can be detected from participants' experiences of violent and degrading content.

When I write about violent and degrading content, I write about what is perceived as violent or degrading by participants. The terms are difficult to define and, as I am not analysing pornography itself but women's experiences of it, exact definitions are not necessary in this analysis. In my study, understanding what participants perceive as violent or degrading is more important than making definitive claims about whether what they perceive as violent or degrading should be defined as such. In fact, defining what the words violent and degrading mean in the context of pornography is challenging and many different definitions are used in research.

In their 2010 study, Bridges et al. analysed pornographic videos and coded every instance of aggression. They define aggression as 'any purposeful action causing physical or psychological harm to oneself or another person, whereby psychological harm is understood as assaulting another verbally or nonverbally' (Bridges et al, 2010,

p. 1072). Alan McKee (2015) points out that most definitions of aggression in research on sexually explicit material, including the definition by Bridges et al., do not take consent into account. In such definitions, an act can be deemed aggressive even if it is consensual. He argues that a definition that excludes consent has three problems. First, it does not sufficiently distinguish between aggression and acts that may seem aggressive at first glance despite being consensual, such as BDSM (McKee, 2015, p. 82). Second, it ‘removes a key element of healthy sexuality’ (McKee, 2015, p. 82). Not taking consent into account could lead to researchers coding consensual acts as aggressive and non-consensual acts as non-aggressive. For example, if kisses are considered non-aggressive, they will be coded as non-aggressive regardless of whether they are consensual. Finally, a definition that excludes consent ‘can lead to heteronormative definitions of healthy sexual behavior’ (McKee, 2015, p. 82). Researchers doing content analysis typically make a list of acts of aggression and healthy sexual acts, and these lists easily marginalise sexual minorities, such as BDSM practitioners and LGBTQ people, whose consensual sexual practices might not fit into a narrow definition of healthy sexuality.

Degradation may be even more difficult to define than violence or aggression. Feminist definitions of degradation tend to emphasise inequality as central to the degradation of women. According to these definitions, degradation is characterised by the idea that women are inferior to men (Cowan and Dunn, 1994, p. 12). For example, Judith M. Hill (1987, p. 41) argues that ‘[d]egradation occurs with the creation of a public impression that a person is being treated as something less than a person’. In other words, degradation affects the perceived value of a person. Hill argues that the pornography industry does not necessarily degrade individual women, but it does degrade women as a class. It treats the class of women as ‘a means to its own financial ends’ and smears the reputation of women by presenting them as being less than men (Hill, 1987, p. 49). Hill’s definition provides a framework for understanding degradation, but it lacks a definition of what kind of acts result in degradation. The problem is that degradation is to some extent subjective, so naming degrading acts is difficult. What to one person is degrading, is to another a desirable sexual act. Participants in my study acknowledged the problem of subjectivity when they used

phrases such as ‘it’s not my cup of tea’ (Siilinpentu, age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) or ‘many like it, I don’t’ (N.A., age 25-29, heterosexual) when describing coming across pornography they do not personally like and find upsetting for themselves. They stated that even if they find something unpleasant, it does not mean that others could not enjoy it. For example, some BDSM acts could be described as degrading but it is unlikely that the people participating in them would find them such. Following McKee’s definition of aggression, degrading acts could be defined as non-consensual acts that contribute to the degradation of a person or group. A definition like this would not categorise consensual BDSM acts as degrading.

While ethical concerns, including the issue of violence and degradation, was a topic I asked interviewees about, survey participants were not specifically asked about violent and degrading content. Hence it is significant that many participants brought up violent and degrading content by their own initiative. Reflections on violence and degradation and descriptions of coming across them were particularly common in answers to the question ‘What is your worst experience with pornography?’ For many participants, the worst experience was related to seeing or reading pornography that they found too violent or degrading. From the data set, it is not possible to make claims about how common such content is, but it can be concluded that coming across it is not unusual.

Violent or degrading content is typically encountered in videos but two participants wrote about coming across it in short stories and some participants did not define the medium. Some said that they had encountered violent content without specifying further, while others particularly mentioned violence against women. Rape was mentioned by four participants. Degradation was frequently mentioned but few participants gave descriptions of the degrading content they had encountered, thus making it difficult to analyse what exactly they mean by ‘degrading’. In addition to the experiences related to violent and degrading content, some participants described coming across unpleasant content that is not easily defined as either violent or degrading but make participants express disapproval or disgust, much in the same way as when they describe violent and degrading content. These experiences are typically related to fetishes. Pornography featuring sexual acts that include human faeces, urine

and vomit were among these experiences. Mkettunainen (age 18-24, homosexual/lesbian) wrote: 'I unexpectedly ended up in the perplexing world of faeces porn. That was the most disgusting five seconds of my life.' These participants described their experiences as unpleasant but did not write that they had found the content degrading or violent, even if some might categorise them as such.

A typical encounter with violent or degrading pornography starts as an accident. Several participants wrote that they 'stumbled upon' it, saw it 'accidentally' or 'by mistake' or that what first seemed like a nice video or story suddenly turned violent or degrading. Ronaatti (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) described what is a typical experience of stumbling upon something unpleasant:

Searching for porn videos is generally depressing and I often accidentally stumble upon very misogynistic material. Perhaps one of the most awful recent experiences was when I accidentally stumbled upon a video where a tearful woman who had the text STUPID written on her forehead was on her knees giving oral sex to a man. The uploader of the video had written and attached to the video a really violent text about the rightful treatment of inferior feminists, and the whole horridness brought tears to my eyes and I felt scared and anxious.

What makes Ronaatti's experience typical is that she was looking for something she would like to watch and ended up seeing something she never would have wanted to see. Not only did the video include misogynistic material and a woman who was not enjoying what she was doing, but it was also accompanied by a hateful comment written by the uploader of the video. Perhaps this experience was particularly bad because of the comment attached to it.

Ronaatti is not the only participant who described experiencing anxiety as a result of violent or degrading content. Saara (age 30-39, homosexual/lesbian, bisexual/pansexual and queer) wrote: 'I was a reading a short story where the actions became too violent. I felt anxious for a very long time. Nowadays I'm more careful.' There is some evidence that the use of pornography can cause depressive symptoms, particularly if pornography is against one's moral views (Perry, 2018). Pornography itself is not against the moral views of most participants, but they do see violent and degrading content as unethical. Seeing such content might make participants feel anxiety as it is against their values. The thought of supporting unethical pornography

would be distressing to many and simply seeing violence or degradation could be haunting.

Pornography can also remind victims of sexual violence of their experiences. Manna (age 18-24, bisexual/pansexual) described how degrading pornography makes her react: 'The old wounds of my rape have opened a few times when I have been watching porn. It is so male-centred and sometimes degrading to women that I've been hit by a panic attack a few times.' Violent and degrading content is not just unpleasant to stumble upon. It can also cause very real distress for women who come across it, particularly those with personal experiences of abuse and violence. Manna wrote that she used pornography almost daily when she was 14-19 years old but after being raped at the age of 20, her use of pornography has decreased as pornography can cause her anxiety. The triggering effect of pornography on women who have experienced sexual violence is also found by Parvez (2006).

