

**What counsellors need to know about assessment of problematic pornography use.**

By

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A project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling (MC)

City University of Seattle

Victoria BC, Canada

Dec. 16, 2024

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### **Abstract**

The continued growth of the Internet, coupled with its influence on the consumption of pornography on individuals as well as families, has led to growing concerns for both academics and counsellors about the negative impact both on mental health and on relationships. This capstone explores the impacts of problematic Internet pornography consumption and ways counsellors can support adults who self-report problematic Internet pornography use. The literature review showed that problematic Internet pornography consumption is a controversial issue within the counselling and mental health fields. Within the literature, there proved to be no real consensus regarding the conceptualization and screening of problematic Internet pornography consumption which challenged the professional confidence of some counsellors. This has left them unable to decide/agree if problematic Internet pornography use was a behavioural addiction, human sexuality concern, or connected to gender based violence. The hope for this capstone project is to clearly define problematic Internet pornography consumption and to equip counsellors with clear information on how to provide improved quality care, and support assessments for clients that include questions surrounding Internet pornography use.

*Key words: Pornography, Internet Pornography, Assessments, Counselling,*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my kids, Beau and Jericho for being incredible while I was navigating parenting, working, and writing. I would like to thank my dear friend Katie who just knows how to be such a light for me in my world. I would like to thank my co-workers at Interior Community Services in Kamloops, Laurel and Lisa who were unwavering in their support of me throughout the years I balanced working and school. I would like to especially thank Shelly Dean (Bonnah) and Idris Marican who were pivotal in my career choices, inspired my educational opportunities and offered me experiences to jump from. I started my first class at City U in Langford in the winter of 2014, and while I took my time to complete this Master of Counselling program, I would not change the experience of learning for the world. Lastly, I would not have made it through this program without some incredibly special teachers: Allan Wade and Danelle Kabush thank you for your extra, you rose up for me, and I am forever grateful you two exist. To the class of cohort 12, this one is for you!

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## Chapter One Introduction

The prevalence of clients and their families coming into counselling presenting concerns or wanting information around the risk of Internet Pornography (IP) is growing (Sparks, 2020). This is due to the exponential increase in the number of pornography users and the level of engagement of these users (Potenza, 2018). Longitudinal studies like Price et al.'s (2016) found that pornography use has been increasing across successive birth generations, especially in more recent generations due to the rise of Internet access. Online pornography consumption has increased by 16 % in men and 8% in women from the 1990's and 2000s (Price et al, 2016). From 2010 onwards, there was a 50 % spike, as smart phones became available and as pornography started to present unregulated free access to users (Balester-Arnal, 2023). In this capstone project Internet pornography (IP) is defined as being third-party produced or user-generated online photos or videos featuring sexualized acts intended to sexually arouse the viewer (Donevan, 2021).

With the increase of IP usage, counsellors will experience more clients presenting issues related to internet pornography use in counselling sessions (Hagedorn, 2009; Hinman 2013; Short, Wetterneck, Bistricky, Shutter & Chase, 2016, Sparks, 2020). Despite counsellors having the best intentions, they may not know how to ask about IP use or understand its connection to other problems unless they are intentionally assessing for it in counselling sessions with clients (Hinman 2013, Sparks 2020). Consequently, there is a need for counsellors to address client issues related to IP use (Bloom & Hegadorn, 2016). The entirety of this capstone will explore negative effects of problematic Internet pornography consumption and how counsellors can improve therapeutic support for clients who are reporting problems with IP.

## Overview of the Topic

Major technological revolutions led to new forms of expression and access to pornography (Rudgeley, 2000). The introduction of videotapes in the 1970s abruptly changed the way of consuming pornography, allowing access to the content in the privacy and comfort of each person's home (Brown, 2017). Next came the cable TV with specialty channels, in the 1990s which allowed a further step toward accessibility and privacy, giving the possibility to retrieve content directly from home, removing the need to pick up the products from a physical store (Brown, 2017). Finally, the Internet revolutionized the market again, guaranteeing direct delivery to every person with a broadband connection (Donevan, 2021). After a first phase, when the users exchanged files through peer-to-peer software, nowadays, accessing pornographic is now just a click away and that is because of user generated content sites (UGC's) or tube sites which give unregulated access to anyone to post anything on them as well as view anything without restriction (Arthur et al, 2015).

It is estimated that by the end of 2024 4.88 billion people will have a smart phone and that by 2028, 1 in every 5 people will have a smart phone (*Oberlo.com*, 2024). Examples of popular tube sites are, You tube, Pornhub and You porn (Pornhub insight, 2024). Porn hub continues to be the most popular way to access online pornography and was the most visited website in the world wide web of websites in 2017 (Porn hub, 2018). In 2022, Pornhub, reported over 125 billion daily visits to the website and three quarters of that traffic was from smart phones (Pornhub insights, 2023).

Today most individuals have access to the internet, even most children have access to a smart phone and or a tablet (Wright, 2018). The concerns with so many of us having a device that connects to the internet is that individuals who have data, have unlimited access to online

pornography whether they know it or not (Donevan, 2021). It is estimated that 30% of all data transmitted online today is pornographic content (Wright, 2016). In addition, problems associated with pornography use are gaining significant clinical attention, in relationship to its prevalence on mental health and wellbeing (Binnie and Reavey, 2020).

Internet pornography (IP) is a problem when it causes negative life consequences to the user (Hesse & Pederson., 2017). Negative effects include feelings of shame, loneliness, depression, career loss and financial consequences. (Negash, et al., 2016). Relationship breakdown, possible inability to gain an erection with partner, shift in attitude towards more aggressive sex in real life setting after watching online pornography, increase in frequency of consuming Internet pornography and accidental exposure to children and /or young people when phones and computers are not locked or left on (Bridges et al, 2016). Despite these concerns pornography isn't a new phenomenon.

Pornography can be traced back to pre-historic times (Maddox, Rhodes & Markman., 2011; Sparks, 2020). Depictions of a sexual nature though rock art have been found in every historic era known (Rudgley, 2000). Because pornography has been woven into our world since human existence, not everyone views Internet pornography as a problem for mental wellness and relationships. In the modern context, some view Internet pornography as a vehicle of sexual liberation (Hall, 2019). Researchers have also found pornography to be a useful learning tool that expands one's sexual repertoire (Weinberg et al., 2010; Olmstead et al., 2012) and helps increase excitement and satisfaction under certain circumstances (Poulsen et al., 2013). Moreover, pornography may also be viable as a relational aid between partners (Hall, 2019). Pornographic content that is produced consensually and in which all actors are treated with respect and dignity, whose scenes depict safe sex practices do exist and can have a positive

impact on people's sense of sexuality (Hall, 2019). However, despite the research around the potential benefits of IP most have found it to be associated with problematic outcomes.

