

**Impacts of Viewing Pornography**

by

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### **Abstract**

Viewing pornography is a universal act that some individuals take part in as early as adolescence, leading into adulthood. The objective of this capstone is to offer an understanding of how viewing pornography impacts individuals across different areas of their lives and in various ways. This capstone reviews existing literature to provide an overarching overview of the impacts of viewing pornography, with a focus on sexual expectations, emotions, sexual acts, sexual experiences, and partnered sex experiences. Factors such as unrealistic sexual expectations, negative emotions, acts of violence, pleasure in partnered sex, and sexual competence in men and women are examined. The literature reviewed showed that there are both positive and negative impacts to viewing pornography. There is also still an impact of viewing pornography regardless of culture and sexual orientation. The capstone concludes with a guiding framework in the form of a questionnaire intended for therapists who may work with clients who voice concerns over their pornography viewing.

*Keywords:* pornography, pornography viewing, sexual expectations, emotions, sexual acts, sexual experiences, partnered sex experiences

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Topic Overview

Approximately 40 million Americans routinely visit pornography sites (Pawlikowska-Gorzelańczyk et al, 2023). Furthermore, every second, 28, 258 individuals are viewing pornography (Pawlikowska-Gorzelańczyk et al, 2023). According to Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020), pornography, the term, refers to “stimulating visual materials that depict sexual acts with the primary intention of arousing the ones viewing it.” (p.969). Through researching the topic of pornography, it was observed that pornographic material itself is not something that was produced in recent years. Instead, this production dates back several decades. As early as the 1970s, it has been found by various scholars that there has been an increase in the availability of pornographic content (Walker et al, 2016).

Throughout the years, pornographic material has been distributed to viewers in various formats. The advancement of the way pornography is distributed to its viewers is a contributing factor to its increasing viewing rates overall for different reasons. For example, Meghan et al. (2022) noticed that the shift from printed pornographic content to home videotapes and television and now to the Internet and smartphones has resulted in pornography being more available, inexpensive, and easier for individuals to view in a safe space discreetly. Meghan et al. (2022) highlighted three different reasons why advancing methods of pornography distribution have resulted in increasing viewing rates, due to the following: 1) advanced distribution methods have resulted in increased accessibility of pornography with just a tap of a finger on a smartphone 2) from purchasing printed pornographic content to having free access on one’s smartphone and 3) and having privacy within their own homes to view pornography due to easy access on the internet.

From the 1970s and 20 years later to the 1990s, Walker et al. (2016) stated that alongside the accessibility of pornography, the standard of pornography also grew due to the advancement of technology on cable and satellite television. In addition, Cordero (2021) found that 1 in 5 internet searches on cell phones are by individuals searching for pornographic content. The advancement of technology caused the consumption of pornography to skyrocket because Weinberg et al. (2010) valued that 10 to 14 billion dollars are annually earned from pornography videos via pay-per-view movies on TV, pornography networks, websites, films provided in hotel rooms, through phone sex, magazine and sex toys. Weinberg et al. (2010) further found that the pornography business is bigger in comparison to professional basketball, football and baseball combined. Additionally, it was found that Americans paid more money to view pornography versus money spent on purchasing movie theatre tickets (Weinberg et al, 2010) As you can see, consumerism of pornography has only grown in the last few decades due to advancements in both technology and the standard of pornography.

To further support the exponential growth of individuals viewing pornography, through research, it was found that alongside the obvious advancement in technology, other parts play a role in this growth. For example, it was found that in Western society, the act of viewing pornography is considered a common sexual practice, which may start at the age of 14 years old, and this practice then carries into adulthood (Vasquez et al, 2024). Although popular porn websites forbid viewers under 18 years old, Cordero (2021) still suggested that adolescents under the age of 18 are still viewing these websites because the age restriction barrier can still be bypassed with one click. For example, if an individual under 18 is in the privacy of their own home, on their laptop or smartphone, on a popular porn website, and they

are asked, 'Are you under 18?', it is very easy for them to click 'no,' without further investigation from the website. They can then continue watching any pornographic content they search for. In addition to age, there were also notable gender differences. Cerbara et al. (2023) found that up to 60 to 98% of men commonly view pornography, and between 30 to 90% of women view pornography. Based on the statistics noted and similar findings in other literature, one can conclude that pornography viewing rates are higher for men versus women. A viewing platform that contributes to these high percentages is a popular pornography site called Porn Hub. To elaborate, Palazzolo and Bettman (2020) found that in 2018, there were up to 33.5 billion visits to Porn Hub and then in 2019, a record of 42 billion visits. These incredibly high viewing rates cause one to question whether individuals view pornography simply for arousal or are their reasons beyond that.

Pouralijan et al. (2024) found that there are various reasons why individuals choose to view pornography, and those reasons can be further categorized into personal, relational and social reasons. Personal reasons may be the demographic background a viewer is from, such as their age, gender, their religious attachment, relationship status, education levels and their experience with depression or anxiety (Pouralijan et al, 2024). Regarding relational reasons, Pouralijan et al. (2024) mentioned reasons such as conflict within the family, dissatisfaction in sexual relationships, and problems within a marriage. Lastly, social reasons for viewing pornography may be experiencing loneliness, the desire to fit in, and the culture the viewer grew up within (Pouralijan et al, 2024). Also, researchers Fritz et al. (2022) stated that viewers use pornography for the following reasons: 1) masturbation, 2) to learn about different types of sexual acts, 3) to improve their romantic relationships, 4) to reduce boredom, 5) to explore and confirm one's sexual identity, 6) to see people like their physiques

being represented, 7) or simply because their partner wants them to. So, you can see, there are a variety of reasons why pornography viewing may be an appealing route to people, and these reasons are dependent on the viewer themselves. Also, by reflecting on the reasons mentioned, it can be concluded that people do not just resort to pornography viewing for arousal and instant gratification. Instead, there may be more complex reasoning behind their viewing.

Alongside various reasons why individuals view pornography, comes the varying degrees of negative impact pornography has on viewers. For example, regarding negative impacts, Cordero (2021) claimed that being addicted to pornography viewing can affect one's overall well-being, from physical to spiritual. Regarding physical well-being, Cerbera et al. (2023) argued that there may be changes to the viewer's pleasure centre of the brain where they may experience changes in that part of the brain's structuring and functioning. when there is overexposure to pornography. Cerbera et al. (2023) also argued that individuals getting addicted to viewing pornography can be comparable to someone who is addicted to a drug, which can then further cause anxiety or depression in the viewer. In addition to the physical impacts of viewing pornography, there are impacts on a viewer's perception, specifically regarding gender roles during sexual acts. Cerbera et al. (2023) found that various mainstream pornography content emphasizes sexual acts that include male domination, which in turn results in the portrayal of objectification of women. One can conclude that the objectification of women can then further result in certain strict gender roles. In simpler terms, pornography producers create certain content where men are portrayed as the rule creators during sexual acts, and women are the rule-followers.

### **Purpose Statement**

Multiple sexual factors may impact individuals throughout their lifespan, including viewing pornography. As summarized, the act of viewing of pornography is a universal and widespread practice that many individuals take part in from adolescence to adulthood for numerous reasons. Viewing pornography may impact individuals regardless of culture or sexual orientation. Although the use of pornography is a common act, there are different comfort levels with discussing pornography in general for a lot of individuals from various cultural spaces. Many individuals are comfortable with the topic of pornography and are willing to discuss their experiences or opinions about it in a public space. But then there are also individuals on the other side of the spectrum who choose to keep this topic private, their viewing of pornography private, alongside their opinions and experience with it private. Hence, this area of research was explored to give initial exposure to those readers who have varying comfort levels with this topic in general and who may feel a lack of awareness regarding the impacts viewing pornography has on individuals. Having an initial understanding of how viewing pornography may impact individuals in different areas of their lives and to varying degrees is the purpose of this capstone for readers. Alongside gaining a brief understanding of this topic, this capstone presents an opportunity for readers to spark further curiosity for further research so conversations can take place in either professional or private settings on a topic that is not necessarily discussed as much in comparison to other topics.

The intended audience for this capstone is therapists. A therapist will not know if they are seeing a client who is completely comfortable with speaking about their experience with viewing pornography and how it has impacted their life or a client who is so afraid to share their struggle with pornography viewing because of how taboo it may be considered from the

cultural space they are coming from. Learning how to support both types of clients effectively is a valuable skill set to attain as a therapist. Thus, this capstone is intended for therapists who want to learn more about the impacts of viewing pornography and how to evaluate and support clients when problems arise from their viewing. It is an important skill for therapists to have the competence to effectively support their clients who bring forth their concerns and struggles over their pornography viewing.