The triggering quality of violent and degrading pornography is highlighted by pornography featuring rape. Elina (age 25-29, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about a time she saw rape in pornography and how that made her feel: 'I started watching porn that seemed okay but in which an unconscious girl was "raped". It hit too close to my own experiences.' Makin and Marczyk (2016, p. 2136) define rape-oriented pornography as 'the depiction of sexual assault or forced sexual intercourse'. Such depictions were described by four participants, including Elina. Ulla (age 30-39, heterosexual) described a video where a soldier raped an unconscious woman on a battlefield and wrote that seeing it made her feel 'bad, guilty and disgusting' and that she stopped watching pornography for a long time. Both she and Elina were strongly affected by seeing rape pornography. For Elina, it triggered memories from her own past, and Ulla felt so guilty about watching pornography that she quit it for a while.

The four descriptions of rape pornography share a common theme. In each of them, the woman being raped is unconscious. Salma (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about a video where a woman was drugged and raped: 'I got anxious from a video where an Asian woman was drugged either really or very realistically and after that she was presumably raped.' A video seen by Yona (age 30-39, heterosexual) had a rape scene with a sleeping or hypnotised woman: 'Once there was an unpleasant scene

in a video, where a man (“a therapist”) fucked a sleeping (or hypnotised) woman. I think that kind of situation is rape. Disgusting.’ These two videos and the videos described by Elina and Ulla follow the same pattern. Such videos are disturbing to women not just because of the violence they depict but also because of the message they send. They suggest that a man has the right to take any woman, even if the woman is unconscious.

Rape is particularly common in what Linda Williams calls separated pornographic utopias. Separated utopias depict a world where the sexual revolution and women’s liberation never took place (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 164). In videos that are based on a separated utopia, men’s pleasure is the only sexual pleasure that matters, and rape is considered impossible because ‘female power is virtually nonexistent’ (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 164). Consequently, the men in these videos can rape women without any moral qualms. The assumption is that women either enjoy being raped or that their pleasure and pain do not matter. In its disregard for women’s pain, pleasure and consent, rape pornography participates in a long tradition of using rape myths to justify rape. Rape myths, such as ‘no woman can be raped against their will’ and ‘all women want to be raped’ (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 346) are reflected in rape pornography which makes it so upsetting for participants to encounter.

## **7.2 The case of BDSM pornography**

The many ways in which violence and degradation can be defined show that the terms are subjective. What is violent or degrading to one is pleasurable and playful to another. BDSM pornography is a good example of the subjectivity of violence and degradation. 54% of participants reported liking BDSM pornography, while some other participants described it as their worst experience with pornography. For participants who brought it up as their worst experience, BDSM pornography is upsetting and unpleasant rather than enjoyable. BDSM pornography is a divisive issue not only among the participants in this study, but also among feminists in general. As the topic divides feminists and touches upon the issue of violent and degrading content, it deserves a closer analysis. What feminists and the study participants think about BDSM highlights the complexity of depictions of violence and degradation in pornography.

The acronym BDSM stands for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism. It is a form of consensual sexual practice between two or more people and it is distinct from sexual violence and abuse. When I discuss BDSM pornography, I refer to pornography depicting consensual BDSM acts, not to any pornography that includes BDSM-like activities. Even though all pornography labelled as BDSM may not explicitly address the issue of consent, consent is a central concept in BDSM practice, and it distinguishes it from sexual violence. There may be risks involved in BDSM, but its practice is meant to be safe and consensual (Barker, 2013, p. 896). The term BDSM is related to the term ‘sadomasochism’ (SM), which is commonly used especially in slightly older academic texts. For example, Linda Williams uses the term ‘sadomasochistic pornography’ in her book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’* from 1989 while discussing what is essentially BDSM pornography. I have chosen to use the term BDSM as it does not carry the same clinical connotation as sadomasochism, and I thought the term BDSM would be more familiar to the study participants than sadomasochism. The term is also commonly used on pornography websites to describe content.

Because of the use of pain and domination that is characteristic to it, BDSM has often been criticised by feminists who argue that it is an expression of patriarchal oppression. Other feminists, however, argue that it is a legitimate way to express one’s sexuality. This split may cause conflicting thoughts and feelings in those who enjoy BDSM pornography. Survey participant Vilma (18-24, homosexual/lesbian) wrote that her ‘feminist identity and (hetero) BDSM porn have caused conflict and guilt afterwards [after using BDSM porn]’. Vilma enjoys consuming BDSM pornography but feels guilty after it because she finds it to be conflicting with her identity as a feminist. She seems to think that enjoying BDSM pornography and being a feminist do not go together. Vilma, just as most other participants too, did not specify what kind of BDSM pornography she uses, so it is impossible to say why exactly she finds it to conflict with feminism. It is possible that she watches videos with female submissives being dominated by men and that she finds it to be unfeminist because it recreates a patriarchal hierarchy. However, BDSM includes the possibility for different kinds of power arrangements and women are not always dominated by men. Women can also be

dominatrices or engage in lesbian BDSM. Whether BDSM pornography is seen as feminist or not may depend on the gender of performers and their roles in the scenes they perform.

Why women would enjoy BDSM pornography can be explained in at least two ways. The first explanation is connected to normative female sexuality. Normative sexuality is 'a model of sexual behavior that is taken as exemplary for defining the propriety or impropriety of any particular instance of sexual activity' (Schutte, 1997, p. 41). Normative female sexuality has emphasised women's lack of sexual agency and has viewed women as sexual objects rather than subjects. Linda Williams argues that due to this norm of female sexuality, masochism can be said to have been the norm for female sexuality under patriarchy (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 213). Masochism allows women to enjoy sex while they still seem unwilling or at least uninterested in sex. In this view, the appeal BDSM has for women is explained by women's wish to get sexual pleasure without losing their status as 'good girls' who are not interested in sex.

Williams describes this as roleplay and explains its role in sadomasochistic pornography as follows:

[O]nly by playing the role of 'good girl' – that is, by pretending to be good and only coerced to sex – does the woman who is coerced and punished by the phallic dominator get the 'bad girl' pleasure. She gets this pleasure *as if* against her will and thus *as if* she were still a good girl. By pretending to succumb to the authority of the male double standard that condemns and punishes women for pleasure, she defeats the system – but only part of it: here, too, she cannot defeat the power of the phallus. She gets pleasure, but she must pay obeisance to a value system that condemns her for her own pleasure; the rules of the game are not her own. (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 209)

The price women pay for their pleasure is submitting to the rules of patriarchy. On the one hand, they play the system for their own benefit but, on the other hand, by doing so, they remain in an inferior position compared to men. Their engagement in BDSM as submissives, i.e. as those who are dominated, keeps patriarchal structures intact.

Williams argues that masochism should not be overemphasised as an explanation for women viewers' pleasure. She argues that women do not always identify with the suffering woman in pornography. They may also identify with the (male) dominator or with a passive spectator. They may even alternate between different objects of identification. Furthermore, even if a woman identifies with the



female submissive, she is aware that the woman in the film is participating in consensual roleplay and, thus, she may identify not only with the pain but also the pleasure of the woman on screen (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 214-215). It should also be noted that women can take a dominating role in BDSM and men can be submissive. In fact, Williams argues that a man taking the role of the submissive or identifying with it is engaging in 'a devious act of defiance' (Williams, 1999 [1989], p. 213). Instead of being an active subject, the man becomes a passive object, thus taking a feminine role and subverting established sexual roles for men and women.