Problematic outcomes can extend past the individual pornography consumer. IP has also been shown to negatively impact an entire family (Glass, 2002). First, pornography is increasingly affecting couples' and family relationships commensurately with the increasing availability of pornographic material online (Glass, 2002). For example, Manning (2006) conducted a study about the effects of pornography consumption on the family and found that the internet was providing a gateway for the pornography industry to have an unprecedented proximity to the home, school, and work environments. Second, in the home, pornography can have detrimental influences on romantic relationships and is often perceived negatively by the partner who refrains from using pornography (Ford, et al, 2012). If the individual frequently using pornography keeps his or her frequent consumption a secret from his or her spouse, it often creates even more problems related to a power imbalance (Glass, 2002). Third, the consequences of IP can also affect children. Perry and Snawder (2017) shared that consumption of pornography among parents might be linked to guilt or distraction, affecting the parent-child relationship. The guilt arising from the parents' inability to engage with their children can create distress and could potentially fuel their desire to consume more IP to cope (Perry, 2017). Children sometimes see IP themselves when a smart phone is left unlocked or a computer is left on (Donevan, 2021). Fifteen years ago, Maltz & Maltz (2010) reported in their research that on average the age of first exposure of pornography was 11 years old. In 2020, Sparks reported that the first age of exposure is now between the ages 5-11 years old (2020). Children being exposed to IP can be very traumatic for the child and showcases that problematic IP consumption can impact more than just the consumer themselves.

Another area of concern is that online pornography has shown to have a connection to problematic behaviors towards women (Donovan, 2021). For example, problematic behaviour includes the increased objectification of women (Bridges et al. 2003), and an increase in aggressive attitudes towards women (Hald et al. 2010). In addition, those who compulsively use IP often suffer from the breakdown of self-esteem, lower productivity at home and at work, pain, self-loathing, failed promises and attempts to stop consuming IP, progressive isolation, and sexual problems (Cavaglioni, 2008). Individuals who self-report problematic use of IP also often experience a preoccupation with sex, leading to obsessive behavior and may request that their partner to engage in new sexual acts, or acts the partner finds uncomfortable (Cooper, Galbreath, & Becker, 2004; Hertlein & Piercy, 2008).

### **Purpose Statement**

As summarized above, the use of pornography is controversial and knowing how to assess what is problematic for clients, and their families, is an important skill for counselling therapists. The purpose of this capstone project is to provide a greater understanding of what problematic Internet pornography consumption is and how it presents in clients. In turn, the overall aim is also to show how counsellors can improve assessments and therapeutic responses to clients who may be struggling with pornography use. Clients will no doubt benefit when counsellors expand their assessments and confidence to ask questions about Internet pornography because it gives permission to the client to assess whether it is a problem. The intended audience for this project is counsellors who want to learn more about the negative impacts of consuming Internet pornography and how to assess and support when problems arise from its consumption.

## **Research Question**

The two research questions that guide this capstone are: “what are the impacts of problematic Internet pornography consumption” and “how can counsellors support adults who self-report problematic Internet pornography consumption”?

## **Theoretical Statement**

Because the world of pornography can be seen as liberating and empowering, as well as oppressive and exploitive, my grounding theory is critical feminist theory (CFT). Critical feminist theory (CFT) combines feminism and critical theory (Braithwaite & Schrodt., 2015) Feminism is the belief that women deserve social, and political rights equal to that of men (Boyle, 2014). Critical theory refers to theories that critique social injustice from an intersectional perspective that considers racism, ableism, sexism (Boyle, 2014). This combination of critical theory and feminism together, yields an interest on how power is deployed and how it is resisted (Jensen, 2021).

Critical feminist theory (CFT) is a relevant theory to apply to the topic of problematic internet pornography consumption because of how it analyzes pornography (Braithwaite & Schrodt., 2015). (CFT) examines pornography in its relationship with the viewer, how it intersects with patriarchy, capitalism and examines how women are treated in pornography by men (Boyle, 2014). The highest consumer of internet pornography is often men and boys (Donevan, 2021). Pornography may also influence a viewer’s attitude toward sex and women (Wright 2018). In a content analysis of pornography in 2010, Ana Bridges and colleagues found that 88% of the most popular rented pornography films contained physical violence like gagging, open hand slapping, hair pulling and choking women (Bridges, 2010). Nearly half of all scenes contained verbally aggressive acts, where women were called dehumanizing and derogatory

names or threatened with physical harm (Fritz et al., 2020). Recent studies investigating online pornography have observed the same theme of men's dominance over and violence towards women (Fritz et al., 2020a; Shor, 2019; Vera-Gray et al., 2021) and noted a very high incidence of overt racism (Fritz et al., 2020b).

### **Contribution to the field**

The widespread use of pornography among men and women, the proximity to families, coupled with a younger than ever average age of first exposure, has almost unanimously been attributed to the internet (Marshall, 2021). Technological advancements will only continue to make pornographic material more available to a larger number of individuals, therefore, it is important that counsellors are equipped with the proper tools to support this increase, especially in the counselling field (Marshall, 2021).

The goal of this capstone project is to invite dialogue amongst counsellors around how IP can impact the health and wellbeing of clients and what we as counsellors can do when clients are sharing that they feel that IP is having a negative impact on their lives. This capstone aims to contribute to an increase in competence around how counsellors are supporting clients who present with concerns around Internet pornography.

### **Positionality Statement**

I see the world from the eyes of being an abled-bodied, educated, financially secure, heterosexual white women. How I position myself creates some biases in how I view pornography as those privileged aspects of my identity influence my understanding and analysis of this topic. While embarking on the research topic of the impacts of pornography in counselling, I found myself pulled toward research around how specifically Internet pornography can potentially negatively impact individuals, family, society/societies.

I am also Registered Social Worker belonging to the British Columbia College of Social workers. I work for a large unionized not for profit agency where I offer counselling services. The program I work for is funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Having a social work degree has been a great starting point for me entering the field of counselling. My social work degree has complimented my experience working to obtain a Master of Counselling degree at City University in two ways. Firstly, my previous education offered me the confidence to continue to see the problems in the context that they are presented as opposed to solely within the person who is experiencing the problem. Secondly, the ability to think critically and ask questions from a place of curiosity as opposed to judgment. This Master of Counselling program has allowed me to grow in bigger ways and for that I am grateful.

Graduating with a Master of Counselling degree is very important to me, and while on this capstone journey, I have really improved my assessment skills as a counsellor in training. My research of Internet pornography for this capstone project has increased my online awareness and also made me reflect on what could be improved in my graduate degree experience. Including IP into the human sexuality course as well as the violence course at city u could really support counsellors in training to become more aware of client issues with IP.

The topic of pornography became of interest to me when I started to notice more clients come into session with problems associated with Internet pornography consumption. I supported couples, whereby one partner would identify the other partner's IP consumption was making them feel cheated on and contributing to issues in their relationship. I was getting more referrals for teenagers where they are self-identified that viewing IP was interfering in daily life. Lastly, I was also noticing a pattern of IP consumption concerns with individuals who were being physically or emotionally violent with their partners. What I was observing was that, many of

them were also self-reporting that they were watching a lot of Internet pornography. When I looked at any assessment, diagnosis, or treatment tools, I didn't know if they were reliable, or trusted. This led me to explore existing research around Internet pornography and counselling and try to offer more to the conversation for counsellors.