### **Research Question**

The research question that will guide this capstone is ‘How does viewing pornography impact individuals’?

### **Contribution to the Field**

There are various reasons why I decided to research the impacts of pornography viewing. Firstly, this research will be beneficial for me as a future therapist, alongside other therapists who are not as knowledgeable about viewing pornography and its impacts it has on different areas of people’s lives. When thinking about the various struggles clients we serve are facing, it is uncommon for therapists to instantly think that pornography viewing may be one of those struggles. This means the topic itself is not discussed as much in general or thought about, so it is sometimes difficult to know how to approach a case of this kind. It is important to create that initial comfort within yourself as a therapist when approaching a case that you are not as familiar with because, without that comfort, it may create a barrier to effectively supporting your clients. Part of being an effective therapist and providing ethical care to clients is also consistently questioning your familiarity with topics or concerns that your clients bring to sessions. So, you can also further inquire if you have personal biases regarding this topic that may create a block in providing effective support.

Second, this capstone is an opportunity to educate therapists on how to think critically about how the viewing of pornography impacts individuals from different demographics in different areas of their lives from the cultural spaces they come from. Although pornography viewing is considered a universal act, in some parts of the world, it is considered normal, but in other parts of the world, it is highly stigmatized. To further elaborate, in some parts of the world, it is considered a normal sexual practice, and in other parts, it may be non-existent to some people. Critically thinking about these differences allows us to question in what ways our clients who struggle with their pornography consumption are affected concerning the walk of life they are coming from. Another example is thinking about how romantic relationships are affected, whether that be in positive ways or negative ways. Then, further thinking about how each partner in the relationship is affected and what their relationship was with pornography growing up or whether their relationship with pornography was non-existent. These are a couple of multiple explorations that may take place when critically thinking about this topic in a therapeutic setting.

Thirdly, there is value in learning more about the gaps and limitations in research on the impacts of viewing pornography. When gaps and limitations are identified, there is then an increased potential for action and advocacy work to take place for professionals. For example, if a therapist is researching therapy models or techniques to address concerns regarding the negative impacts of pornography viewing, and a gap in the literature is identified, there is an opportunity for further research to take place on what models or techniques could be effective when working with this type of concern in the present day. As we are all aware, as years go by, many aspects of life also advance, therefore, it is just as important for research to also progress to address certain topics and concerns.

During my research, I concluded that it is important to further explore if more research is required on individuals from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds concerning pornography viewing. While I was reviewing different research studies, it was difficult to find research on how culture may correlate with pornography viewing and the different impacts it has on different people from different parts of the world. Indeed, there were general findings through research studies that included participants from different cultural backgrounds, but there was a lack of in-depth explanation as to how specific cultural values or morals of these participants play a role in the findings of these studies.

As a future therapist who aims to work towards advocacy, I believe that it is also important to include research on how educational programs in earlier years in school settings on pornography viewing may impact individuals' lives in countless ways, in the present and the future. Pornography viewing is a worldwide concept, but its potential impact on individuals concerning their day-to-day diverse lives is an area that lacks attention. As previously mentioned, pornography viewing starts at a considerably young age, due to how easily accessible pornography is through the advancement of technology over the years. Therefore, it may be beneficial to conduct further research on how early and in what different professional settings these educational programs can be applied around different parts of the world.

### **Reflexivity and Positionality Statement**

Regarding the topic of my capstone, I have no personal connection to the topic, but rather a huge interest in learning more about this topic and how it impacts humans in their development, interpersonal relationships, views, beliefs and so on. I believe that pornography viewing is a universal concept and, although there may be more research from certain parts of

the world, there is still an overwhelming amount of research that I came across, and it was nothing short of interesting. Throughout the CityU Master of Counselling program, my interest has been in specializing in marriage counselling and sex therapy. For me, this was a beneficial opportunity to increase my knowledge and comfort in an area that is connected to the possible work I am going to be doing in the future.

Being of South Asian descent and growing up in a very traditional family the topic of even discussing the opposite sex in connection to an intimate relationship was frowned upon. Growing up for many South Asian individuals including myself, acts of love or intimacy that are considered appropriate to display in front of children in other cultures such as kissing, hugging, hand holding, or saying 'I love you' in front of one's children were not displayed. In contrast, displaying acts of love or intimacy mentioned above, resulted in a negative stigma. As you can see, coming from a South Asian household, I knew nothing about intimacy beyond the idea that individuals married to have children to carry their lineage and nothing beyond that.

Considering I had limited knowledge growing up of what romantic relationships looked like, across various cultures and situations, the topic of viewing pornography and its different impacts on individuals caught my interest. I want to apply what I learned through research, in my future experiences of working in the counselling field. I aspire to be a South Asian therapist whom individuals of different cultures including the South Asian culture feel comfortable seeking support, for issues that society may consider taboo, both in the Eastern and Western worlds. I aim to take this opportunity as a starting point to grow my knowledge in this topic. I have no bias concerning this topic but rather a lot of curiosity to learn more and apply it in my future practice and learning as a therapist.

## **Definition of Terms**

### ***Culture***

“A system of people, places, and practices.” (Causadias, 2020, p.310).

### ***Pornography***

“Stimulating, visual materials that depict sexual acts with the primary intention to arouse the ones viewing it.” (Daskalopoulou and Zanette, 2020, p.969).

### ***Pornography Viewing***

For this capstone, I am defining pornography viewing as an individual who views any stimulating visual materials that portray sexual actions

### ***Romantic Partner***

‘Spouse, fiancé[e], or dating partner.’ (Bernhold and Gasiorek, 2020, p.80).

### ***Romantic Relationship***

“Mutually acknowledged ongoing voluntary interactions, these relationships, unlike others such as friendships, are characterized by a particular intensity, specific expressions of affection, and initiation in erotic sexual encounters.’ (Gómez-López et al, 2019, p.2).

### ***Sexual Orientation***

“The preferred term used when referring to an individual’s physical and/or emotional attraction to the same and/or opposite gender.” (Dembroff, 2016, p.1).

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

The rest of the capstone will be Chapter two which consists of a literature review and Chapter three. For the literature review in Chapter two, I will focus on five different areas that are impacted after viewing pornography.

The first area will explore how viewing pornography impacts sexual expectations concerning the following: unrealistic sexual expectations, gendered expectations and personal standards.

The second section will explore how viewing pornography impacts emotions in the following ways: coping and emotional avoidance, self-esteem, and negative emotions.

The third section will explore how viewing pornography impacts sexual acts with the following: women versus men, acts of violence and risky sexual behaviours.

The fourth section will explore how viewing pornography enhances sexual experiences about the following: women, pleasure in partnered sex and education.

The fifth section will explore how viewing pornography impacts partnered sex experiences concerning the following: sexual satisfaction, pornography versus real life and sexual competence in men and women.

Chapter three will consist of a discussion of the findings from my literature review and a proposal of an alternative action via presenting a framework that may be of use to practitioners who work closely with the South Asian population

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Multiple sexual factors may impact individuals, throughout their lifespan. For this research study design, I will explore how "Viewing pornography impacts individuals regardless of culture or sexual orientation." Throughout this paper, the impact of pornography viewing will be examined through the review of multiple research studies. As per Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020), pornography, as a term, refers to stimulating, visual materials that depict sexual acts with the primary intention to arouse the ones viewing it. (p.969).