The second explanation for women's enjoyment of BDSM pornography is related to its subversive potential. Much of my participants' dissatisfaction with pornography is related to how it perpetuates established norms about women's sexuality and treats women as tools for men's pleasure. The subversion of sexual norms that BDSM pornography offers is likely to be appealing to many women and they may see BDSM as political. In a study of 24 self-identifying SM practitioners, Taylor and Ussher (2001) found that female participants saw SM through a feminist lens, understanding it as a parody of 'sexual relations considered as traditionally subjugating, oppressive and exploitative of women' (Taylor and Ussher, 2001, p. 303). If seen as parody, even BDSM pornography with a female submissive and a male dominator can be liberating because it reveals the faults of patriarchy. Writing about BDSM and Black female sexuality, Ariane Cruz (2015, p. 411) argues that BDSM is not only about pleasure but also 'a mode of accessing and critiquing power'. BDSM offers a critique of existing power structures and a way to subvert them, either through parody or by turning around the norm of a man dominating a woman.

Despite the subversive potential that some see in it, BDSM is a controversial topic within feminism, much like pornography. In many ways, the feminist debate on BDSM is similar to the feminist debate on pornography. Lynn S. Chancer (2000) calls the split between feminists in both debates a split between sexism and sex. Those who are on the sexism side of the debate emphasise the role of patriarchal oppression, while the sex side of the debate is more concerned about women's sexual freedom. Chancer identifies this split not only in debates about pornography and sadomasochism but also

in debates about beauty, sex work and violence against women. In her analysis of sadomasochism, she writes that some feminists regard 'sadomasochistic sexual practices as inseparable from patriarchal hierarchies based on relations of dominance and subordination', while others argue that sadomasochism is a legitimate form of consensual sexual practice and women have the right to enjoy it (Chancer, 2000, p. 79).

As Chancer is trying to bridge the gap between the two sides, she suggests a third position that incorporates elements from both sides of the debate. She reminds the reader that sadomasochism is not always sexual. Many women are in coercive social situations characterised by sadomasochism that they, unlike women engaging in consensual sexual sadomasochism, cannot escape. These situations stem from patriarchal structures and can range from violent relationships to everyday situations in the workplace (Chancer, 2000, p. 84). However, sadomasochism can also be a source of sexual pleasure to some individuals. Feminists must take both sides of sadomasochism into account when talking about it. Chancer writes:

On the one hand, it is problematic to ignore that in many sexual situations, playfulness indeed may be involved; on the other hand, to fail to indict institutional arrangements that make sadomasochistic dynamics common, in and beyond their sexual manifestations, is to let society off the hook. (Chancer, 2000, p. 84)

While Chancer argues that BDSM must be accepted as a form of consensual sexual practice, she also believes that we must recognise that sadomasochistic pleasure is part of patriarchy and BDSM must be understood in light of this context.

Perhaps due to feminist concerns regarding BDSM, BDSM pornography was described as upsetting by some participants. These participants do not see the appeal of BDSM, and they had doubts about the reasons for why other people would like it. However, BDSM pornography was not condemned by participants, suggesting that the women who do not like it see it as a matter of preference rather than a question of what is right or wrong. Marika did not mention using BDSM pornography in the survey but in her interview, she told about a website called BDSM Baari that she sometimes uses. BDSM Baari (BDSM Bar) is a Finnish online forum meant for people who are interested in BDSM. Members of the forum discuss BDSM related topics, look for sexual partners and share pictures and stories. In addition to Marika, two other

participants, interviewee Malin and survey participant Eveliina (age 25-29, heterosexual) mentioned the forum. Marika likes to read discussions and look at photographs posted by members. She mentioned in the survey that reading other people very openly discussing different sexual preferences had taught her a lot and made her more open-minded. Even though she is not personally interested in engaging in BDSM, she seems to find it exhilarating to read about other people wanting it. For example, she enjoys reading posts where a member looks for a partner or partners for a BDSM activity and describes what they would like to do.

However, even though Marika likes reading discussion threads in BDSM Baari, she also struggles a little with understanding why some people find pleasure in pain. Survey participant H.B. (age 18-24, heterosexual) has similar thoughts. She wrote: 'Sometimes I have opened a BDSM video and it has felt distressing because relating pain or something else like that to sex feels like a very strange thought.' Not everyone finds pleasure in pain and it can be difficult to understand why some do. Marika described seeing photographs that members had posted in BDSM Baari after a BDSM session. In the photographs the people had bruises and other marks on their bodies. Pictures like these make Marika feel anxious and wonder why anyone would like to do something like that. The idea of enjoying sex that leaves physical marks of pain on one's body is so unthinkable to Marika that it makes her think that some people who practice BDSM may have underlying issues that make them enjoy pain.

Even if everyone has given consent, let's just say that my brain just shuts down. I don't want to look at it and I don't want to wonder [pauses for a moment] what makes a person enjoy something like that. I won't judge but I do find the thoughts people have problematic, the reasons why one would end up in a relationship like that. (...) The psychotherapist inside me wakes up, starts thinking about what's in the background there [when people find pleasure in pain]. But, once again, people can do whatever they want.

Later Marika also mentioned that sometimes she suspects that the people posting pictures like these might have been drunk when the activities that caused the marks were done. She said that, unfortunately, she sometimes finds herself wondering if what was done had been truly fine for everyone involved. Yet, despite her doubts and inability to understand why some people enjoy pain, Marika still believes that other people can 'do whatever they want'.

The wish to be non-judgemental and allow other people to enjoy whatever sexual practices they like is an attitude that can be seen in other interviews too, as well as survey answers. The participants have a very open and understanding approach to pornography and other people's desires, an attitude likely to have been influenced by sex-positive feminism. Consensual acts of violence and degradation, such as many BDSM acts, are understood as being within the boundaries of acceptable pornography and distinct from gross violence, such as rape, or clearly misogynistic degradation of women. Consent is what separates the acceptable from unacceptable in participants accounts of violence and degradation. As consent is a key part of BDSM, participants do not see reason to condemn BDSM pornography even if it upsets some participants.

### **7.3 Ethical concerns and strategies to determine ethicalness**

As a genre where pain and humiliation play an important role, BDSM raises an important ethical issue. Participants see consent as a central factor in whether pornography is acceptable or not, but users of pornography have little chance of knowing if performers have actually consented to everything they participate in. Even genres that do not include BDSM acts or rough sex raise this same issue. The ethical argument against pornography is centred on consent and other issues related to the production of pornography. It is argued that the pornography industry exploits performers and that working conditions are poor. Critics worry that female performers are not performing out of their own free will and that they are pressured into doing sexual acts they would not like to do. These types of arguments against pornography are widespread, so it was to be expected that participants would be concerned about the ethical implications of pornography production. The general finding in my study is that while participants are worried about how pornography is made and would like to use ethically produced pornography, few have taken concrete steps to make sure that the pornography they use is indeed ethically made. Difficulty in knowing how pornography is made is a factor that plays into this.

The interviewees associate ethical concerns primarily with the treatment of performers, thus they did not see ethical problems with drawings or written stories, which do not include the use of performers. Ethical issues can also concern the content

of pornography, but, due to the participants' focus on production, the analysis in this chapter focuses on the ethicalness of the production process of pornography. The ethical issues that relate to the production of pornography and were discussed by participants include, but are not limited to, questions of consent and coercion, human trafficking, working conditions, wages and health care for performers, and child pornography.