Previously, discussions around Internet pornography made me feel uncomfortable. I didn't initially know exactly why, however I soon realized that I didn't always like the way women like me were treated in pornography both online and more generally. Dines (2010) speaks to the discomfort some women have about pornography, in her book, *Porn Land*. The messages that porn disseminates about women is that women are objects and that women are always wanting to have sex (Dines, 2010). This discomfort around some messaging initially created some bias for me. Not all people that are on the Internet watch pornography, and not all people who watch IP have a problem. I want all people to feel safe on the Internet, and I worry about the industry of Internet pornography becoming increasingly more dangerous for viewers. Over the last ten years, I have become more comfortable with having conversations with clients around their use of pornography and continue to seek out clinical supervision and professional development opportunities as I learn. Below is a list of definitions that will increase the understanding of the topic.

### **Definition of Terms**

For this capstone project, I define problems associated with pornography consumption as problematic Internet pornography consumption.

*Addiction* is a chronically relapsing disorder that has been characterized by (1) compulsion to seek and take the drug or seek the behaviour, (2) loss of control in limiting intake, and (3) emergence of a negative emotional state (eg, dysphoria, anxiety, irritability) reflecting a

motivational withdrawal syndrome when access to the drug or behaviour is prevented (defined as Substance Dependence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

*Internet Pornography* (IP) is defined in this paper, as third-party produced or user-generated online photos or videos featuring sexualized acts intended to sexually arouse the viewer (Donevan, 2021,).

*Internet Pornography Addiction* is defined as compulsively using the internet to pursue, find, view and/or download pictures, movies or pornographic text for the sole purpose of sexual gratification (Hagedorn & Juhnke, 2013). Moreover, where the individual develops dependency upon and tolerance toward IP, has trouble controlling impulses to view IP (Bancroft & Vukadinovic, 2004) and suffers from repetitive and progressive compulsions to view pornography on the Internet despite adverse social, biological, relationship or career consequences (Kafka, 2010).

*Pornographers* are those profiting from pornography production and distribution. Like other pimps and traffickers, pornographers understand boundaries are more easily pushed when women and girls face multiple vulnerabilities, which is why they target the most vulnerable women and girls (Donevan, 2018).

*Pornography* is defined as third-party produced or user-generated photos or videos featuring sexualized acts intended to sexually arouse the viewer. These images are produced for the purpose of generating income and are characterized by men's dominance over women, where women appear to enjoy humiliation, degradation, and violence (Donovan, 2021).

*Pornography addiction* is defined as craving for more behaviour, increased psychological tolerance to exposure, and withdrawal symptoms in the absence of stimuli (Skinner, 2005, Tarver, 2010).

*Problematic Internet pornography consumption* is defined as the use of Internet pornography that causes adverse life consequences, for the user, negatively impacting daily functioning, disturbances in is relational, social, and emotional functioning are considered effects of problematic internet pornography consumption/use (Hesse-Pederson, 2017, Mitchell et al, 2005, Schneider, 2000).

In summary, these definitions are essential in understanding the components of this capstone and subsequent literature review.

### **Outline of the Capstone Project Chapters**

The remainder of the capstone will be presented as follows: chapter two will be the literature review, and it is written highlighting three areas. The first section will explore the identified barriers for counsellors in asking questions about Internet pornography in sessions. The second section will explore the challenges of determining when pornography becomes problematic for individuals. The third section will conclude with exploring the literature of how counsellors are responding and treating problematic Internet pornography consumption with their clients today.

Chapter three will review the findings of my literature review, my recommendations on how to increase the competence of counsellors when clients are self-reporting problems with Internet pornography as well as provide an example of Internet pornography assessment questions that could be used. Lastly, there will be a section of reflection on personal learning.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The first section of this literature review will explore barriers to counsellors identifying problematic Internet pornography consumption and counsellor likelihood to assess problematic pornography consumption in the future. The second section will explore the difficulty in defining when pornography becomes problematic for individuals. The third section will review the history of psychotherapy assessments for individuals who have self-reported problems with Internet pornography (IP) use in counselling.

### **Counsellor barriers to asking about pornography in counselling sessions**

There exists a growing number of reports of individuals who claim their Internet pornography (IP) use has become problematic. The symptoms reported by these individuals, both men and women, include dysfunctions in sexual arousal, inability to achieving an orgasm (Potenza, 2018), loss of libido or sexual interest in a real partner, and loss of interest in one's romantic partner (Poulsen, Busby, & Galovan., 2013). Symptoms also include a variety of problems in psychosocial functioning, such as depression, the risk of losing career and relationship opportunities, isolation and a lack of motivation (Philaretou, Malhfouz, & Allen, 2005; Young, 2004). These symptoms have also been seen in problematic Internet gaming consumption (Backlund et al., 2022).

In 2013, the DSM-5 included a diagnosis called Internet gaming disorder (IGD). The diagnosis focused on online gaming, and its impact on individuals (Klugah-Brown, 2022). Accumulating evidence suggested that the development of the IGD symptoms, such as; loss of motivation, relationship strain, and isolation accompanied by behavioral and emotional dysregulations, including increased levels of depression and anxiety (Andreassen *et al.*, 2016), as well as changes in brain structure and function warranted a diagnosis (Klugah-

Brown *et al.*, 2021; Yu *et al.*, 2021). In addition, excessive and problematic engagement in Internet gaming might be accompanied by changes in the structural architecture of the brain, particularly in terms of the integrity of gray matter (Gao *et al.*, 2021; Klugah-Brown *et al.*, 2021; Qin *et al.*, 2020; Solly *et al.*, 2022). The inclusion of Internet Gaming in the DSM-5 as a behaviour addiction is an interesting inclusion only for the fact that IP is not included.

Problematic Internet pornography consumption has not been included in the DSM while interest in researching the impacts and symptoms continue (Backlund *et al.*, 2022). Many individuals describe feeling a strong compulsion to view IP even at times when it is highly inappropriate to do so, such as at work, in a room where children are present, or on a computer that is not their own (Potenza, 2018). Others also report developing unhealthy misconceptions of sexuality and sexual practice, such as beliefs that certain sexual acts (e.g., anal sex) are more socially normative than they are. Others report feeling negatively influenced by how pornographic videos display sex (Peter & Valkenburg., 2007).

The Internet has clearly become the central vehicle for distribution of pornography, which has altered the way individuals use pornography in three major aspects (Maas & Dewey, 2018). First, the Internet makes pornography *available*, because nearly everyone has internet access; second, the use of pornography has become *anonymous*, because one can access internet pornography without anyone else knowing; third, the Internet makes pornography *affordable*, because one no longer has to purchase a VHS or DVD as the majority of internet pornography is free on internet tube sites (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Campbell, 2000, Maas & Dewey, 2018). The increased accessibility of Internet pornography could explain why a study of high school students in the United States found that students are exposed to pornography online a few times

per month, compared with exposure to pornography in movies or magazines a few times per year (Chang et al., 2016).