### **Impact of Viewing Pornography on Sexual Expectations**

Through reviewing several studies on the impact viewing pornography has on sexual expectations, there was various research on themes such as unrealistic sexual expectations, gendered expectations and personal standards. Research that was found in different studies and analyses across the themes noted above included participants from similar age groups and sexual orientations. A common method for collecting data on sexual expectations was interviews, surveys and thematic analyses

#### ***Unrealistic Sexual Expectations***

In the Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) study, 15 participants were interviewed about the different aspects of their pornography use. The participants were heterosexual males with a mean age of 32.5 years. Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) further noted the cultural backgrounds of these participants, and they were as follows: 1) 9 participants were of European descent 2) 3 of Asian descent 3) 1 of Pasifika descent 4) 1 of Māori descent and 5) 1 of Middle Eastern descent. Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) collected data via semi-structured interviews, which lasted 30 to 75 minutes. Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) asked about the following in the interview questions: 1) the male's first exposure to pornography 2) exposure to education on sex during childhood 3) the

levels of openness with family and friends about discussing pornography use 4) regularity of pornography use 5) duration of pornography use 6) patterns of pornography use 7) triggers for pornography use 8) feelings and emotions for using pornography 9) reasons for difficult self-perception and 10) past efforts at decreasing or quitting pornography usage. Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) found that over a duration of time, the men's continued use and repetitive use began negatively impacting different aspects of and experiences of sexual activity. Additionally, Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) research study concluded that men perceived pornography usage as having unrealistic expectations when it came to both sexual activity and sexuality in general. To further support the notion of unrealistic expectations from males, Charles and Meyrick (2020) conducted a qualitative survey on eleven male participants, ranging from 18 to 25 years old. Additionally, all participants had British and mixed heritage backgrounds and worked at the same workplace. Charles and Meyrick (2020) found that pornography consumption led to unrealistic expectations and sexually aggressive behaviour.

Both studies noted above were conducted on male participants, and both studies also consisted of a tiny pool of participants. For the first study mentioned, there was more diversity regarding cultural background alongside age, but the findings in both studies were similar, regardless of cultural background. One can conclude that although there may be differences in cultures, there is still the common denominator of males having unrealistic expectations of sex after viewing pornography. For Sniewsk and Farvid (2020), the interviews were in person and for Charles and Meyrick (2020), an online or hard copy survey was administered, therefore, there was more anonymity for participants in the second study. Considering the similarities in the results of both studies, the method of administration for obtaining results did not seem to play a role in affecting the way participants responded.

In addition to the results noted above concerning unrealistic expectations from men, Shuler et al. (2021) conducted a thematic analysis on multiple studies involving Caucasian males and females and found that female participants felt their partners had unrealistic expectations of them when it came to performing sexual acts. The sexual orientation of these individuals was not mentioned in the analysis. The dominating cultural background of these participants was mainly Caucasian and through various studies that involved multiple methods of measurement, there was a trend of the same response from a female perspective. This means that all studies included in the analysis came to the same conclusion that females felt that their partners had unrealistic expectations of them due to what is portrayed in pornography. Through research, it can be confirmed that both females and males across different cultures voice that unrealistic expectations contribute to sexual expectations overall. However, it was unclear which specific unrealistic sexual expectations took precedence after viewing pornography. Specific sexual expectations meaning highlighting specifics such as how a partner should physically look while performing sexual acts, how a partner should satisfy their partners during sex, how the overall experience of a sexual encounter should be, what specific sexual act is related to unrealistic expectations and so on.

### ***Gendered Expectations***

As noted above regarding unrealistic sexual expectations, the gender that there was more research evidence on was males. Through further review, an additional amount of research was found on heterosexual males of various cultural backgrounds and what these males specifically sexually expected from women due to viewing pornography. Firstly, Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) found that men viewed females solely as objects of sex, which resulted in reduced sexual satisfaction due to men having unrealistic expectations of how a woman should perform during

sex. To further expand, Cordero (2021) also conducted a study on males and females ranging from the age of 16 to 23 years old and found that after viewing pornography, men viewed women as objects as well. According to Cordero (2021), these males further elaborated and mentioned they viewed women as objects in their world created through fantasy, which resulted in their views of sex and love being distorted. Through the response of these males in Cordero's (2021) study, one can infer that there may be a cause-and-effect relationship between viewing pornography and fantasizing, which may lead to unrealistic expectations. Both studies also suggest through pornography viewing, gendered expectations can surface.

To explore how pornography viewing may be connected to the growth of gendered and sexually aggressive stances, Bernstein et al. (2023) researched males and females who ranged from the age of 17 to 25 years old. Bernstein et al. (2023) collected descriptive statistics to measure the following: 1) gender stereotype using the 7-item Gender Stereotyping Scale 2) sexual impulsivity using the 13-item control subscale of the Compulsive Sexual Behaviour inventory and a 28-item self-report measure of the severity of obsessive sexual behaviour and 3) internet pornography sexual beliefs by asking the participants how internet porn influenced their sexual beliefs about gender-based sexual expectancies, the determination of sexually appealing physical features and other ways internet pornography may have predisposed their sexual beliefs. Bernstein et al. (2023) established that there are positive connections between viewing pornography and stereotypical gendered attitudes. Furthermore, women reported feeling that it is acceptable for men to control women during sex and for women to be coerced into sexual activity by men. In the study conducted by Bernstein et al. (2023), research and results were more centred around the preferences of males during partnered sex and how pornography has made it socially acceptable for women to be coerced and welcome more aggressive behaviour

from their male partners during sex. Regardless, the findings in this study confirm the findings by Sniewsk and Farvid (2020) and Cordero (2021) regarding how some women are accepting of being seen as sexual objects in a fantasy that is created by men via being controlled and coerced during sex.

### ***Personal Standards***

Alongside unrealistic expectations and gendered expectations, some research was found on some personal standards that may be formed after viewing pornography. Beggan (2020) analyzed solely heterosexual pornography that is focused only on one man and one woman. Beggan (2020) found that men assume women expect them to perform in ways that are like porn stars. Peterson et al. (2023) also conducted a thematic analysis of thirty different studies which explored individuals' views on pornography concerning their sexual health. The analysis consisted of participants ranging from the age of 17 to 32 of mixed ethnicities. Peterson et al. (2023) found that individuals may create expectations around how they should physically look during sex and behave based on what they view when watching pornography. There seemed to be less research conducted on what specific personal standards get created after viewing pornography versus what one expects of others after viewing pornography.

### **Impact of Viewing Pornography on Emotions**

Through reviewing the literature on the impact of viewing pornography on emotions, findings on coping and emotional avoidance, lowered self-esteem, and mixed emotions were quite prevalent. Through reviewing studies and further reviewing thematic analyses on multiple studies, there seemed to be a strong indication that men rely more on viewing pornography to cope with negative thoughts. Concerning lowered self-esteem with viewing pornography, the act

of comparison seemed to be present in various situational factors that lead to lowered self-esteem.

### ***Coping and Emotional Avoidance***

A cross-sectional study conducted by Bernstein et al. (2021) explored nine different factors linked to pornography viewing. The 227 participants were male and female undergraduate psychology students aged 17 to 25. Bernstein et al. (2021) explored the following factors and measures: 1) the pornography source and content—participants were asked what websites they visited and what genres they preferred 2) the reasons for viewing certain pornography—participants were asked the reasons 3) sexual fantasy purposes—4-point Likert Scale was used 4) participants' sexual and emotional states before viewing pornography—11-item Emotional and Sexual States Scale was used 5) problematic pornography use—a modified version of the 14-item Compulsive Internet Use Scale was used 6) non-sexual and sexual sensation seeking—4 point Likert Scale was used 7) pornography consistent behaviour—Behavioral Correlates of Internet SEM Use Scale was used 8) oppositional sexual beliefs—Adversarial Sexual Beliefs Scale was used and 9) moral disconnection—32-item Moral Disengagement Scale was used. Bernstein et al. (2021) discovered that mood management, emotional avoidance, sexual sensation seeking, moral disengagement, and pornography-related fantasizing watching were all noteworthy predictors of pornography-consistent behaviour. In addition, researchers Peter and Valkenburg (2011) systematically analyzed multiple studies that included both men and women. Peter and Valkenburg (2011) found that men may view pornography to cope with negative thoughts, whereas women may view pornography for sexual empowerment and sexual explorations. Through this research, one can conclude that men specifically viewed pornography as a form to avoid certain emotions they were experiencing at

that moment alongside managing their mood, whereas it was the opposite for women. It was unclear through the review of the literature if more men or more women viewed pornography as a source of coping with their emotions, but through the systematic analysis of a variety of different articles Peter and Valkenburg (2011) analyzed, it can be noted that men, in general, seem to rely more on pornography to cope with and avoid their emotions.