Mia described only using pornography she is certain to be ethically made. She uses pornography from ethical and feminist websites, and she said that knowing where pornography comes from and who has made it is very important to her. She actively looks for ethically made pornography and described doing background research on pornography producers and directors she is not already familiar with. She reads information on producers' websites, watches documentaries on the pornography industry and in general tries to find out as much as she can. She wants to know who is behind the pornography she uses and how they take ethical concerns into account in their work. Even though all interviewees discussed ethical concerns and saw them as important, none of the others described putting as much effort into finding out how pornography is made as Mia did.

Many participants described feeling guilty and worried when they see videos that make them suspect that they might not have been ethically made. Doubting the consent of female performers to participate in a video or in specific sex acts is particularly common, and it makes viewers feel worried and guilty for watching such content. Kaisa (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) wrote about her worst experiences with pornography: '[When] I notice that the female performer in the video is not really in on what's going on. It makes me feel really bad. To be simultaneously aroused and feel empathy and disgust – it makes me feel broken.' Being aroused by and perhaps masturbating to a video that raises ethical concerns can be a jarring experience. Sarppa (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) said that she often gets 'feelings of guilt while watching videos due to worker's rights and questioning their [work] conditions' and that the guilt she feels takes away the sexual urges that make her want to use pornography in the first place.

The contradictory feelings that pornography can raise due to the conflict between the viewer's ethical concerns and their wish to enjoy pornography also

emerged in Parvez's 2006 study on American women. Parvez uses the concept of emotional labour when discussing this conflict. She writes that 'in addition to performing the physical act of sex, the porn actresses must in general display arousal and pleasure to satisfy most viewers' (Parvez, 2006, p. 604). She further argues that women consumers feel empathy for performers and form 'a social connection shaped by concerns about power and inequality in the labor process. However, this connection coexists alongside the private and individual experience of erotic arousal.' (Parvez, 2006, p. 626) On the one hand, women feel empathy for female performers because they are aware of the emotional labour they are performing and the conditions they are subject to in the pornography industry. On the other hand, they seek arousal from pornography and 'desire authenticity of pleasure from porn actresses' (Parvez, 2006, p. 625), despite the concerns they have for the performers' well-being.

Hilla (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) described the conflict between empathy for performers and her own desire for pleasure when writing about her worst experience with pornography. She wrote: '[Sometimes] I have watched a particularly nasty video and, without being particularly aroused by it, masturbated to it. For example, [a video where] a woman clearly hasn't wanted to act in, even if she claims to [want to].' When one masturbates to a video while thinking that the female performer in it did not really want to be in it, one's thoughts (empathy for performers and concern for their well-being) and one's actions (masturbating and continuing to watch the video) are inconsistent with each other. What Hilla was doing was against her ethical beliefs. She let her desire for pleasure override ethical behaviour. However, her empathy for the performer did not disappear and she was not able to be 'particularly aroused' by the video. Maria (age 30-39, bisexual/pansexual) also wrote about how ethical concerns get in the way of pleasure: 'I like rough and BDSM porn so questions regarding consent and mutual agreements are important. It is difficult to enjoy when I can't be sure if participants' boundaries have been respected and things have been done in mutual understanding.'

Considering that ethical concerns can get in the way of pleasure one might think that participants would make sure that the content they use is ethically produced. After all, using material that one is certain is ethically made would reduce the amount of

emotional labour required from the viewer and would make it easier to enjoy pornography. Yet, participants described doing very little work to ensure the ethicalness of their pornography. While interviewees described some strategies to determine ethicalness, most of them are not concrete and definite ways to evaluate it but are vague and based on instincts and feelings rather than facts. Thus, participants' actions are somewhat at odds with their thoughts and values, just as when Hilla masturbated to a video even when she believed the female performer did not want to be in it.

It should be noted that 22% of participants reported using pornography found on websites that offer alternative pornography (such as feminist or queer pornography) and as many as 43% use feminist pornography. While some definitions of alternative and feminist pornography include ethical production practices, the terms were not defined in the survey, meaning that participants could interpret them in many ways. For example, some participants might call pornography feminist if it includes gender egalitarian portrayals of men and women, even if they do not know how performers were treated on set. Furthermore, pornography labelled as alternative or feminist is not necessarily ethically produced. The interviewees that reported using feminist pornography or alternative pornography websites know very little about how the pornography they use is made. Their use of the terms feminist, alternative and ethical is based on their perceptions, not facts, which is something they also admitted to in their interviews.

Difficulty in knowing how pornography is made is likely to contribute to participants' lack of attention to the ethicalness of the production of pornography. It is often difficult for a consumer to know where and how a product is made, whether it is a piece of clothing or a pornographic video. The lack of information regarding the production process of pornography is a theme that came up in all interviews. Many mentioned that they do not know where to look for information or that, even though they know that some production companies and directors pay more attention to ethicalness than others, they do not know where to find their videos. When talking about ethical pornography, Alise said that 'it is in practice impossible to know what porn is ethical, especially when it comes to free porn'. Free videos were seen as a problem by other interviewees too. Mia pays for her pornography, but all the other interviewees said that they use free content. Alise, Iina and Riitta-Kyllikki said that

maybe they could be more certain that videos are ethically made if they paid for them. They think that if they paid, they would look more into how the videos are made. Riitta-Kyllikki explained that she thinks paying for pornography is important but with so much free content available, she just does not do it.

When porn is available for free, how on earth do actors or these production companies get paid? If I bought [porn] then I would know if they do and I would support porn that's made the right way. That would be important of course but, then again, now I don't pay when I know that 90 percent is available completely free.

Big tube sites that offer free pornography are the most popular source of pornography as 89% of participants use them. Malin and Iina said that they do not pay for pornography because, in the end, they do not use pornography very often. Malin also said that she wants the variety free pornography websites offer. Buying pornography seems like an unnecessary step to take when the Internet is full of free content.

Writing about women's ethical spectatorship of pornography, Olga Marques (2019) points out that even though consumer society emphasises the opportunity to make choices, individual decision-making is still done under a limited selection of options. Women make choices about what kind of pornography they watch, and they often take ethical considerations into account, but their choices are limited. With free pornography on big tube sites dominating the market, it is what most women end up watching. Marques writes that there is 'limited space for critique or comment on' pornography and that 'pornography consumers are asked to unquestioningly and uncritically accept the visual, emotive and aural cues on display' (Marques, 2018, p. 785). In other words, consumers are asked to ignore their ethical concerns and to trust that no ethical rules were broken in the making of what they are watching.

Participants in my study have ethical concerns and they reflected on them in the survey and interviews, but it seems that most are able to temporarily put them aside when using pornography. This is not to say that they are uncritical of pornography, as they do express harsh criticism, particularly when it comes to pornography's prioritisation of male pleasure. However, interviewees were quite uncritical of how the videos they use are made. Mia was the only interviewee who described knowing where and how the pornography she uses is made. The other five were not able to say. They



still value ethicalness but have taken few practical steps to find out how the pornography they use is made. Alise, Riitta-Kyllikki, Ina and Malin use videos from big tube sites and Marika uses Bellesa, a female-run free pornography website that has a reputation of being ethical. The videos on Bellesa come from different sources and Marika was not able to answer when asked if she knew where and how the pornography on Bellesa is made:

Ummm... I don't know very well. I don't know well where it comes from. (...) I don't know, I trust that I see from the people [performers] that they are liberated and having fun. But... I haven't looked much into what the criteria are. The same actors appear in many Bellesa videos, the same faces, so maybe there's a subcontractor that produces it for them. Yeah but, they do also have their own values written [on the website] where they do emphasise that everyone is treated well etc.