It stands to reason that counselors will increasingly see clients with this presenting problem and more parents worried about children Internet pornography exposure (Cooper, Galbreath, & Becker, 2004; Hertlein & Piercy, 2008). If practitioners are unwilling or unable to discuss this issue from an informed and compassionate lens, then their clients will be unable to evaluate the harm that may have come from IP and may be less likely to talk about developing positive relationships and having fulfilled and healthy sexual relationships (Delmonico & Carnes, 1999). It is imperative that counselors gain knowledge of and comfort in discussing the experiences of a person who is identifying problems with Internet pornography to be better prepared to offer appropriate therapeutic responses (Delmonico & Carnes, 1999; Turner, 2009, Maas & Dewey, 2018).

### **Counsellor education for treating pornography**

With the rapid development of modern technology, there are a variety of factors that make problematic internet pornography use challenging for counsellors to treat (Guo, 2024). First, clinicians working with individuals on sexuality issues such a pornography, tend to feel some level of discomfort (Short et.al, 2016). That could be from several reasons. Some counsellors may feel uncomfortable broaching the topic of pornography use due to their own private opinions on the topic (Walters & Spengler, 2016, Sparks, 2020). Some counsellors could think pornography is violent, not congruent with their religious beliefs, or a form of cheating (Guo, 2024). While others may struggle with their feelings of discomfort in addressing or assessing for issues related to pornography in sessions due to feeling incompetent with the topic (Walters and Sprengler, 2016).

Aayes and Haddock (2009) interviewed 100 child and family therapists who were working with clients who were self-reporting feeling concerned about their Internet pornography consumption and 78% of those counsellors interviewed felt unprepared to help. A study from Bloom et al, (2016) found that specific training for counsellors around supporting clients who report problems with online pornography usage were very limited. Of those interviewed, 47 % of counsellors described having no graduate school training on issues of IP consumption, and of those who reported being trained, 79% felt only slightly trained (Bloom, 2016).

A similar study of Zeglin's (2018) agreed that counsellors were less likely to ask about Internet pornography consumption concerns in counselling due to lack of post-master's degree education opportunities around his topic. Moreover, Zeglin (2018) argued that counsellors should not even be assessing or treating problems associated with Internet pornography without proper training. While this is what counsellors do post graduate degree, is continue their education towards specialities like, EMDR, substance use and addiction or working with family law for example, problems with Internet pornography professional development either was not available or were not sought out (Hinman, 2013). Zeglin (2018) noted counsellors are at risk of judgement errors in support or responding to problematic Internet pornography consumption without up-to-date training and proper clinical supervision. Without up-to-date training and clinical supervision, judgment errors such as discomfort-bias can occur (Zeglin, 2018).

Discomfort bias refers to the unconscious tendency for individuals, including counsellors, to avoid situations, conversations, or emotions that make them feel uncomfortable (Walters & Spengler., 2016). In counselling, this bias can manifest in several ways, often leading to challenges in effective therapeutic practice. For counselors, discomfort bias might occur when they feel uneasy or threatened by the client's experiences and this bias can hinder the counselor's

ability to create a safe and open environment for the client, potentially undermining the therapeutic process (Munch-Juriscic., 2020).

Discomfort bias in counseling is a natural and human reaction that can impact the effectiveness of therapy (Walters & Spengler., 2016). The therapeutic relationship is built on trust and open communication. If a counselor's discomfort leads to avoidance or defensiveness, it can damage the client's sense of safety, preventing them from being open or vulnerable in sessions (Munch-Juriscic., 2020). When a counselor avoids exploring difficult emotions or topics such as pornography consumption, the client may feel invalidated, misunderstood, or unable to fully process their issues (Walters & Spengler., 2016). However, counselors who acknowledge and address their own discomfort can use the learning as an opportunity for growth and deeper understanding. Through self-reflection, cultural awareness, and professional support, counselors can mitigate discomfort bias and better serve the diverse needs of their clients (Walters & Spengler, 2017).

### **Competence and Confidence**

Increasing a counsellor's confidence and competence in supporting clients concerned with their internet pornography consumption in counselling sessions can be difficult without a standard assessment tool (Sparks, 2020). Short et al, 2016 surveyed 183 counsellors and their competence to assess and support problems related to a client's Internet pornography concerns. These professionals indicated that while they felt trained to deal with issues surrounding Internet pornography only indicated a perceived competence after training, and that if there was a definitive diagnosis and treatment plan in the DSM-5-TR, then they would feel more confident in their responses to clients self-reporting and the desire to initiate assessment questions (Short et al, 2016).

Internet pornography addiction is not included in the DSM-5- TR for several reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of consensus with mental health professionals around whether excessive pornography use constitutes being a true addiction (Antons & Brand., 2021). Secondly, there is an absence of clear diagnostic criteria. There are no universally agreed-upon criteria for diagnosing pornography consumption as a disorder, making it difficult to classify in the DSM-5- TR (Antons et al., 2019). Thirdly, there is a variability of impact. The effects of pornography use vary widely, with some individuals experiencing negative consequences and others not, complicating its classification (Antons & Brand., 2021). For example, excessive pornography use does not consistently meet the diagnostic criteria for addiction, such as tolerance, withdrawal, and compulsive behaviour which are required for a disorder to be labeled as an addiction (Crosby & Twohig., 2016). Lastly, more research is needed to understand the potential harms of online pornography use, and whether it should be classified as a behavioural addiction in future DSM editions (Gola & Potenza., 2018).

### **Clinical Supervision**

Clinical supervision is necessary for all counsellors (Walters & Spengler 2016). Clinical supervision has a key role in promoting counsellor development across the professional life span, positive client outcomes, and effective agency functioning (Pope & Vasquez, 2011). However, clinical supervision is not always present or available to counsellors (Lindman, 2021). Walters & Spengler's (2016) study identified that counsellors were not asking about Internet pornography consumption. Not only that, but some respondents surveyed identified lack of on-going clinical supervision as the barrier (Walters & Spengler., 2016). Clinical supervision can be extremely important to increase confidence in addressing IP concerns within counselling and can be beneficial to decrease bias through internal reflection (Walter's & Spengler, 2016). The ethical

issues that arise due to bias, and lack of preparedness and training, indicates a need for the promotion of better education around online pornography use for new and experienced counsellors (Sanabria & Muray, 2018).

### **Inconsistent definitions of pornography consumption**

Another issue preventing counsellors from understanding when IP use becomes problematic, involves the inconsistent definitions of pornography use across research (Marshall, 2021). For example, researchers have historically referred to problems related to problematic IP use as: Internet pornography addiction, Internet pornography compulsivity, online sexual compulsivity, cybersex, hyper sexual disorder, problematic sexual behaviour, sexual compulsivity, sex addiction, internet addiction, behaviour addiction, and process addiction, to name a few (Carnes 2001, Cooper et al., 1999, Kraus Voon Potenza 2016, Laier, Pekal and Brand 2014, Love, Laier Brand Hatch Hajela 2015 Williams 2017). Furthermore, Short and colleagues (2012) found that an overwhelming majority of studies did not provide a clear definition of problematic pornography consumption. Moreover, among 14 % of the studies that did provide a definition, there was no overlap (Marshall, 2021, p.30). In other words, all the definitions given to the respondents were different among studies reviewed (Fisher & Barack 2001). Having clarity around what pornography is defined and how it is classified will only work to improve our understanding of this area of concern for clients and strengthen the area of study.