### *Self-esteem*

Following coping and emotional avoidance, the emotional state of lowered self-esteem was a noticeable theme concerning emotions. More research was found on how one's emotions with viewing pornography can lead to lowered self-esteem versus higher. The one exception to this observation was a study by Peterson et al. (2023). Researchers Peterson et al. (2023) analyzed a study that included females and males of multiple ethnicities that ranged from 17 to 32 years old. The participants' sexual orientation was not included. Peterson et al. (2023) concluded that pornography was a platform to view a variety of body types, which helped with one's self-esteem and exploring their sexual orientation and gender identity. Viewing pornography seemed to have a beneficial effect on these participants that further prompted them to gain a better understanding of their sexual and gender identity, but that was not the case for the participants in the remainder of the literature found. In contrast to Peterson et al. (2023)'s findings, Shuler et al. (2021) concluded that a participant pool of both men and women from the United States felt insecure about their sexual performance and physical appearance after viewing pornography. Also, Shuler et al. (2021) concluded that participants felt less attraction, less emotional closeness, less sexual functioning and less of an emotional outlook on sex after viewing pornography. In another part of the world, Cerbara et a. (2023) conducted a study on adolescent males and females from Italy and had similar findings. Cerbara et a. (2023) found that

pornography negatively affected self-esteem and body satisfaction for both boys and girls. These effects were the opposite of what Peterson et al. (2023) found. Based on the studies, not just viewing pornography overall causes low self-esteem, but specifically, paying attention to the physique of people in pornographic content seems to be one leading factor to lowered self-esteem. Even though a variety of body types are displayed in pornography, this factor does not stop viewers from comparing. In addition to viewers having lowered self-esteem due to comparing their body type to porn actors/actresses, there are situations when people further compare themselves to porn actors/actresses their partners are viewing. Walters et al. (2020) found that individuals may feel a threat to their self-esteem due to comparing themselves to porn actresses their partners are viewing. In addition to observing who their partners are viewing in pornography, Walters et al. (2020) also found that individuals may also feel threatened due to an observed decrease in sexual intimacy with their partners if their partner prefers to view pornography alone to masturbate instead of having sex. Concerning a partner preferring to view pornography to masturbate, Journeay et al. (2024) conducted a study on heterosexual females of varying cultural backgrounds and found that women who believed that their romantic partner formed a strong crush or liking to a porn actress, posed a threat to their actual romantic relationship by increasing jealousy and perceptions of adultery within the women, which further decreased the woman's self-esteem. A male choosing to view pornography for self-pleasure and potentially having a strong liking towards a porn actress play may negatively affect a woman's self-esteem. However, a male may be experiencing lowered self-esteem while masturbating as well. Beggan (2020) explains how it is commonly demonstrated in pornography that the ability of a man to control ejaculation is considered a valuable trait, and if a man prematurely ejaculates, it may be related to diminished satisfaction with sex and lowered self-esteem. Therefore,

although a man chooses to masturbate by viewing pornography instead of having sex, they may still be at risk for experiencing lowered self-esteem too. Overall, multiple thought processes relating to comparison that arise from viewing pornography may affect levels of self-esteem.

### *Negative Emotions*

Following experiencing the emotional start of lowered self-esteem, several studies concluded that individuals experienced negative emotions after viewing pornography. Palazzolo and Bettman (2020) conducted a qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of individuals who were considered problematic users of Internet pornography (IP). Palazzolo and Bettman's (2020) study consisted of 105 individuals who self-identified as being problematic IP users via snowball and purposive sampling. Notices on social media websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and WordPress were posted. The mean age of these participants was 32. Although only 53 participants completed the entire set of questions, the survey included. The 53 participants consisted of 1 male who identified as being gay, one female who was heterosexual and the remainder of the 51 participants identified as heterosexual and male. Palazzolo and Bettman (2020) also mentioned that most of these participants did not seek professional support for their problematic IP use. The study was conducted via Survey Monkey, where participants anonymously answered. Palazzolo and Bettman's (2020) consisted of 3 'yes or no' questions and seven open-ended questions. These open-ended questions asked individuals about their experience as problematic IP users and how they felt about their use of pornography concerning their relationships. Additionally, these open-ended questions also explored the problems or benefits that resulted from IP use, and if any problem did come up, did they attempt to stop or reduce their IP use? The data from these open-ended and 'yes or no' questions were coded and then thematically organized. Palazzolo and Bettman (2020) identified three core themes, one of

them being the effects IP use has on the participants' mental health and well-being. Palazzolo and Bettman (2020) found that IP use resulted in participants feeling depressed, lonely, anxious, and feelings of guilt and shame concerning mental health and well-being. Cardoso et al. (2023) also found that the more frequently pornography is viewed, the higher the likeliness of depressive symptoms to occur in individuals. Both studies highlighted that more frequent viewing of pornography is connected to mental health. Therefore, how frequently one views pornography can result in varying levels of negative emotions viewers experience.

Adarsh and Sahoo (2023) also found that anxiety may result from comparison with pornographic materials, particularly when their partner or own behaviour does not resemble the behaviour in pornographic material. Another finding that relates to comparison with pornographic material is Cranney (2015) found that frequent viewing of pornography predicted penis size dissatisfaction among men, but it did not predict dissatisfaction for women regarding breast dissatisfaction among women.

In addition to comparison resulting in negative emotions, a common theme of individuals feeling guilt and shame was present in multiple studies. Peterson et al. (2023) found that both males and females seemed to experience a level of guilt or shame if the pornographic content they were viewing was opposite of their own cultural or familial morals. Guilt or shame seemed to be connected with a value set or morals that may be ignored by viewers when viewing pornography. Cordero. (2021) also conducted a study on a similar age group to Peterson et al. (2023) and found that both females and males experienced guilt and shame alongside depression and anger but also found that some participants felt a sense of excitement. Another researcher who concluded similar findings of positive emotions to Cordero (2021) was Kohut et al. (2017),

who found that pornography viewing resulted in lower levels of anxiety, shame, guilt and sexual distress around sexual behaviours due to becoming more familiar with sexual behaviours.

### **Impact of Viewing Pornography on Sexual Acts**

To explore the impact of pornography on sexual acts, various research was found on the different preferences for women versus men, acts of violence, and risky sexual behaviour. Acts of violence portrayed in pornography seemed to have a greater influence on men across different research findings. For risky sexual behaviour, findings were similar regardless of sexual orientation, but it can be concluded that pornography consumption and risky sexual behaviour can have a causal effect on concerns around sexual health.

### ***Women Versus Men***

Ashton et al. (2019) conducted a study on female participants with a mean age of 25. These women came from different parts of Australia with various backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes toward pornography. As per Ashton et al. (2019), six of these women came from cultures originating from New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Pakistan, and Macedonia. Additionally, five of the participants identified as being Christian and one as Muslim. The rest of the participants did not disclose their religious affiliation. Ashton et al. (2019) interviewed to obtain the participants' opinions on the following: 1) use of or exposure to pornography 2) unwanted sexual activity and 3) sexual pleasure. After the interview, the participants provided the researchers with demographic details, chose anonymous names, and were allowed to communicate any other matters via email or through a subsequent interview. Results were based on a woman's individual experience with pornography and a woman's experience with pornography concerning sexual activity with their partner. Ashton et al. (2019) concluded that concerning the woman's individual experience, some of these women described pornography as

improving solo pleasure, they found it inspiring to see a diversity of bodies shown in pornography which as a result prompted them to be accepting of their bodies. Ashton et al. (2019) also found that women noted that watching pornography added to their sexual fantasies, which were different from their preferences concerning their sexual practices, furthermore, this allowed them to reflect passionately and cognitively on sexual acts. Lastly, Ashton et al. (2019) found that women who found that pornography increased their pleasure also drew on other outlets of information about sex and pleasure, which included formal education and solo or partner experimentation, whether before or after their initial viewing of pornography. With sexual activity with the participants' partners, Ashton et al. (2019) found that women who watched pornography increased pleasure with their partners during sex, but the women's pleasure appeared to be secondary to maintaining connection and harmony with their male partners. In simpler terms, Ashton et al. (2019) found that women used pornography as a tool to learn how to prioritize their male partner's sexual needs and desires.

Jahnen (2022), administered a self-reporting questionnaire survey on 479 male and female fourth and fifth-medical-year students over 2 years that explored their sexual behaviours. Over the 2 years, the questionnaires were for the most part identical, except there were a few gender-specific questions. Therefore, students were allowed to choose the questionnaire with the gender they identified with. Jahnen (2022) included the students who provided context on their consumption of pornography in Jahnen's analysis. As per Jahnen (2022), young women who consumed pornography used it as a source of information to aid in sexual activity with their partners or for simple entertainment. In contrast, Jahnen (2022), found that male consumers of pornography used it to masturbate as a channel to fulfill short-term sexual drive impulses.