Marika trusts that she can tell when performers are 'liberated and having fun' and that to her is a sign of ethicalness. Instincts and feelings like this are used by other participants too when they try to evaluate the ethicalness of a video. Malin explained that she does not know much about how the videos she watches are made, but that some videos give her 'a feeling' that no one in them is under coercion. She was not able to exactly articulate where that feeling comes from but said that she gets it when she sees videos that do not use many clichés. She did not elaborate on what she considers to be cliché in pornography, but other participants' views on fake pornography help explain what this perceived connection between clichés and ethical pornography is. Clichés are associated with the fake bodies, fake plots and fake pleasure that participants see as signs of pornography's male-orientedness.

Mia's views on ethical pornography shed some more light on the link between fakeness and what is perceived as ethical. Mia, who only uses pornography that she thinks is ethical, said that it is difficult to say what exactly makes pornography ethical, but she was still able to describe some differences between ethical pornography and mainstream pornography. In addition to performers' working conditions, she described the content of ethical pornography:

[Ethical porn videos] are carefully scripted and they are good quality and there's a bit of a plot, which I think is important. It's thought through and people look normal in them or they can, like, have more weight, for example, or have body hair and there are different ethnicities and gender expressions. (...) They use

better cameras and editing is good quality. You really understand why it's worth paying for [laughs a bit,] or like, it's good value for money.

The attention Mia pays to the plot, the performers' looks and the quality of the filming and editing indicates that when evaluating the ethicalness of pornography, information about the treatment of performers is not the only factor that matters. Consumers make assumptions about ethicalness also based on what pornography looks like. Diversity of body types, ethnicities and gender expressions, as well as alternative aesthetics and well-written stories that are not often seen in pornography, indicate ethicalness because they are seen as 'real' as opposed to 'fake'. The conflation of the ethical and the aesthetic is not uncommon and makes some styles of pornography seem more ethical than others, even though the way pornography looks does not really tell about the ethicalness of its production (Paasonen, 2014, p. 28). Viewers making assumptions about ethicalness based on aesthetics also opens up the possibility of whitewashing pornography. 'Greenwashing', or the practice of making products seem more environmentally friendly than they really are, is a well-known phenomenon (Hostovsky, 2011) and a similar practice is possible in pornography. Much like ecolabels and claims about eco-friendliness are used to make consumers buy particular products, producers may try to appeal to ethically minded consumers of pornography by using alternative aesthetics without taking any steps to make their production more ethical.

Malin acknowledged the dubiousness of an evaluation of ethicalness not based on facts and said that she might be a bit naïve when it comes to pornography. She knows that there are ethical problems related to the pornography industry, but she chooses to believe that the pornography she uses is not unethical and that surely someone would have reported it and done something about it if it were. She even said that it is 'odd' how much she trusts that videos are ethically made without looking into it, as she is usually 'a really responsible consumer'. She said that she knows that there are websites where one can pay and production companies that are known for making ethical pornography but that she does not 'even know where to start looking' for them. A lack of information, but also a lack of willingness to put effort into finding information, lead viewers to trust their instincts rather than facts.

One of the few concrete sources of information that interviewees reported using is documentaries. Riitta-Kyllikki, Alise and Malin mentioned seeing documentaries about the pornography industry, and Iina mentioned watching some episodes of *Ina <3 porno*<sup>18</sup>, a Finnish television series where a journalist introduces viewers to pornography in different parts of the world. Two survey participants also mentioned seeing documentaries, but it is possible that it is a source of information for even more participants, as the survey did not specifically ask where participants find information about pornography. For the interviewees who mentioned seeing documentaries, seeing them had somewhat reduced their anxiety about pornography. Mia sees documentaries that feature the work of producers whose videos she uses as a good sign. Because they appear in documentaries, their work has been given outside approval, which Mia sees as a guarantee of the ethicalness of their pornography. Riitta-Kyllikki has become to trust the American pornography industry because documentaries that she has seen depict it in positive terms: ‘I’ve watched documentaries and at least those women [performers] seem like they like their profession, they like it and there’s proper pay and health care and these things and it looks like they really enjoy it as a profession.’ She still acknowledged that there can be problems in pornography production but what she knows about American pornography from documentaries has made her trust that most American videos are made ethically.

The problem with documentaries is that, much like a viewer cannot confirm the ethicalness of a pornographic video, a viewer cannot know how reliable a documentary is. Some participants also evaluate ethicalness from interviews with performers published by producers. SP (age 18-24, heterosexual) wrote that when she sees a video where it looks like the female performer might be in pain, it sometimes helps if there is an interview with the performer at the end of the video. It reassures her that the woman was not really in pain and consented to everything that happened. The use of this type of extra-pornographic content is relatively common in pornography. Karly-Lynne Scott (2016) argues that such content is part of the pornographic performance and therefore should not be used as evidence when evaluating the ethicalness of videos. A viewer

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<sup>18</sup> The name of the series is *Ina loves porno* (*porno* is porn in Finnish) but ‘loves’ is spelled with a heart (<3).

cannot trust that performers express their true feelings in such interviews as they might be pressured to only say good things about the making of the video. After all, such interviews are also a marketing tool. They can be used to reinforce ‘a discourse of authenticity’ that emphasises performers’ genuine interest in their work, that they do it for fun rather than money and, therefore, their pleasure is real (Berg, 2017, p. 679).

Even if documentaries, online sources and information provided by producers indicate that a video is ethically made, consumers can never be completely sure of how it was made. Even Mia, who does not watch videos without researching them first, has her doubts and described them in her interview.

Somehow I doubt everything, if this is really ethical. I wish I could just trust... Maybe it’s a bit like I never can know if I can trust it [the ethicalness of porn]. Maybe the porn I have found now is more ethical, but I can’t, like, say what is really ethical.

There is something about pornography that makes Mia think that perhaps it can never be truly ethical. Anti-pornography feminist arguments might be a contributing factor. While Mia completely agreed with the statements ‘porn can empower women’ and ‘porn can be feminist’, she also completely agreed with the statement ‘porn has an effect on how men treat women’ and somewhat agreed with ‘porn increases violence against women’. Mia neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement ‘performing in porn is never a completely free choice’. The last three statements are claims often made by anti-pornography feminists. Mia’s answers to these statements demonstrate that it is possible to simultaneously see pornography in a positive light and still be critical of pornography. In her interview she explained that ‘porn actually does a lot of harm, even though it’s also empowering’.

Mia and the other participants expressed a feeling of powerlessness in front of the pornography industry. They enjoy pornography but wish it would be made differently. Not only are they concerned about performers’ well-being but also about content they see as violent, degrading or male-oriented. Mia’s expression ‘I wish I could just trust’ was echoed by the other interviewees. All of them talked about how frustrating it is to not know much about the pornography they use and where to find pornography they like, both content-wise and from an ethical perspective. When asked what pornography would be like in an ideal world, they played with the idea of a

pornography standard or certificate that would guarantee the quality of pornography production and content. Such an idea may be utopian, but it shows that the women want to find a solution to the concerns they have. Some, such as Mia, have turned to feminist and ethical pornography and found a solution there. The cost of such alternative pornography and the ubiquity of free mainstream pornography, however, make ethical pornography a choice for a few, while most keep navigating the world of free mainstream pornography.