The confusion continues when reviewing literature on internet pornography consumption because of how the problem is conceptualized in different studies. Some studies that were reviewed were framing the problem related to consuming Internet pornography as an addiction, some studies were framing Internet pornography consumption more as a human sexuality

concern, and lastly some studies framed Internet pornography consumption as connected to perpetuating gender-based violence. Below I will explore those classifications.

### **Conceptualizing problematic pornography consumption as an addiction**

Client's self-reporting problematic pornography use in counselling is gaining significant clinical and academic attention, particularly in relation to its prevalence, cause, correlations and effects on mental health and wellbeing (Binnie and Reavey 2020). By conceptualizing internet pornography (IP) as a medical addiction, it characterizes the problem by suggesting that the brain can be easily addicted to Internet pornography much like one would be addicted to a substance (Love et al., 2013). Since the inclusion of gambling addiction disorder in the DSM -5, behavioural addiction constructs have gained greater currency (Shevlin & Ivey., 2024). There is increasing evidence suggesting that excessive and compulsive online pornography consumption has similar effects to substance-dependencies, including interference with working memory performance (Laier, Schulte, & Brand, 2013), neuroplasticity changes that reinforce use (Hilton, 2013, Love et al., 2015), and the significant negative association between consumption and grey matter volume in the brain (Kühn & Gallinat, 2014). This increase in Internet availability also contributed to a significant role in the process of losing self-control, which increases the risk of mis-using internet pornography and related addictive behaviour (Privara, 2023).

In a recent study Shevlin & Ivey (2024), investigated psychological aspects of adults who were self-reporting problematic Internet pornography consumption to better understand how sufferers came to label themselves and how this label simultaneously constructed and constricted their identity. Data from 10 participants were collected using semi-structured individual interviews, a practice best suited to obtaining rich information about experiences of IP addiction (Dempsey, 2018, Shevlin & Ivey, 2024). The results yielded insights into how self-reporting

was experienced by all the participants to relieve feelings of shame (Shevlin & Ivey, 2024). Another insight with the results was that all the participants felt like they were more understood by others if they self-identified as an internet pornography addict, even if it didn't necessarily represent how they truly felt (Shevlin & Ivey, 2024). Shevlin & Ivey (2024) help understand that the pornography addiction label is helpful to some because the neurochemical objectification of desire denudes it of agency and, hence, individual meaning and responsibility (Shevlin, Ivey, 2024). That potentially, the IP consumer could separate the pornography problem and the person.

However, this view has been strenuously challenged by critics who asserted that IP addiction lacks diagnostic validity (Clarkson & Kopaczewski, 2013; Prause & Williams, 2020; Voros, 2009; D. Williams et al., 2020). Williams (202) argue that studies supporting an IP addiction diagnosis are methodologically unsound and obscure important social contexts and discursive practices in which sexual behaviours are embedded (Car-meli & Blass, 2013). By expanding addiction to encompass pornography, medical "experts" have the power to define "normal" sexual behaviour. In this way, an addiction model and the associated treatment create a disciplinary regime that defines and enforces sexual "normality" (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, Shevlin & Ivey 2024).

Controversially, most research that conceptualized problematic pornography use as an addiction aims to pathologize the person, to best classify this phenomenon (Ley, Prause, and Finn 2014). While classifying problematic IP consumption as an addiction seems to be the most researched way to conceptualize the problem, other ways have risen. The two other popular ways to classify problematic internet pornography consumption were either as a human sexuality problem or as a problem related to violence. Below I will summarize these two classifications.

### **Conceptualizing problematic pornography consumption as gender-based violence**

By conceptualizing internet pornography as gender-based violence, there is the belief that IP inherently violent (Speed, et al., 2021). In 2008, “Pornography” and “sex” are reported to be the most heavily searched terms on the Internet, comprising 25% of all searches (Carroll et al., 2008). In 2015, the search, “free rape porn” in Google has become one of the fastest growing search terms since 2005 (Makin & Morczek, 2015), suggesting that online exposure to violence against women is becoming more socially acceptable (Maas & Dewey, 2018).

The acceleration of sexual aggression of Internet pornography is demonstrated by the growing popularity of rape porn searches and rape sites with many of them hosting real webcam footage depicting sexual assault against women (Gossett & Byrne, 2002; Makin & Morczek, 2015). The ubiquity of this kind of material is alarming as sexual objectification theory posits that through repetitive representations of sexualized girls and women within a culture, boys learn to treat women as sexual objects, and girls learn to perceive themselves as sexual objects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996).

Content analyses of the most popular pornography over the last 10 years consistently report aggressive depictions of sexuality and power differentials between men and women across mediums (Maas & Dewey, 2018). For example, 48.8% of scenes contain verbal aggression consisting of insults, threats, and coercive language and 88.2% of scenes contain physical aggression such as slapping, forced gagging during fellatio, and choking (Maas & Dewey, 2018). Some scholars agree that while some forms of pornography, particularly violent pornography (Malamuth & Check, 1985; Rostad et al., 2019; Skorska et al., 2018), are associated with aggression and hostility toward women, it is not true of all forms of pornography (Hald et al., 2010; Skorska et al., 2018). Bridges et al. (2010) analyzed the frequency in which violence

occurred in pornographic online videos and found 90% contained some form of physical aggression towards women and half contained verbal aggression. Vera-Gray et al., (2021) completed a more recent study exploring around how mainstream pornography positions sexual violence as normal. This study found that 1 in 8 pornography videos described sexual activity that constitutes sexualized violence directly in their advertising title.

Much of the prior and current literature primarily focuses on men's pornography use, with fewer studies also investigating gender differences in pornography use (Maas, Dewey, 2018). Prior work regarding the impact of various media exposures on female sexual socialization indicate that IP affected woman differently than men (Maas, Dewey, 2018). In a longitudinal study which included men and women, findings demonstrated that men's use of pornography was linked to body dissatisfaction, yet women's use of pornography was unrelated to their body dissatisfaction (Peter & Valkenburg, 2014). Another study demonstrated that women who thought they were "addicted" to online pornography were much more drawn to online stories about sex and interacting in sex chat rooms, whereas men were more attracted to pornographic images (Schneider, 2000). This may indicate that Internet pornography's intended audience is men.