As you can see, in both studies conducted by Ashton et al. (2019) and Jahnen (2022), results varied between females and males about the influence of pornography on sexual acts. For women, it seemed to be that viewing pornography was more of a reflective and explorative tool to aid in sexual acts with their partners. In contrast for men, viewing pornography was a way to satisfy short-term sexual impulses through the act of masturbation. In the Ashton et al. (2019) study, culture and religion were taken into consideration, which allowed there to be diversity in the results of the study. Although religion and culture were taken into consideration, results were applied to heterosexual partnered sex strictly. In the Jahnen (2022) study, gender inclusivity was taken into consideration with the questionnaire that was administered, which was a very helpful way to get diversity in responses. Although gender inclusivity was taken into consideration in the Jahnen (2022) study, there was no mention of the cultural backgrounds of these individuals. Also, since the Jahnen (2022) study was conducted for 2 years, the changeable influence of sex culture and media during those years was not taken into consideration when collecting this data. Overall, after reviewing these two studies, the results indicate that women seem to use the tool of pornography to increase their solo pleasure in sexual acts as well as to tend to the sexual needs of their male partners and men use pornography as a way of coping with their sexual impulses via masturbation.

### *Acts of Violence*

To elaborate on sexual acts with partners, Bóthe et al. (2022) stated that women who use pornography are at risk of feeling pressured to perform unrealistic sexual acts during partnered sex. To elaborate, Vera Cruz and Sheridan (2022) studied Mozambican 16 to 20-year-old male and female individuals. Vera Cruz and Sheridan (2022) found that these participants were inspired to include physical or psychological violent acts during sex after viewing pornography.

Vera Cruz and Sheridan (2022) explained physically violent acts to be spanking or punching different parts of their partner's body, alongside rough oral, vaginal or anal penetration. Additionally, Vera Cruz and Sheridan (2022) explained psychological acts to be insulting, threatening, and humiliating their partners by coercing their partners to swallow their body discharges and crawling on all fours. To highlight the noticeable difference in preferences concerning sexual acts between men and women, Vera Cruz and Sheridan (2022) noted that 89.2% of males reported including physical or psychological violent acts during sex after viewing pornography versus only 16.8% of women. To further support men favouring acts of violence after viewing pornography, Brem et al. (2021) also found that men's viewing of pornography is related to controlling acts and actions portraying sexual and physical intimate partner violence. The study conducted by Brem et al. (2021) was focused on males from different cultural backgrounds in the United States. As you can see, for the studies mentioned, participants were from different parts of the world, where sexual practices and preferences may look different. But one can conclude that regardless of what is considered a normal sexual act in one culture versus the opposite in another, sexual acts inspired by viewing pornography seem to be solely dependent on the viewer's preference and not dependent on their culture.

### ***Risky Sexual Behaviour***

Following sexual acts, some research was found on risky sexual behaviours. Nelson et al. (2014) claimed that over the past 20 years, there has been an increased consumption of pornography where it is men having sex with men. Nelson et al. (2014) conducted a study on 16 homosexual men with a mean age of 42 from the United States. Nelson et al. (2014) found that the high frequency of unprotected anal intercourse in pornography relays the message, at least to other men having sex with men, that it is common practice to take part in unprotected anal sex

and future sexual partners may desire the same. Although these findings were derived from a small sample of men, these findings are still beneficial to brainstorm how preventative action can be taken to reduce unprotected sex to protect one's sexual health.

In addition to unprotected sex, Braithwaite et al. (2015) explored the relationships between porn viewing, script acquisition, and sexual risk behaviour over time. They discovered that participants who watched pornography more frequently "hooked up" with sex partners more often, had more "one-night stands," and planned to have more sex partners in the future than peers who watched pornography less frequently. Braithwaite et al. (2015) mentioned that these 'hook-ups' consisted of kissing, oral sex, sexual touching, vaginal or anal intercourse. It is important to note that these participants were university students. Therefore, it may be considered important to further explore what 'hook-up' culture looks like within the university culture because Weinberg et al. (2010) also concluded that college students who consumed pornography resulted in more normalization of a variety of sexual behaviours, which further inspired students to experiment with new sexual practices.

### **Impact of Viewing Pornography on Enhancing Sexual Experiences**

Spišák, S. (2020) found that individuals find viewing pornography beneficial for solo sex due to the ability to fulfill more sexual experiences. For research related to viewing pornography on enhancing sexual experiences, there were specific findings on women, pleasure in partnered sex, and pornography being a source of education.

#### ***Women***

Rowland and Uribe (2020) conducted an analysis of a popular website called Porn Hub to track women's usage of the website, and researchers found that North American women comprised 29% of visitors in 2018, with the percentage increasing in more recent years. Solano

et al. (2020) found that in comparison to men, women admit to viewing more pornography with their partners because they want to increase sexual drive during partnered sexual activities.

To provide a more in-depth understanding of a woman's use of pornography, Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) interviewed 27 women. For participant selection, Daskalopoulou and Zanette's (2020) eligibility requirements for this study were as follows: 1) women were consumers of pornography, and 2) the women were willing to share their personal experiences with the researchers about viewing pornography. Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) collected the following information about participants: 1) age, 2) sexual orientation, 3) relationship status, 4) education, 5) occupation and 6) place of residence. The mean age for these women was 29 years old. Sixteen of these women were exclusive with their sexual orientation, and 11 were non-exclusive. Regarding relationship status, 12 of the women were single, one engaged, 12 in a relationship, and two were married. For the level of education obtained, 1 received a high school level education, one at a college level, 13 at a bachelor's level, five at a master's level, and seven at a Ph.D. level. Lastly, for the place of residence, participants were from the United Kingdom, Greece, France, Italy, Switzerland, Brazil, the United States of America, and Australia. Following participant selection of the 27 women, Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) conducted interviews that lasted up to 78 minutes in duration, with an average interview taking up to 50 minutes. Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) included open-ended and non-directive questions and probes to create a thorough understanding of the participant's use of pornography. Additionally, at the start of the interview, researchers inquired about the participant's sexual characteristics, sexual experiences, and personal sex lives to gain a better understanding of the context and sexual situations of each participant consuming pornography. Following that inquiry, the researchers discussed the participant's consumption of pornography

in more detail. Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020) concluded from their study that pornography is a significant means through which women simply enjoy viewing pornography, enact their sexual fantasies, and learn and experiment with their bodies and partners. Regarding fantasies, the participants found that pornography can satisfy sexual experiences that they are new to or do not explore (Daskalopoulou and Zanette, 2020). Pornography was consumed for educational purposes to learn more about female sexuality experiences and limitations. Additionally, regarding experimentation, women sometimes use pornography with their partners to experience pleasure together. In the study done by Daskalopoulou and Zanette (2020), a thorough amount of data was collected from a small pool of participants to inquire about the different cultural spaces these women are from. This means that regardless of how small the group of participants this study was conducted on, researchers included women from different parts of the world, with varying education levels, occupations, relationship statuses, and so on, which provided promising results that women experienced similar benefits after viewing pornography even though these women were from multiple cultural spaces that had their own set of norms and practices.

To elaborate more on the individual benefit for women after viewing pornography, McNabney et al. (2020) also found that pornography is often used by women to increase arousal and pleasure during masturbation, but its absence during partnered sex might deprive these women of an important and habitual source of sexual stimulation, thereby making it more difficult for them to become aroused and reach orgasm. Specifically, those women who used pornography more frequently also reported less difficulty becoming sexually aroused and longer latencies during partnered sex. Fraumeni-McBride (2023) also conducted a qualitative study on a small group of seven cisgender women from the United States who self-identified as problematic

pornography consumers and found that consumption allowed increased self-pleasure and allowed control or ownership over their sexuality. Shuler et al. (2021) also found when the participants' partners were not available, the participants viewed pornography for sexual release. One can conclude that self-pleasure seemed to play an important role in women viewing pornography.