## 8. Conclusion

The interviews and survey conducted for this thesis analysed the experiences and thoughts of 159 Finnish women who use pornography and are members of a feminist Facebook group. The purpose of the research was to find out how women navigate the male-oriented world of pornography. The three sub-questions that guided the research were 1.) What is the role of pornography in women's lives? 2.) Why do women think that pornography is male-oriented? and 3.) How do women navigate the ethics of pornography?

The participants' accounts of their pornography use are varied and include positive, even joyful, descriptions of pornography but also complaints of male-orientedness and worry over the ethics of pornography. The participants mainly discussed pornographic videos, the most popular medium, but also touched upon written pornography, which many find both more relatable and ethical than videos. Much like the participants in the Finnish memory work project conducted by Paasonen et al. (2015), participants in this study showed critical thinking and reflected on pornography and their own use of it. Their reflections provide information about what pornography's role is in their lives and why they think that pornography is male-oriented, as well as reveals inconsistencies between their ethical concerns and their behaviour.

Pornography's role as a tool for sexual exploration is one of the key findings of the thesis and suggests a difference between Finnish and North American women. Considering that earlier studies conducted in Canada and the United States (Gurevich et al., 2017; Parvez, 2006) indicate that pornography is often used to learn about sex and get sex tips, remarkably few participants talked about pornography as an educational source. There is admittedly some overlap between pornography as an educational source and pornography as a tool for exploration, but the two have very different implications for what women look for in pornography. The participants in my study do not turn to pornography to learn how sex works. They turn to it because they want to explore the many manifestations of sexuality and the ways to be a sexual being. For them, pornography is about self-exploration rather than learning about anatomy or sex positions and, therefore, it goes beyond learning about sex. Exploration includes using

pornography to examine one's own and other people's desires and to understand the many ways sexuality can be expressed.

The fact that all study participants are Finnish may shed light on the emphasis on exploration rather than education. Attitudes toward sex are quite liberal in Finland, as exemplified by the emphasis on health and self-expression in public discourse on sex. Furthermore, sex education in Finnish schools is not centred around abstinence, as is often the case in American sex education. Parvez's research was conducted in the United States and the emphasis on pornography's educational value in her results may reflect American attitudes toward sex. One of Parvez's participants said that she had learned almost everything she knows about sex and anatomy from pornography (Parvez, 2006, p. 616). It seems unlikely that a Finnish woman who has received sex education and learned about anatomy in school would say the same. In an environment where reliable information about sex is easily available and attitudes toward sex are accepting, there is less need to rely on pornography for education.

In addition to exploration, participants use pornography to enhance pleasure, a finding that is consistent with previous research (Ciclitira, 2004; Gurevich et al., 2017; Parvez, 2006). The connections between pornography and orgasms that many participants drew in their survey answers point toward pornography's important role in these women's lives. It allows women to take a break from their everyday stress, and that way immerse themselves in pleasure. Pornography has a similar role when used with a partner. Some participants described pornography's liberating effect on their sex life. They find it aids relaxation and encourages them to demand more from their sexual partners. They also described the intimacy-increasing effect shared pornography use can have. Sexual self-disclosure through sharing pornography preferences makes partners feel closer to each other. This finding warrants more research. Research on the positive impact pornography can have on romantic relationships is rare, while there is a lot of research on the negative consequences of pornography on couples (see, for example, Carroll et al., 2017; Zitzman and Butler, 2019). Negative experiences related to pornography addiction and trying to use pornography with a partner were also reported by participants in this study, but they should not overshadow the positive role pornography has in many relationships.

Participants' views on the male-orientedness of pornography reveal their dissatisfaction with pornography's portrayals of men and women and their disappointment in the perceived fakeness of pornography. According to some participants, women's portrayals in pornography are a continuation of the Madonna/whore dichotomy and women's role in pornography is to please men, while men themselves are 'expressionless fuck-machines' who do not show emotions or pleasure. These portrayals are seen by participants as a sign of pornography's prioritisation of men's pleasure. Whether the portrayals really reflect what men want to see is a different matter and the participants who addressed this matter disagreed on it. Some believe that men want to see these types of portrayals, while others believe that most men would prefer more diverse portrayals. While this thesis is not able to comment on what men's thoughts on the matter are, it does seem likely that men would like to see men who are relatable in pornography, just as the women in this study express a wish to see relatable women. Men's portrayals in pornography can be described as portrayals of hegemonic masculinity and most men do not fit the narrow definition of hegemonic masculinity, leaving pornography's portrayals of men lacking in relatability and realness.

The one-dimensional portrayals of men and women are a symptom of a larger problem, that of fakeness. Fake bodies, plots and pleasure are also seen as a result of male-orientedness and they make the participants feel sidelined by pornography as it reminds them that pornography's assumed audience is men. Fakeness as a euphemism for male-orientedness is also identified by Parvez (2006) and is reflected in women pornographers' search for authenticity in their work, as documented by Bakehorn (2016). The findings presented in this thesis further highlight the importance of realness to women who use pornography. Many participants said that they want relatable pornography, and real bodies, plots and pleasure make it easier to relate to the characters and stories in pornography. A question that remains unanswered is why women associate fakeness with male-orientedness. It is possible that they make this connection simply because they see pornography as intended for men and find fakeness common in pornography. Consequently, they think that fakeness is male-oriented.



However, the association of fakeness with male-orientedness requires more research as there may be other reasons behind it.

Fakeness is also associated with unethicalness. The primary ethical concern participants expressed is their concern for performers' well-being in pornography production. They are worried that performers might not be treated well and might suffer from poor working conditions or outright abuse. Their concern is particularly strong when they encounter violent or degrading content. Women's concern for performers' well-being is well-documented also in previous studies that suggest that women often have contradictory feelings about pornography as their enjoyment of it contradicts their ethical views (Ciclitira, 2004; Parvez, 2006). Yet, despite their worries, many participants in my study rely on aspects of pornography that are not strictly related to ethics to judge how ethical a production is. They rely particularly much on aesthetics. Alternative aesthetics that depict real, not fake, bodies, such as bodies without plastic surgery and women with hairy armpits, are seen as a sign of ethicalness. Participants also assess ethicalness based on how much performers seem to enjoy themselves on screen which is related to the realness of pleasure. If performers look like they are having a good time, they are assumed to be performing voluntarily and to enjoy it.

The interviews conducted for this thesis support the existence of a conflation of aesthetics and ethics among users of pornography. The idea itself is not new (Berg, 2017; Marques, 2018; Paasonen, 2014; Scott, 2017) but the findings in this thesis provide further evidence that pornography users really do base some of their ethical assessments on aesthetics and performance. Even though the interviewees expressed great concern for performers, only one of them, Mia, has extensively looked for information about the ethicalness of the pornography she uses and she, too, relies heavily on aesthetics and expressed frustration at how difficult it is to be certain that pornography is ethically made. When there is little reliable information about pornography's production processes, users of pornography do not have much material to base their judgements on. Since pornography nonetheless has an important role in their lives as a tool for pleasure and exploration, they put their ethical concerns aside and let themselves be reassured by alternative aesthetics.