In a qualitative piece, McKee (2005) reported dozens of opinions, some in conflict and some in concordance, about the nature and the effects of pornography. This variability hints at an important aspect of the wider debate: people do not react in uniform ways to pornography (McKee, 2005). In contrast, Shor, and Seida (2019) found that the top pornographic videos on the free pornography website Porn Hub from the last 10 years, did not support the idea that there was increase in an aggressive content and that it was noting a decrease in violent pornography content. Some studies found a statistically significant relationship between online pornography

consumption (violent and non-violent genres) and violence-supportive attitudes (Bridges, 2019; Foubert et al., 2019; Malamuth, 2018; Stanley et al., 2016). This includes trivialization of sexual violence and beliefs that minimize the impact of victimization along with attitudes associated with the concept of 'rape myth acceptance' such as that women enjoy being raped (Beck et al., 2012; Durán et al., 2018; Harper, Franco, & Wills, 2019). Some evidence suggests that consuming online pornography can contribute to rape-supportive attitudes with a greater tolerance of sexual violence towards women (Malamuth, 2018; Palermo et al., 2019).

### **Conceptualizing problematic pornography consumption as a human sexuality problem**

By conceptualizing internet pornography as a human sexuality problem, researchers assess how the cultural script regarding pornography seems to have changed in society from a morally reprehensible attitude to social acceptance (Lofgren- Martensen et al, 2013). A study from Adrian-Warburg et al, (2024) explored the relationship between pornography use, sexual fantasy, and behavior. The study suggested that pornography use appears so persistent across time and culture because it is related to a human universal, the ability to fantasize (Adrian-Warburg et al, 2024). Consequently, Internet pornography use is an opportunity to acquire media-mediated sexual fantasies, and pornography use interacts with sexual fantasies and, to a much weaker extent, with sexual behavior (Adrian-Warburg et al, 2024). The results were like the hypothesis, in that Internet pornography users do not automatically apply all behavior messaging they encounter (Adrian-Warburg, 2024).

In Thomas & Binnie's (2024) qualitative study, interviews were conducted with men who self-reported problematic pornography use. The themes highlight the men's relationship with their sexuality as a feature of their self-perceived problematic pornography use. The research suggests that the experiences of self-perceived problematic pornography use are influenced and

maintained by an incongruent and conflicting relationship between an individual's own experiences of sexuality and self-perceptions of pornography use (Thomas & Binnie, 2024). Given that this topic can be quite taboo, it is not surprising that some people who are using pornography are confused about why they use it and who they want to be as a sexual partner.

In the Journal of Medical Internet research Carrott et al (2020) did research around concerns around internet pornography's impact on viewers' own sexuality (Carrott et al, 2020). The study tried to identify how many times condoms were used during sexual behaviour and how often aggression and violence were happening in IP videos (Carrott, et al., 2020). The researchers found that condom use was rare showing only about 2% use on average. 75% of scenes depicted aggression, such as hitting/ spanking, and unequal sexual relations were shown. In general, when violence is found in IP videos, it is always perpetrated by men against women (Vera-Grey et al., 2021). The conclusion presented that no use of condoms and gender inequalities are common concerns in pornography, which has implications for the development of healthy sexual relationships among pornography viewers.

### **Assessments**

The assessment and treatment for clients who come to counselling concerned about their online pornography use is challenging to review (Lindman, 2021). Little is known about the assessment tools used with adult clients for issues related to Internet pornography use due to a lack of cohesion among assessment tools today (Chen & Jien, 2020). In 2018, Giodano and Cashwell looked at assessment practices for sex addiction by counsellors, where it was discovered that some counsellors engaged in formal assessments, others used informal assessments, but most did not assess or address these issues at all. Of the 77 counsellors that were surveyed a third of those indicated not being educated in problematic Internet pornography use, 80 % shared that they had never used a formal assessment method to assess for concerns

with Internet pornography (Lindman, 2021). Moreover, 50 % shared that when counsellors had assessed they did so informally in response to what the client shared. (Giodano & Cashwell., 2018; Lindman, 2021). This study shows that of those surveyed, most are leaning into informal assessments as necessary, as opposed to assessments being common practice. Below are a few popular assessments that some counsellors refer to today.

Dr. Kimberley Young, a well published author on the topic of Internet addiction, including social media and internet pornography developed questions to assess and diagnose internet addiction and many counsellors today (Young 1998, 2009, Hinman 2013). Young's assessment tool was developed to measure the presence and severity of Internet and technology dependency among adults. (See appendix). In this assessment tool, Young classifies Internet addiction as a clinical disorder (Young, 2017). In this tool, the term Internet is used to refer to all contact that individuals have with web-based services, including websites, Internet-based games, social media, and online pornography, accessed on all types of computers, screens, devices, phones, portable electronic devices, and other forms of technology (Young, 2017). Many counsellors do use this tool for problematic IP consumption. This tool has characterized Internet addiction as an impulse control disorder comparable to pathological gambling because of overlapping diagnostic criteria and symptomatology (Young, 2017).

Another assessment to be noted is the The Cyber- pornography Use inventory (CPUI) (Grubes et al, 2010), Hinman, 2013). The CPUI was developed by Grubes & Collegues (2010), was based on the idea that “addictive behavior is characterized by an inability to stop the behavior, significant negative effects as a result of the behavior, and a generalized obsession with the behavior” (Delmonico & Miller, 2003, p. 321). This principle is not just true in internet addiction as outlined in the ISST (Delmonico & Miller, 2003), but in substance addiction, sexual

addiction, and impulse control disorders (Grubes et al, 2010). The CPUI assessment distinguishes itself due to wanting to assess problems with Internet pornography addiction over assessing for online sexual compulsivity (Grubes et al, 2010).

The Problematic Pornography Use Scale (PPUS) developed by Kor et al, (2014) is another example of a measure of pornography use that focuses on measuring compulsive pornography use. Development of the items in the PPUS involved adapting items found in the Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998), the Hypersexual Disorder Questionnaire (Reid et al., 2012), and the CPUI (Grubbs et al., 2010). Combining items from these different questionnaires helped bridge the gap between research that associates elements of the hypersexual disorder found in the DSM-V (Reid et al, 2011), other addictions such as gambling or internet addiction (Kor et al, 2014), and what previous research has already found in terms of pornography addiction (Grubbs et al., 2010; Grubbs et al., 2015).

The final measure that will be reviewed is the Compulsive Pornography Consumption Scale (CPC) developed by Noor and colleagues (2014). This measure was developed to assess compulsive pornography consumption. The six items created for this measure were adapted from definitions provided in the DSM-V regarding obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors (Noor et al., 2014. DSM-V and American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM-5 characterizes obsessive-compulsive disorders by the presence of recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images experienced as intrusive and unwanted (termed “obsessions”); and/or repetitive behaviors or mental acts that the individual feels driven to perform to reduce anxiety or distress (termed “compulsions”) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Other supporting criteria that obsessions or compulsions are time-consuming, cause clinically significant distress, and/or impair social, occupational, or other key areas of functioning were used to validate the

key presenting characteristics. These were translated into survey items to assess the key criteria (Noor et al, 2014). The CPC scale is comprised of five items (Noor, Rosser, & Erickson, 2014). Two items assessed obsessive thinking about pornography: (1) I thought of pornography when I was trying to focus on other things; and (2) I was upset because I could not stop thinking about pornography; and three items assess compulsive pornography behavior: (3) I watched pornography even though I did not want to; (4) It was necessary for me to watch pornography to feel at ease; and (5) I could only have an orgasm when watching pornography. Participants answer each item using a 7-point Likert-type scale (Rosser et al, 2014).