### *Pleasure in Partnered Sex*

Alongside self-pleasure and becoming aware of how women can be sexually aroused by viewing pornography, this awareness seems to have an enhancing effect on pleasure during partnered sex as well. Fraumeni-McBride (2023) found that some women used imagery from previously consumed pornography as a prompt for masturbation before taking part in intercourse with their partners. In addition to females, Kohut et al. (2017) found that males also consumed pornography out of curiosity and for experimentation, which resulted in increased sexual activities with partners and sexual pleasure. An example of how experimentation may take form is in the finding by Litsou et al. (2021). It was found that couples who view pornography together provide an opportunity for couples to communicate their sexual preferences and dislikes, fantasies and preferences when it comes to condom use (Litsou et al. (2021)

Following individual pornography viewing for pleasure in partnered sex, another study conducted by Kohut et al. (2021) on 200 American heterosexual couples who were together for an average of 15 years found that the couples' shared pornography viewing also allowed for more sexual open communication and feelings of more closeness in the relationship.

Additionally, Kohut et al. (2021) concluded that when viewing pornography with a romantic partner, there was an increase in fulfilment and sexual appeal within their sexual relationship since both partners were observing different sexual acts in the pornographic content they were viewing.

### *Education*

Regarding education, Pool and Milligan (2018) conducted a qualitative study that consisted of three Caucasian male participants who identified as gay and or queer. The aim of Pool and Milligan's (2018) study was to focus on how pornography platforms on the internet impact these males' sexual identities and experiences. Originally, ten males expressed interest in taking part in the study, but in the end, only three agreed to interview. The three males ranged from the age of 21 to 32 years old. Regarding the three males' education levels, two of these males were undergraduates, and one was a graduate student. Pool and Milligan (2018) also indicated that, during the time of the interview, one of the males was an actor/model in multiple 'gay-themed' adult films. Pool and Milligan (2018) also self-disclosed to the clients that they both identified as gay and or queer. Each of these participants took part in interviews where both researchers were present. The interview consisted of semi-structured guiding questions and probes. It was found that these participants spent on average 21 hours/week on the Internet, with 13 hours dedicated to personal sexual exploration, where they viewed content that consisted of masculine straight men having sex with other masculine straight men (Pool and Milligan, 2018). Pool and Milligan (2018) study was unique because it was a rare occurrence to come across a study where the researchers themselves disclosed their sexual orientation to their participants and where one of the participants was an actor/model in a pornographic film. It would be worthwhile to question if the researchers disclosing their sexual orientation affected how the participants responded. Regarding one participant being an actor/model in pornographic content, it allows one to question if any bias came into play regarding the results of the study.

To further support how viewing pornography can contribute to increasing sexual knowledge for viewers, Wang and Davidson (2006) found that young women in rural China

viewed pornography as formal sexual education and as a prompt to experiment with the sexual practices they observed in pornography. Also, Charles and Meyrick (2020) found that consuming pornography was a trustworthy educational source of information. To expand on pornography being a trustworthy source of education, McKee (2010) found that viewing pornography can help in understanding one's sexual self, sexual acts and partnered sex experiences. Lastly, Peterson et al. (2023) expanded that when education is absent on sexuality, youth may use pornography to find answers to their curiosities and questions in a private setting. One can infer that viewing pornography in private may create a safe space for viewers to educate themselves on curiosities they may not feel sharing with others. For example, Gillespie et al. (2022) who conducted a study by interviewing seventeen participants. This participant pool consisted of seven men and ten women. Additionally, one of the women was transgender. The mean age of these participants was 21. The men and women identified as either being gay, lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. The aim of Gillespie et al. (2022) study was to gain a better understanding of how LGBTQ+ individuals approach first-time same-sex sexual experiences. Gillespie et al. (2022) found that the participants considered the internet to be an important source for gaining more knowledge about sex and sexuality. Furthermore, Gillespie et al. (2022) found that participants watched pornography to better understand their sexual identity and as a tool for guidance during same-sex sexual experiences.

### **Impact of Viewing Pornography on Partner Sex Experiences**

Wu and Zheng (2022) found that 45 to 70% of North American couples view pornography together. In addition to the theme of partner sex experiences that emerged from researching how the impact of viewing pornography has on enhancing sexual experience. Further themes of sexual satisfaction, comparison of content in pornography versus what occurs in real

life, and sexual competencies in men and women emerged from further research on partner sex experiences.

### *Sexual Satisfaction*

Shuler et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to explore the effects that pornography viewing had on romantic relationships. The study consisted of 588 with a mean age of 25, from the western and midwestern United States. These participants were predominately Caucasian and were chosen via convenience sampling through an online survey that was distributed through social media platforms. Additionally, the participant pool consisted of more women than men. Both men and women were either married, in committed romantic relationships or cohabitating with a romantic partner. The mean relationship span of the participants was 5.30 years.

Pornography use was assessed based on participants' reporting the following: 1) participants intentionally accessing pornography in the past month, 2) the participants' partner's intentional pornography use in the past month and 3) If the participants intentionally accessed pornography together. Shuler et al. (2021) collected open-ended responses to the following question that was included in the survey: "In your own words, how has pornography influenced your relationship and/or sexual satisfaction." (p.608). Shuler et al. (2021) found that viewing pornography allowed participants to learn new sex positions, ideas and foreplay with their partners to enable an orgasm. Additionally, Shuler et al. (2021) found that learning new sex positions and exploring new types of foreplay improved relational and sexual satisfaction with their partners, alongside emotional intimacy. In addition, when the participants' partners were not available, the participants viewed pornography for sexual release. Huntington et al. (2021) also conducted a longitudinal study that lasted 5 years on heterosexual couples from the United States from Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, Asian, American Indian, and Pacific Islander races and

found that couples who view pornography together have increased sexual intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

To highlight how sexual satisfaction may be negatively or positively affected after viewing pornography, Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2020) found that on the days that women viewed pornography compared to the days they did not, there was an increased likelihood of having partnered sex for those in relationships with either women or men. Regarding men, Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2020) found that on the days men viewed pornography compared to the days they did not, men who were in relationships with men had more partnered sex versus men who were in relationships with women there was less partnered sex. In other words, Vaillancourt-Morel et al. (2020) found that for women who viewed pornography, there was a positive sexual outcome, but for men, it was the opposite depending on what gender they were in a relationship with

### *Pornography Versus Real-life*

In another study conducted by Fritz et al. (2022), data was collected from a 2014 U.S. probability survey and a 2014 content analysis of 2562 female-male videos from two popular porn websites. Fritz et al. (2022) found kissing, female orgasm, male orgasm, and the use of condoms were considerably less widespread in online porn videos in comparison to the survey respondents' most recent sexual experiences. Also, Fritz et al. (2022) found that penile-anal intercourse and fellatio were drastically more predominant in porn videos than in participants' reports of their most recent sexual experiences. As per Fritz et al. (2022), there were no noteworthy differences between the frequency of cunnilingus or sex toy use shown in pornography as compared to survey respondents' reports. Lastly, Fritz et al. (2022) found that respondents who reported partnered pornography use during their most current sexual experience were more likely to report having been involved in oral sex, penile-anal intercourse, and sex toy

usage and were also more likely to report female orgasm during their most recent sexual experience. Fritz et al. (2022) research aimed to explore findings on what activities couples took part in based on their viewing of online pornography videos. Although there were significant findings in this research study, there were certain limitations; the study did not mention what culture the participants were from, whether the couples that data were collected on were heterosexual, and readers were not aware if the couples were casually dating, common-law partners, or married for multiple years. All these factors would be relevant to be aware of due to further exploring the results. Knowing the demographics of these participants and where they were from would also have been important due to varying degrees of sex culture in different states and so on.

### ***Sexual Competence in Men and Women***

Berent (2023) conducted a three-wave longitudinal study from 2015 to 2017. This study involved over 100,000 French-speaking participants, both men and women in their early twenties, and over 4,000 were French-speaking. Berent (2023) found that the men who watched porn more frequently had less sexual self-competence, weakened sexual functioning and decreased sexual satisfaction from their partners. Meanwhile, Berent (2023) found the opposite results for women. Meaning Berent (2023) found that women who watched porn more frequently felt higher sexual self-competence, higher sexual functioning and enhanced sexual satisfaction from their partners. Additionally, Goldsmith et al. (2017) found that viewing pornography predicts performance-related cognitive distraction during sexual activity among men, but not among women.