Further research is needed to keep exploring the topic of this thesis and to better understand its findings. Using pornography as a tool for exploration would be a fruitful research topic and a comparative study between different nationalities would be particularly interesting. This thesis points toward a difference between Finland and the United States, so a study on these two countries would be interesting. Such a study would help to establish whether there really are differences between Finnish and American women or whether exploration is common only in the sample that was studied in this thesis. The conflation of ethics and aesthetics is another topic that warrants further research. Such research could look at how common it is to assess ethicalness based on aesthetics, whether users of pornography recognise it as something they do and where the supposed connection between ethicalness and alternative aesthetics stems from.

Using a different kind of sample for a study similar to this one would be another way to keep exploring the topic. Recruiting from a feminist Facebook group undoubtedly affected the results of the study, and a different sample might reveal whether the findings are specific to this sample. Women who do not have a strong interest in feminism might think differently from this sample. A more diverse sample, age-wise, might also give different results as the participants' young age may be reflected in the results.

Another opportunity for further research would be to conduct a similar study on Finnish men. Whether they also find pornography's fakeness and its portrayals of men and women to be symptoms of male-orientedness and whether they find them appealing would reveal much about pornography and its supposed audience. Looking at pornography's role in men's lives and how men navigate the ethics of pornography would be an opportunity to confirm or refute common notions of men's use of pornography. Men's use of pornography is often depicted in rather simplistic terms as the use of sexual stimulus for masturbation without concern for ethics. Since pornography's role is much more complex than that for the women in this study, it seems likely that many men, too, would see pornography as more than a simple source for sexual gratification and that they would also think about the ethical problems that pornography production poses. After all, pornography and its use are not as simple as

everyday discourse might suggest. If anything, the findings of this thesis show that using pornography is about more than just pleasure and that users of pornography can simultaneously enjoy pornography and problematise it.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Survey

Note that the survey was published on an online platform and the formatting below is not identical to the formatting of the original survey.

Page 1

## A survey on women's use of pornography

We are glad that you are interested in participating in this research project on women's use of pornography. The main purpose is to find out how women viewers navigate the masculine world of pornography. Before answering the survey we want to give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### Purpose of the project

The purpose of the project is to investigate what women viewers think about pornography and how they manage in the masculine world of pornography. The project focuses on the experiences of Finnish women.

The main research question of the project is "How do women viewers navigate the masculine world of pornography?".

The project is a master's thesis.

### Who is responsible for the research project?

University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

### Why are you being asked to participate?

The participants of the project have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- Each participant must identify as a woman.
- Each participant must be 18 years or older.
- Each participant must identify as Finnish.
- Each participant must use pornography.

We aim to have approximately 100 survey participants. In addition to the survey participants, the project includes 6 interviewees.

### What does participation involve for you?

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to fill in. It will include questions about your use of pornography, how satisfied you are with pornography and your thoughts on pornography. It will also include some questions about your background and your sex life. Your answers will be recorded electronically.

### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can still change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you can be deleted upon request. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Your personal data will be accessed by the student conducting the project, Martta Ojala. No other person will have access to your data.

If you provide your name and contact details, I will replace them with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

Survey data is collected through the Nettskjema service and the collected data will be stored in Services for Sensitive Data (TSD), a Norwegian data collection, storage and analysis software designed to be used with sensitive data.

The information you give in the survey/interview will be used in my master's thesis. Directly identifiable data (e.g. name or contact details) will not be published in the thesis. Indirectly identifiable data (e.g. age, ethnicity, experiences and opinions) will be used in the thesis.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on 31 July 2019. All collected data will be anonymised on this date. All directly identifiable data will be deleted completely. Indirectly identifiable data will be rewritten and grouped together so that individuals cannot be identified.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Oslo, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Martta Ojala, the student conducting the research: [marttako@student.hf.uio.no](mailto:marttako@student.hf.uio.no)
- University of Oslo via Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein (the student's supervisor): [d.l.kitchen-doderlein@ilos.uio.no](mailto:d.l.kitchen-doderlein@ilos.uio.no)
- The University of Oslo's Data Protection Officer Maren Magnus Voll: [personvernombud@uio.no](mailto:personvernombud@uio.no)



- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email ([personvernombudet@nsd.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.no)) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Martta Ojala  
student

Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein  
supervisor

**I give consent to participate in the survey.**

Yes

**I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project 31 July 2019.**

Yes

**What name do you want to use?**

Please pick three alternatives for a pseudonym that will be used in the research. You can use a name or initials but do not use your real name or initials.

Page 2

**In this section we ask you to answer some questions about your background.**

**How old are you?**

- 18- 24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-64
- 65 or older

**What is your relationship status?**

- Married
- Cohabiting
- In a relationship but we do not live together
- Separated / divorced
- Single / not in a relationship
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What is your relationship status?»: Other

**If other, please describe your relationship status here.**

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What is your relationship status?»: Married, In a relationship but we do not live together, Cohabiting

**How long have you been in your current relationship?**

- Less than a year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Choose all that apply.

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual/lesbian
- Bisexual/pansexual
- Queer
- Asexual
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What is your sexual orientation?»: Other

**If other, please describe your sexual orientation in your own words.**

**What is your gender identity?**

- Cisgender (my gender identity matches the gender I was assigned at birth)
- Transgender
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What is your gender identity?»: Other

**If other, please describe your gender identity in your own words.**

**Please describe your racial or ethnic identity in a few words.**

**Are you part of any religious denomination?**

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
- Finnish Orthodox Church
- Some Christian Evangelical group
- Roman Catholic Church
- Other Christian denomination
- Islam
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Judaism
- I am agnostic
- I am an atheist
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Are you part of any religious denomination?»: Other

**If other, which religious denomination are you part of?**

**How often do you go to church or otherwise take part in religious activities?**

Choose the answer that best describes your typical behaviour.

- Never
- A few times a year
- Approximately once a month
- Almost every week
- Once a week
- More than once a week

**How often do you have sex?**

Choose the answer that best describes your typical behaviour.

- I have never had sex
- Once a year or less often
- A few times a year
- 1-2 times a month
- 3-4 times a month
- More than once a week

	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
How satisfied are you with your sex life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**How often do you use sex toys or other tools or clothes meant for sex?**

- Never
- Every now and then
- Often

**Have you done sex work?**

- I am currently doing sex work.
- I have done sex work in the past.
- I have never done sex work.

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Have you done sex work?»: I am currently doing sex work., I have done sex work in the past.

**What kind of sex work do you do or have done in the past?**

Choose all that apply.

- Performing in porn
- Selling sex
- Striptease
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What kind of sex work do you do or have done in the past?»: Other

**What type of sex work not included on the list have you done?**

**Have you experienced sexual violence?**

Choose all that apply.

- No, I have never experienced sexual violence.
- Yes, I have been raped.
- Yes, I was sexually abused as a child.
- Yes, I have experienced some other type of sexual violence.

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Have you experienced sexual violence?»: Yes, I have experienced some other type of sexual violence.

**What type of sexual violence not included on the list have you experienced?**

Page 3

## Using porn

In this section we ask you to answer questions about your use of porn.