Lastly, the problematic pornography consumption scale (PPCS) which is the most recent assessment that has gain popularity among counsellors and being mostly used to assess Internet pornography (Bothe, 2017). The goal of the PPCS was to develop a brief scale, (PPCS), based on Griffiths's (2005) six-component addiction model that can distinguish between non problematic and problematic pornography use (Bothe et al, 2017). The PPCS was developed using an online sample of 772 respondents (Bothe et al 2017). The reliability of the PPCS was excellent, and measurement invariance was established (Bothe et al, 2017). The study examined four crucial elements, salience, mood modification, conflict, and tolerance (Bothe et at, 2017). (See Appendix).

The first element is *salience*, referring to the high importance of pornography in the person's life, such that it dominates his or her thinking, feelings, and behaviors. The second component refers to *mood modification* as a subjective experience that users report as depending on the desired emotional state. The third dimension is *conflict*, including interpersonal conflicts between problematic users and their significant others, occupational or educational conflicts (depending upon the individual's age), and intrapsychic conflicts (e.g., knowing the activity is

causing problems but feeling unable to consequence of viewing pornography. The fourth dimension is *tolerance* and refers to the process whereby increasing amounts of activity are required to achieve the same mood-modifying effects.

Overall, the assessments provide valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement, offering a solid foundation for further development and growth.

### **Chapter Three: Discussion and Application**

The central purpose of this capstone was to explore two research questions. The first was, “what are the impacts of problematic internet pornography consumption on individuals” and secondly, “how can counsellors support adults who self-report problematic internet pornography consumption”? The previous chapter first examined literature as it pertained to counsellors assessing for problematic internet pornography consumption in sessions with adult clients. Secondly, the literature reviewed how most counsellors are currently conceptualizing the problem of internet pornography consumption and lastly what assessments tools are counsellor using in their counselling practice today.

Chapter one introduced the growing concern that availability and accessibility of Internet pornography had an impact on the counselling field. More counsellors were having individuals come into counselling self-reporting that internet pornography is a problem for them or their family member. Chapter one concluded with encouraging counsellors to start including questions about internet pornography consumption in their initial assessments.

Chapter two reviewed literature allowed more insight into if counsellors were assessing for problematic internet pornography consumption in their counselling sessions, how counsellor were conceptualizing problems with internet pornography consumption and lastly what assessment tools were counsellors using today.

In summary, of the literature reviewed, most suggested that most counsellors are not necessarily asking questions in counselling about problems with Internet pornography consumption and if they are, it is usually in response to the client bringing it up. Most of the literature reviewed showcased that the most chosen way to conceptualize problematic IP

consumption was as an addiction. And lastly, most of the frequently used assessment forms use the lens of the medical model informed by the past iterations of the DSM.

### **Summary of the effects of problematic internet pornography consumers**

The effects of Internet pornography on individuals depend on the type of internet pornography consumed and differ from person to person. However, where IP consumers struggle most is when the IP use is impacting their daily life functioning, causing relationship breakdowns and the user feels isolated (Brown, 2017). More notably, the consumption of Internet pornography has been shown to have an impact on sexual risk-taking, including less frequent usage of condoms and birth control, as well as more aggressive sex (Wright et al, 2018). IP can negatively impact sexual functioning, become obsessive, and could put other family members at risk if children accidentally are exposed (Potenza, 2018). Consuming online pornography is a contributing factor to rape-supportive attitudes with a greater tolerance of sexual violence towards women (Malamuth, 2018; Palermo et al., 2019). The Internet pornography industry is not well regulated, and the website Pornhub can be accessed with no password, has no age restriction, and what is seen can often be traumatic (Donovan, 2021).

### **Discussion**

The research that I reviewed for this literature review focussed on pornography consumption in the male population (Privara, 2023). That may be because men tend to consume more internet pornography as well as the internet pornography industry is more focussed on men as their target audience (Donovan, 2021).

Internet pornography may mean different things to both researchers and research participants. Therefore, a consistent and clear working definition of pornography is needed prior to assessment (Ayres & Haddock, 2009). There are no official diagnostic criteria and

classification for problematic pornography use, resulting in diverse definitions and measurements of the given phenomenon (Fernandez & Griffiths, 2019). Thus, in the case of problematic pornography use, pornography is the central focus of the users' life; problematic users experience failures when trying to control their use, with recurring unsuccessful efforts to regulate or reduce it; and they engage in pornography use despite the negative consequences and deriving little or no satisfaction from it anymore (World Health Organization, 2018). Also, it has to be noted that problematic pornography use and frequency of pornography use are related but yet may be considered as distinct domains of pornography use (Böthe et al., 2018; Gola, Lewczuk, & Skorko., 2016; Grubbs & Perry, 2019; Grubbs, Perry, Wilt., & Reid, 2019; Kor et al., 2014). Therefore, it may be assumed that there are individuals who use pornography frequently and experience no related problems at all (Bothe et al., 2020). At the same time, others may use pornography just as frequently and indicate that frequency being problematic for them (Ferguson, Coulson, & Barnett, 2011).

### **Application**

Counsellors are encouraged to systemically assess the individual client's presenting concerns around internet pornography consumption with a wider assessment than the medical model. I propose that an assessment should include the context, history of consumption, what kind of pornography they are consuming, who else knows about their internet pornography consumption, how they know it is a problem for them and potentially a safety plan if other family members, particularly children 18 and under, use the adults phone/ computer (Gibbons, et al, 2020). Counsellors would then be able to use a harm reduction approach to inform specific pieces of therapeutic support the individual and the family would need to reduce problems

associated with watching Internet pornography and its accompanying distress (Gibbons, et al. 2020).

A harm reduction approach is a set of strategies aimed at reducing the negative consequences of certain behaviors or activities, particularly those associated with risky or harmful behavior, without necessarily requiring individuals to stop those behaviors completely (Woodley, 2024). While it is more commonly applied to substance use, it has a place in the treatment plan of problematic IP consumption (Woodley, 2024).

Harm reduction for problematic Internet pornography consumption involves strategies and practices aimed at minimizing the negative impact of pornography use while recognizing that total abstinence may not be realistic or desired for everyone (Aamir et al (2021). The goal is to foster healthier pornography consumption patterns and address the psychological, relational, and emotional consequences that may arise from excessive or problematic use (Aamir et al, 2021). Below are the set ideas that could act as a treatment method for counsellors working to support individuals who have self-reported problems with IP in counselling.

**Self-awareness and reflection. Identifying activators/triggers:** Recognize what prompts the urge to view pornography, whether it is emotional distress, boredom, loneliness, or stress. By identifying triggers, users can address the root causes more effectively (Short.et al, 2016).