### **Conclusion**

Through exploring several studies on how viewing pornography impacts sexual expectations, emotions, enhancement of sexual experiences, and partnered sex experiences, several themes arise of varying degrees of information and conclusions. For example, males seemed to play a strong role in contributing to sexual expectations after viewing pornography. Regarding viewers of pornography experiencing mixed emotions, more findings were associated with negative emotions versus positive emotions. Women seemed to be on the opposite end of the spectrum regarding preferences for sexual acts after viewing pornography versus men. Viewing pornography to enhance sexual experiences can benefit people on an individual level and with sexual partners. Lastly, varying levels of competence affect women and men during partnered sex experiences.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion, Recommendations and Application**

#### **Discussion**

The main purpose of this capstone was to explore how viewing pornography impacts individuals. Chapter One described how pornographic content has evolved over the years, resulting in increased consumption. The advancement of technology and accessibility, the normalization of pornography viewing as a sexual practice in Western society, and the limited restrictions on popular pornography websites are among the many contributing factors to the extraordinarily high viewing rates, leading to the pornography industry earning billions annually. In addition to the factors contributing to elevated pornography viewing rates, this chapter also briefly highlighted the different reasons individuals view pornography and the varying levels of impact it can have on a person. Chapter One concluded by suggesting the following: 1) educating therapists on critically assessing how the viewing of pornography affects individuals from various demographics and different areas of their lives, shaped by their cultural backgrounds, 2) encouraging therapists to explore the gaps and limitations in research regarding the impacts of pornography viewing for further action and advocacy work, and lastly, 3) since pornography viewing may begin in adolescence, promoting further research into how educational programs in earlier school years regarding pornography could be beneficial. Chapter Two examined various literature on how viewing pornography impacted individuals concerning sexual expectations, emotions, sexual acts, enhancing sexual experiences, and partnered sex experiences.

#### ***Sexual Expectations***

When reviewing the literature on how viewing pornography impacts sexual expectations, three central themes were confirmed and were as follows: 1) unrealistic sexual expectations, 2) gendered expectations and 2) personal standards. Regarding research on unrealistic sexual

expectations, it was interesting to read about studies conducted on a small pool of participants. This allowed researchers to take a more in-depth analysis of the responses of these participants since data was collected from a smaller pool of participants. In the literature, it was commonly highlighted that men seem to have unrealistic sexual expectations from women after viewing pornography. The studies that were reviewed involved participants from a range of cultures but had similar unrealistic expectations. This allows readers to conclude that unrealistic sexual expectations that are formed by men after viewing pornography may be universal. There also seemed to be a central theme amongst men, where they perceived women to be sexual objects after they viewed pornography.

Additionally, in several studies, it was found that females felt as if their partners had unrealistic expectations of them to perform sexual acts after their partners viewed pornography. It was appreciated that some of the studies reviewed also mentioned how women accepted that they were viewed as sexual objects. Men knowing that some women are accepting of being seen as sexual objects allows one to question whether this prompts men to push boundaries when taking part in sexual activities with women. It would be interesting to further explore if research on this has been conducted. This finding further allows readers to question if it is more of a cultural thing that women are accepting of being seen as sexual objects. Furthermore, is this acceptance a norm due to gendered roles in certain cultures? Concerning personal standards, men seemed to create standards of themselves about how they perform in bed when being in a heterosexual relationship, due to how porn actors perform. This was an interesting finding because this personal standard may simply be created by men by assumption. It allows one to question how much communication takes place for different couples regarding what each person expects from their partners during sexual activities. Alongside, what is the difference in

communication styles and frequencies in different cultures when discussing what is considered acceptable and not during sexual activities between partners?

### *Emotions*

Through reviewing the literature on how viewing pornography impacts emotions, three common themes emerged from the research: coping and emotional avoidance, self-esteem, and negative emotions. Most of the studies reviewed included both male and female participants. It was interesting to discover that many men seem to use pornography as a means of coping, while women use it for sexual empowerment and further sexual exploration. Although women engage with pornography for empowerment and exploration, both genders seem to experience a similar effect on self-esteem in that both experience lowered self-esteem after viewing it. Regarding lowered self-esteem, researchers across several studies effectively demonstrate how this results from various types of comparisons made by both genders following exposure to pornography. It is noteworthy that while both men and women compare themselves after viewing pornography, they experience this comparison in different ways, which ultimately leads to lowered self-esteem. Journeay et al. (2024) did a great job of explaining how a woman may experience lowered self-esteem when her male partner is viewing pornography. This experience may take place in the form of when the woman's male partner is watching pornography and the porn actress is attractive in the porn video, the female then may start to believe that her partner has formed a strong crush on that porn actress, which then may cause the woman to experience jealousy and lowered self-esteem (Journeay et al, 2024). Researchers Journeay et al. (2024) also confirmed that this comparison experience is common for women across different cultures. This is very important to note because it shows how this type of comparison is a universal experience. Concerning men, Beggan (2020) effectively explained how men may experience the act of

comparison, resulting in lowered self-esteem. Beggan (2020) explained how it is commonly demonstrated in pornography that the ability of a man to control ejaculation is considered a valuable trait, if a man prematurely ejaculates, it may be related to diminished satisfaction with sex and lowered self-esteem. It was interesting to learn that although the comparison is quite universal and common for both men and women to experience after viewing pornography, the path that leads to lowered self-esteem may look very different for both genders. Regarding experiencing negative emotions after viewing pornography, guilt, shame, depression, and anxiety were the most common among female and male participants across the studies that were reviewed. Peterson et al. (2023) did a great job of making connections between how guilt and shame after viewing pornography may occur because the set of cultural values and morals the participants in their study aligned with were not aligned with the pornographic content they enjoyed viewing.

### ***Sexual Acts***

Across the literature review on how viewing pornography impacts sexual acts, multiple studies focused on sexual acts concerning women versus men, acts of violence and risky sexual behaviour. It was interesting to learn that women viewed pornography and learnt about sexual acts for more of a long-term benefit for themselves and their romantic partners versus men who seemed to view pornography for the short-term benefit of fulfilling sexual desires through masturbation. Jahnen (2022), who conducted a study for 2 years, discovered these long-term and short-term differences between men and women. It was appreciated that in the Jahnen (2022) study, gender inclusivity was considered in the questionnaire administered to participants, which allowed diversity in responses. Regarding acts of violence, it was interesting to learn about Mozambican culture because it was difficult to find studies that focused solely on one culture.

Although it is beneficial to include participants of various cultures in studies for diverse responses, there are different benefits to focusing on one culture within a study. This means most studies that were reviewed on acts of violence concerning viewing pornography focused on mixed ethnicities, but those of whom were from North America, and this may then lead to general findings. Additionally, one may not be able to critically analyze how different sexual acts may be considered normal in one culture and taboo in another.

Following acts of violence, it was interesting to learn how there is a chance of risky sexual behaviour to take place after viewing pornography, which then may lead to potential sexual health concerns. Nelson et al. (2014) study promoted a strong message and realization for readers that there is a difference between unprotected sex in pornographic content versus real life. To further explain, Nelson et al. (2014) conducted a study of homosexual men who were the mean age of 42 years old and discovered that these men found it to be a common sexual practice to take part in unprotected anal sex and future sexual partners may desire the same due to there being a lot of pornographic content relaying this message. This study allows researchers to critically analyze how strong of an influence pornography can have on viewers where they are willing to risk their sexual health, knowing that sex in pornography videos is not always necessarily real-life sex.

### ***Enhancing Sexual Experiences***

Women, pleasure in partnered sex, and education were central themes when reviewing literature on how viewing pornography enhances sexual experiences. This literature provided information on the positives of viewing pornography. Gillespie et al. (2022) noted that people watch pornography to understand their sexual identity and as a tool for guidance during same-sex sexual experiences. This finding allows readers to reflect on what is potentially lacking in spaces

and platforms that provide sexual education. Pornography websites may be a reliable and accessible source for some people who are trying to learn more about sex in general and their own sexual identity. This finding also informs readers that pornographic content may be the only source of educational content for a variety of people depending on their demographics and viewing pornography may overall be a positive experience for some due to the informal education they are receiving from viewing. Studies that explored how viewing pornography may enhance sexual experiences for some viewers allow readers to also reflect on their biases and to question what their view on pornography is overall. Meaning is it entirely negative for all viewers?

In addition to viewing pornography to learn about sexual identity and as a guiding tool during same-sex sexual experiences, Spišák, S. (2020) found that individuals find viewing pornography beneficial for solo sex due to the ability to fulfill more sexual experiences. This finding was appreciated because it relays the message that a viewer can have complete autonomy over their sexual experiences, and they do not necessarily require a partner. Also, having complete control over your sexual experiences creates a sense of safety for the individual. People who view pornography for solo sex may feel a sense of relief knowing that they do not need to put themselves in uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situations to further explore sexually and fulfill their sexual desires. Although it was mentioned that viewing pornography may cause further sexual health concerns, in some cases, it may also prevent it. This means that if an individual is seeking sexual pleasure and is not romantically involved with someone, they do not need to actively seek and get sexually involved with strangers to fulfill that desire. Instead, they can simply view pornography and be sexually satisfied.