**How often do you use porn?**

- Less than once a month
- 1-3 times a month
- Once a week
- 2-3 times a week
- At least 4 times a week

**Do you ever use porn together with other people?**

Choose all that apply.

- No, I only use porn alone
- Yes, with my partner(s).
- Yes, with friends.
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Do you ever use porn together with other people?»: Other

**Who else do you use porn with?**

**Do you ever discuss porn with other people?**

Choose all that apply.

- No, I never discuss porn with other people.
- Yes, with my partner(s).
- Yes, with my friends.
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Do you ever discuss porn with other people?»: Other

**Who else do you discuss porn with?**

**When do you use porn?**

Choose all that apply.

- When I want to masturbate
- When I am having sex or just before it
- When I am bored
- When I want to relax
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «When do you use porn?»: Other

**If other, when do you use porn?**

**Why do you use porn?**

You can write as much as you wish.

**What pornographic materials do you use?**

Choose all that apply.

- Porn videos or films
- Porn magazines
- Audio porn
- Erotic texts or literature
- Romance novels
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What pornographic materials do you use?»: Other

**What pornographic materials not included on the list do you use?**

**What kind of porn do you like using?**

Choose all that apply.

- Heterosexual porn
- Lesbian porn
- Gay porn
- Group sex porn
- BDSM porn
- Porn with rough sex
- Queer porn
- Amateur porn
- Porn with anal sex
- Porn with masturbation
- Feminist porn
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What kind of porn do you like using?»: Other

**What kind of porn not included on the list do you like using?**

**Where do you find the porn you use?**

- Big tube sites (e.g. pornhub.com)
- Websites with paid subscription
- Websites that send live porn
- Websites that offer alternative porn (e.g. feminist or queer porn)
- TV channels
- Sex shops
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Where do you find the porn you use?»: Other

**If other, please write down places not included on the list.**

**Please describe the last time you used porn.**

For example, you can tell what you used, where, when and why, and what it was like to use porn that time. You can write as much as you wish.

**Your feelings and satisfaction with porn**

In this section we ask you to answer questions about your feelings and satisfaction with porn.

	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>
How satisfied are you with the porn you use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How satisfied are you with the selection of porn available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If there are specific porn films, websites or makers of porn that you are particularly satisfied with, please list them here.**



**How does porn make you feel?**

Choose all that apply.

- Happy
- Sad
- Ashamed
- Guilty
- Excited
- Aroused
- Disgusted
- Satisfied
- Scared
- Liberated
- Embarrassed
- Empowered
- Angry
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «How does porn make you feel?»: Other

**If other, please write down feelings not included on the list.**

**Describe your best experience with porn.**

You can write as much as you wish.

**Describe your worst experience with porn.**

You can write as much as you wish.

## Porn and gender

In this section we ask you to answer questions about pornography and gender.

	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat dissatisfied</b>	<b>Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>
How satisfied are you with how women are depicted in porn?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How satisfied are you with how men are depicted in porn?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How satisfied are you with how relations between men and women are depicted in porn?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How satisfied are you with how sex is depicted in porn?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please choose the answers that best fit your opinion on the following statements.

	<b>Completely disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Neither disagree not agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Completely agree</b>
Women's needs and desires are taken well into account in porn.*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Men's needs and desires are taken well into account in porn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My own needs and desires are taken well into account in porn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most porn is meant for men.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is easy to find porn I like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Your opinion on porn

In this section we ask you to tell about your opinions on porn. Choose the answers that best fit your opinions on each statement.

	Completely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree
Porn affects the way men treat women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porn increases violence against women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porn should be regulated by government.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porn can empower women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porn can be feminist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using porn is a good way to explore one's sexuality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using porn is a good way to learn about sex.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porn is morally wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is important to me to know that the performers in the porn I use were treated well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acting in porn can never be a truly free choice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Your first encounter with porn

In this section we ask you to answer some questions about the first time you saw or used porn.

### How old were you when you saw or used porn for the first time?

- 6 years old or younger
- 7-10 years old
- 11-13 years old
- 14-16 years old
- 17-20 years old
- 21-25 years old
- 26 years or older

### What pornographic materials did you see or use the first time?

Choose all that apply.

- Porn videos or films
- Porn magazines
- Audio porn
- Erotic texts or literature
- Romance novels
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «What pornographic materials did you see or use the first time?»: Other

### What other pornographic materials did you see or use the first time?

### Who introduced you to porn the first time?

- No one, I encountered it on my own
- A dating partner/spouse
- A parent
- Some other adult
- An older sibling
- A friend or acquaintance of the same age
- An older child or teenager
- Other

The next element appears if one of the following options are selected for question «Who introduced you to porn the first time?»: Other

**If other, who introduced you to porn the first time?**

**Describe your first encounter with porn in your own words.**

For example, you can think about the following things: What kind of situation was it? What feelings did it raise in you? Did you encounter porn by accident, or had you decided to look for it? If someone else introduced you to porn, was the situation voluntary on your part or did you feel pressured or forced? You can write as much as you wish.

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**Thank you for your participation!**

In this section you can tell more about your thoughts and experiences regarding porn.

**Is there something you would like to share but did not get a chance to do that earlier in the survey? You can write about it here.**

## Appendix 2: Consent letter for interview participants

### Participation in the research project

#### ”Women Watching Porn: Navigating the Masculine World of Pornography”

We are glad that you are interested in participating in this research project on women’s use of pornography. The main purpose is to find out how women viewers navigate the masculine world of pornography. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

#### **Purpose of the project**

The purpose of the project is to investigate what women viewers think about pornography and how they manage in the masculine world of pornography. The project focuses on the experiences of Finnish women.

The main research question of the project is “How do women viewers navigate the masculine world of pornography?”.

The project is a master’s thesis.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

The participants of the project have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- Each participant must identify as a woman.
- Each participant must be 18 years or older.
- Each participant must identify as Finnish.
- Each participant must use pornography.

The project includes six interviewees and it aims to have approximately 100 survey participants.

#### **What does participation involve for you?**

The interview will take approximately one hour. It will include questions about, for example, your use of pornography, its role in your sex life and your thoughts on pornography. The interview will be recorded electronically.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can still change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All

information about you can be deleted upon request. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Your personal data will be accessed by the student conducting the project, Martta Ojala. No other person will have access to your data.

If you provide your name and contact details, I will replace them with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

The information you give will be used in my master's thesis. Directly identifiable data (e.g. name or contact details) will not be published in the thesis. Indirectly identifiable data (e.g. age, ethnicity, experiences and opinions) will be used in the thesis.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end on 31 July 2019. All collected data will be anonymised on this date. All directly identifiable data will be deleted completely. Indirectly identifiable data will be rewritten and grouped together so that individuals cannot be identified.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Oslo, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS – has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Martta Ojala, the student conducting the research: [marttako@student.hf.uio.no](mailto:marttako@student.hf.uio.no)
- University of Oslo via Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein (the student's supervisor): [d.l.kitchen-doderlein@ilos.uio.no](mailto:d.l.kitchen-doderlein@ilos.uio.no)



- The University of Oslo’s Data Protection Officer Maren Magnus Voll:  
personvernombud@uio.no
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email  
(personvernombudet@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Martta Ojala  
student

Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein  
supervisor

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## Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “Women Watching Porn: Navigating the Masculine World of Porn” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

- I give consent to participate in an interview
- I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project 31 July 2019.

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(Signed by participant, date)