**Mindfulness practices:** Developing mindfulness and emotional regulation skills can help individuals manage the urge to consume pornography impulsively. Mindfulness can also foster self-compassion and reduce feelings of shame or guilt (Short et al., 2016).

**Setting limits and usage boundaries:** Setting clear limits around frequency, duration, and specific types of pornography consumed (e.g., restricting use to certain times or situations) can help reduce harmful patterns of consumption. **Scheduled Breaks:** Take intentional breaks from

pornography use to create distance and reflect on its role in life. Digital Tools for Self-Regulation: Use apps or software (like screen time trackers, website blockers, or porn filters) to help users track and control their consumption (Davis et al., 2020)

Engaging in healthy alternatives exploring intimacy and sexual health: Developing alternative sources of sexual expression or intimacy, such as healthy sexual relationships, self-pleasure practices, or exploring alternative forms of sexual education, can provide fulfilling and less harmful outlets.

Understanding influence: Learning about the potential harms of excessive pornography use, such as desensitization, unrealistic expectations of sex, and relational issues, can help individuals make more informed choices. Recognizing Impact on Relationships: If pornography use is affecting relationships (e.g., intimacy or trust with a partner), individuals may benefit from exploring communication techniques, healthy sexual boundaries, and engaging in couples' therapy if needed (Vera-Gray et al., 2021).

Minimizing harmful content: When consumption is part of one's routine, individuals can focus on seeking ethical pornography, which promotes positive, consensual, and healthy sexual relationships. Some people prefer to consume content that aligns with their values, such as pornography that focuses on mutual respect, diversity, and informed consent.

Avoiding desensitizing content: Avoid content that progressively becomes more extreme or unrealistic, which can lead to desensitization, altered expectations of sex, and potential impacts on real-life relationships.

Having a safety plan. Place a passcode on all devices that connect to the internet. Place parent controls on devices for family members under 19 that need help to stop unwanted ads or click on a link that may take them to a pornography site (Landi et al., 2023). Talk to your

kids about how to report to you if they have some come across Internet pornography on their devices, talk to yourself about how you want to respond.

Building a healthy sexual narrative challenging unrealistic expectations: Addressing the unrealistic portrayals of sex in pornography by fostering a healthy sexual narrative is key. This includes understanding the difference between fantasy and reality, educating about consent, and recognizing diverse sexual experiences. Encourage healthy views of bodies, self-esteem, and body image, challenging negative stereotypes that pornography may reinforce (Davis et al., 2020).

Gradual reduction strategy and setting measurable goals. Instead of immediate cessation, set gradual goals for reduction. This can reduce the sense of failure or pressure while still progressing toward healthier consumption.

Promoting positive sexual education and accessing health resources. Engage in educational resources that promote healthy sexual behavior, communication, and relationships. There are online platforms that focus on ethical pornography, consent, and sexual wellness (Sharpe et al., 2021).

By integrating these harm reduction strategies, individuals can work towards healthier relationships with their sexuality, minimize negative impacts, and retain a sense of control over their consumption patterns. This approach fosters self-empowerment and recognizes that behavior change is a process that takes time

### **Concluding thoughts**

This project has been an incredibly valuable undertaking for my own learning and growth as current social worker and as I grow to be an even stronger counsellor. I was initially drawn to

this research through a critical feminist interest in patriarchy and sexuality, perceiving pornography to be governed by a patriarchal gaze. I have no doubt that I will be able to support clients who are self-reporting problems with internet pornography in a way that is dignified, educated, and holds the problem inside the context the person is experiencing the problem in. Finally, I feel inspired to work on assessment questions prior to a client's first session that will include the questions of: Do you feel that internet pornography is problem for you or your family. Regardless of if the client responds no, my hope is that they feel confident knowing that I am a counsellor that is comfortable to have conversations about problems with Internet pornography in the future if necessary.

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**APPENDIX A: INTERNET ADDICTION TEST**

- 1) Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet (think about previous online activity or anticipate next online session)?
- 2) Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time to achieve satisfaction?
- 3) Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use?
- 4) Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?
- 5) Do you stay online longer than originally intended?
- 6) Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?
- 7) Have you lied to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?
- 8) Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g. feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

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### APPENDIX B: Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS)

Please think back to the last 6 months and indicate on the following 7-point scale how often or to what extent the statements apply to you.

- 1- Never    2- Rarely    3- Occasionally    4- Sometimes    5- Often    6- Very Often  
7- All the time

1. I felt like porn is an important part of my life
2. I used porn to restore tranquility of my feelings
3. I felt porn caused problems in my sexual life
4. I felt that I had to watch more and more porn for satisfaction
5. I unsuccessfully tried to reduce the amount of porn I watch
6. I became stressed when something prevented me from watch porn
7. I thought about how good it would be to watch porn
8. Watching porn got rid of my negative feelings
9. Watching porn prevented me from bringing out the best in me
10. I felt that I needed more and more porn in order to satisfy my needs
11. When I vowed not to watch porn anymore, I could only do it for a short period
12. I became agitated when I was unable to watch porn
13. I continually planned when to watch porn
14. I released my tension by watching porn
15. I neglected other leisure activities as a result of watching porn
16. I gradually watched more “extreme” porn because the porn I watched before was no longer satisfying
17. I resisted watching porn for only a little while before I relapsed
18. I missed porn greatly when I didn’t watch it for a while

Scoring: Add the scores of the items of each factor. For the total score add all the scores of the items.

76 points of more indicate possible problematic pornography consumption

Salience: 1, 7, 13

Mood Modification: 2, 8, 14

Conflict : 3, 9, 15

Tolerance : 4, 10, 16

Relapse: 5, 11, 17

Withdrawal : 6, 12, 18

Bóthe, B., Tóth-Király, I., Zsila, Á., Demetrovics, Z., Griffiths, M.D., Orosz, G. (2017). The development of the Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS). *Journal of Sex Research*, in press.

### **APPENDIX C: The Short Version of the Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS-6)**

“Pornography is defined as material (text, picture, video, etc.) that (1) creates or elicits sexual feelings or thoughts and (2) contains explicit exposure or descriptions of sexual acts involving the genitals, such as vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, or masturbation.”

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

1- Never 2- Rarely 3-Occasionally 4-Sometimes 5-Often 6-Very Often 7-all the time

1. I felt that porn is an important part of my life.
2. I released tension by watching porn.
3. I neglected other leisure activities as a result of watching porn.
4. I felt that I had to watch more porn to feel satisfied.
5. When I vowed not to watch porn anymore, I could only do it for a short period of time.
6. I became stressed when something prevented me from watching porn.

Scoring: Add the scores of the items. 20 points or more indicate possible problematic pornography use.

Bóthe, B., Tóth-Király, I., Demetrovics, Zs., & Orosz, G. (In Press, Accepted: 7 January 2020). The Short Version of the Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale (PPCS-6): A Reliable and Valid Measure in General and Treatment-seeking Populations. *Journal of Sex Research*. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2020.1716205