### *Partnered Sex Experiences*

Through reviewing the literature on how viewing pornography impacts partner sex experiences, central themes were sexual satisfaction, pornography versus real life, and sexual competence in men versus women. This part of the literature review naturally included more data on romantic relationships. One study by Huntington et al. (2021) lasted 5 years and found similar findings of increased sexual satisfaction when comparing the results of shorter studies. Also, it was interesting to observe that women still had positive sexual outcomes in partnered sex after viewing pornography, whereas men did not. Goldsmith et al. (2017) provided a great example of how men may not have positive sexual outcomes after viewing pornography by mentioning that for men, viewing pornography predicts performance-related distraction during sexual activity among men. Through research, it was quite evident across multiple studies that there were similar findings for men and women regarding sexual satisfaction. This means that men and women seemed to be on opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to how they applied pornography viewing to enhance their sexual experiences with their partners. I questioned if women had more positive experiences in partnered sex because they didn't have as many expectations from their partners as men did. Concerning sex portrayed in pornography versus sex in real life, it was appreciated how Fritz et al. (2022) highlighted the difference between what takes place in pornography versus real-life sex. For example, it was noted that condom use was less portrayed in pornography than in real life. As mentioned earlier, this can be related to major sexual health concerns in real life if one is sexually active with multiple partners. Pornography is such an influential platform for viewers as young as adolescents. Therefore, it is alarming to know how detrimental certain acts portrayed in pornography may be to one's sex life and sexual health. For example, no condoms when having sex with a stranger in pornography is normalized when it should not be.

### *Limitations and Gaps*

A noticeable limitation was that there was not much research on middle-aged to older populations. Meaning individuals that are in the age range of 50 years or older. It would be interesting to see what their experience has been with viewing pornography and how it has impacted them on an individual and relational level. Considering how pornography has evolved over the years and has become a lot more accessible. It would be interesting to know how this age group would perceive it now versus when they were perhaps in their early twenties or thirties. Another noteworthy factor would be how this population would be impacted in terms of sexual expectations, emotions, partner sex experiences and so on. It causes one to question whether their self-esteem would be affected to the same degree after being exposed to pornography. As time has evolved so has sex culture. For example, the body types that may be considered attractive now versus then. It was mentioned that in a variety of pornographic contacts, there are a variety of different bodies shown then.

Following the lack of research on the older population, I concluded that it is important to explore if more research is required on individuals from different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds concerning pornography viewing. While I was reviewing different research studies, it was difficult to find research on how culture may correlate with pornography viewing and the different impacts it has on different people from different parts of the world. Indeed, there were general findings through research studies that included participants from different cultural backgrounds, but there was a lack of in-depth explanation as to how specific cultural values or morals of these participants play a role in the findings of these studies. For example, as per Adarsh and Sahoo (2023), there is a shortage of studies conducted in the South Asian context of how viewing pornography negatively impacts individuals.

## **Recommendations**

I recommend further educating therapists on critically assessing how the viewing of pornography affects individuals from various demographics and different areas of their lives, shaped by their cultural backgrounds. Regarding the South Asian culture, Adarsh and Sahoo (2023), state that there has always been a negative stigma surrounding sex-related content and pornography in India. Roy (2023) further explains how parents promote this negative stigma by refusing to have conversations with their children about sex or sexual orientation because there is this belief that this type of conversation will corrupt the innocence of their children. In addition, Roy (2022) mentioned that parents justify not having sex-related discussions because it does not align with the South Asian culture they were raised in. Overall, in comparison to Western culture, sexuality is considered conservative and comes with various restrictions (Mishra & Roy, 2023).

## **Application**

For my capstone, I have created a questionnaire for therapists working closely with the South Asian population. This questionnaire is an opportunity for self-reflection and exploration for South Asian clients who voice discomfort with discussing how pornography viewing has impacted different areas of their lives. I suggest that this questionnaire is not administered at the first session. It is important to note that therapists are encouraged to build therapeutic rapport with their clients before asking them to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire can be conducted in session or for the client to take home to complete in private. Based on the client's consent and comfort levels, therapists are suggested to review the client's answers with the client for further discussion and reflection. This questionnaire aims to provide a safe place and

judgment-free zone for clients to increase their comfort with speaking vulnerably about their sexual experiences without feeling restricted.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this capstone was to explore how viewing pornography impacts individuals by highlighting certain areas of research, including sexual expectations, emotions, sexual acts, sexual experiences, and partnered sex experiences. This capstone has been a highly valuable journey for my learning and growth as a future therapist. The impact of viewing pornography and other various concerns are topics that future clients will likely bring forward in sessions. Commitment to ongoing learning, collaboration with other professionals, and approaching one's work with benevolence, cultural sensitivity, and open-mindedness are crucial for ethically supporting the clients we serve. With deep gratitude toward diversity, these actions and traits are just a few of the many I will uphold to enhance emotional well-being and cultivate personal growth within the future clients I support.

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**Appendix: Questionnaire**

1. How comfortable were you about discussing anything pornography-related growing up?
  - 1=Strongly uncomfortable
  - 2=Uncomfortable
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Comfortable
  - 5=Very comfortable
2. How comfortable are you voicing your sexual needs within a romantic relationship?
  - 1=Strongly uncomfortable
  - 2=Uncomfortable
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Comfortable
  - 5=Very comfortable
3. How comfortable are you with integrating viewing pornography into romantic relationships?
  - 1=Strongly uncomfortable
  - 2=Uncomfortable
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Comfortable
  - 5=Very comfortable
4. How comfortable are you in the present about discussing anything pornography related?
  - 1=Strongly uncomfortable
  - 2=Uncomfortable
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Comfortable
  - 5=Very comfortable
5. How comfortable would you be if a romantic partner suggested viewing pornography together as a sexual activity?
  - 1=Strongly uncomfortable
  - 2=Uncomfortable
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Comfortable
  - 5=Very comfortable
6. Do you think viewing pornography is a common sexual practice around the globe?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Choose not to answer
7. Do you think viewing pornography is seen as a negative activity?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Choose not to answer
8. Has viewing pornography affected your romantic relationships?
  - Yes
  - No

- Choose not to answer
9. Was sexuality discussed in your household growing up?
- Yes
  - No
  - Choose not to answer
10. Has viewing pornography influenced the way you perceive your body?
- Yes
  - No
  - Choose not to answer
11. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
*“Viewing pornography influences sexual experiences between couples.”*
- 1=Strongly disagree
  - 2=Disagree
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Agree
  - 5=Strong agree
12. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
*“Viewing pornography influences mental health.”*
- 1=Strongly disagree
  - 2=Disagree
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Agree
  - 5=Strong agree
13. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
*“Viewing pornography enhances **solo** sexual experiences.”*
- 1=Strongly disagree
  - 2=Disagree
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Agree
  - 5=Strong agree
14. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
*“Viewing pornography is a source of sexual education”*
- 1=Strongly disagree
  - 2=Disagree
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Agree
  - 5=Strong agree
15. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement.  
*“Viewing pornography helps explore sexual identity.”*
- 1=Strongly disagree
  - 2=Disagree
  - 3=Neutral
  - 4=Agree
  - 5=Strong agree

16. How was sexuality discussed within your family growing up?
17. What kind of impact do you think viewing pornography has on sexual experiences?
18. In what ways can viewing pornography be seen as a **positive** experience?
19. In what ways can viewing pornography be seen as a **negative** experience?
20. How old were you when you first watched pornography?
21. What was your initial reasoning for watching pornography?
22. What was your initial opinion on pornography?
23. How often do you watch pornography?
24. How has viewing pornography been a **negative** experience for you?
25. How has viewing pornography been a **positive** experience for you?
26. How has viewing pornography impacted your solo sexual experiences?
27. What are the benefits of discussing your relationship with pornography?
28. In what ways has viewing pornography **positively** impacted your sex life?
29. In what ways has viewing pornography **negatively** impacted your sex life?
30. In what ways has watching pornography negatively impacted your relationship with your  
body?