

Re-assessing Audiences: How and Why do
Women Consume Pornography in Contemporary
Britain?

By

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Abstract

Natasha Walter has stated that we are, ‘growing up in a world where pornography is ubiquitous and will be part of almost everyone’s sexual experience’ (2010: 102). With reference to this view and towards widespread acknowledgement of an ever increasing female audience of pornographic texts, this thesis attempts to explore how and why heterosexual women are actively consuming heterosexual mainstream pornography in contemporary Britain (Walter, 2010; Levy, 2006; Alexander 2008). It explores how women approach the consumption of pornography in differing ways, yet still within a constricting patriarchal framework that seeks to promote a narrow yet contradictory notion of acceptable female sexuality. It further analyses the effects of capitalism, feminism, the hypersexualisation of contemporary culture and the importance placed on being ‘sexual’, as contextual influences that shape and promote the consumption of pornographic materials.

By conducting a set of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, I seek to gather the individual stories and views of a small number of women who identify themselves as heterosexual in and around the Birmingham area, focusing on the ways in which a relationship with the pornographic text is established and negotiated within an individual context. I am specifically targeting heterosexually-identified women, as their relationship with pornography is an especially under-researched area. Heterosexual women are generally seen as the dominated party in mainstream heterosexual pornography, making their relationship with the text seemingly problematic; an assumption that warrants more in-depth exploration.

I conclude by reflecting on the continuing, significant unease felt by heterosexual women in embracing a fluid, multiple and unapologetic female sexuality. I suggest that if women truly

want to be active in controlling their personal notions of sexuality, then the shackles of this unease need to be erased: heterosexual women must break free from the framework of 'acceptable sexual behaviour' that has been imposed on them.

For Mum and Dad

who always believe I can

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Introduction – How could they?

'Pornography makes the world a pornographic place; establishing what women are said to exist as, are seen as, are treated as, constructing the social reality of what a woman is and can be...Stopping pornography... is women's only chance to gain, in or out of court, a voice that cannot be used against us' (Mackinnon, 1993: 25, 68).

The impact of pornography on women's welfare and female sexuality has received much-publicised condemnation over the past forty years from both feminist scholars and more popular writers' (Dworkin, 1981; Mackinnon, 1993; Walter, 2010). Andrea Dworkin said in 1993 that, 'in pornography we literally see the will of women as men want to experience it' (Mackinnon, 1993: 67). Similarly, more contemporary writers have suggested that, 'a vein of real contempt for women characterises so much pornography...this is true even of mainstream pornography' (Walter, 2010: 114). However, Strossen argues that feminists should be in favour of anything that disrupts and challenges sexual conventions, and others argue that pornography can be a powerful tool for women to subvert the social systems that oppress them (Strossen, 2000; Segal, 1994; McIntosh, 1993). I take issue with the binary and extreme views that some feminisms take on pornography and attempt to draw attention to the often more nuanced and reflective accounts in more contemporary feminist literature.

Furthermore, I suggest that the relationship with pornography and the pornographic text is very much shaped by the context in which it sits, so the publication date of views is also an important factor.

In terms of a 'contemporary British context', there are a number of issues and areas to consider, as it is here, 'where the undressing-as-empowerment rhetoric really seems to come into its own' (Walter, 2010: 43). Women can freely frequent lap dancing clubs; read

Playboy; watch pornography and attend pole dancing lessons, all in the name of female empowerment (guardian.co.uk). However, I suggest throughout that this presentation of female sexuality is conducted within a continuing sexist and patriarchal framework that is unwilling to accept these expressions of female sexuality as empowering: 'it look[s] too uncannily like the old sexism to convince many of us that this is the freedom we have sought' (Walter, 2010: 34). Contemporary feminist writers, and many women I have spoken to, show an awareness of this return to sexism and the still barely distinguishable range of female sexuality offered, but the popularity of the activities above is ever increasing (Levy 2006). I question why so many women are willing to conform to such a narrowing representation of sexuality, and explore whether adopting these stereotypically male roles can ever provide a challenge to patriarchal dominance.

The openness towards a vocalised female sexuality is nothing new:

'by 1990, a generation of women had produced an array of new stories with their own autonomous desires and bodies at the centre. New stories of 'liberating masturbation' and 'female pleasures'; tales of women's erotic fantasy worlds...narratives which spoke of 'total orgasm', 'Gspots' or desires for 'dominance and submission,' (Plummer, 1995: 62).

It is the way these stories are portrayed that is problematic and worthy of greater understanding. If, twenty years ago, a new array of stories concerning female sexuality were beginning to emerge, then one would expect that, by now, a myriad of female sexual stories would be available to the contemporary British female. However, this widening female pleasure narrative has not emerged, and instead of growing into a spectrum of sexual stories, this thesis argues that heterosexuality is now constructed within a hypersexualised yet increasingly narrow framework of what is acceptably sexy and sexual for women: shown

most literally in the content of popularised heterosexual pornography, which has spilled so effortlessly into the mainstream.

Contemporary feminism seems to have acquiesced in challenging the impact of pornography or the hypersexualised notion of female sexuality, as its condemnation seems rarely heard and transcending voices of acceptance are emerging within the movement itself. As Walter identifies: 'many women who would call themselves feminists have come to accept that they are growing up in a world where pornography is ubiquitous and will be part of almost everyone's sexual experience' (2010: 102). If this is the case, how and why has the pornographic content and representation of female sexuality not widened to cater to this growing demographic? What cultural influences may be affecting women's use of pornography, and how may its use be reclaimed to aid a feminist agenda?

Moreover, alongside views that concern the 'duping' of the contemporary female consumer of pornography; the reclamation of sexist views; or the adoption of traditional roles of male fantasy, there is still little published on women consumers themselves. Walter makes brief reference to the female viewer; 'there are intelligent women, choosing and thinking for themselves, who do enjoy watching pornography' (Walter, 2010): but her analysis of pornography, centred most closely on its problems, is only concerned with the male consumer and female victims. This view is something that I have found particularly common throughout my research; there is a mass of statistics concerning the emergence of women consumers of pornography, yet there is little published in depth on how and why these women choose to consume these texts. I want to understand how women negotiate their relationship with pornography, alongside their views on sexuality and their views as feminists (if they choose to identify themselves in this way). Considering issues such as agency and guilt, I also want to explore whether women approach their pornography consumption in differing ways. Like much traditional feminist theory, homogeneity is still somewhat

presumed, and although this thesis cannot be all-inclusive, I hope to begin to widen the debate on contemporary British women's relationship with pornography and contemporary female sexualities, by offering stories that represent a wider spectrum of consumer. As Williams' states, '[We need a] substantive, critical and textually aware critique of the most popular moving image genre on the earth' (Williams, 2004: 12).

Therefore, chapter one explores the relationship between feminism and pornography in greater detail, providing a brief history of the changes and continuations in views on pornography, from the second wave to more contemporary manifestations. Chapter two follows on by beginning to explore whether there is a gender or sexual difference in the physical and emotional way that women consume these texts, and how women appear to 'look'. If the content of much pornography is still identified as degrading, misogynistic and sexist, how and why are a growing number of heterosexual women choosing to consume mainstream heterosexual pornography in contemporary Britain.

Chapter three includes a discussion of research methods used and subsequent reflections on this process. My research consisted of conducting questionnaires and interviews to collect the views of self-selecting heterosexual women who identify themselves as consumers of heterosexual mainstream pornography. I acknowledge that 'heterosexual mainstream' may seem too broad a term that could encompass a range of different things, but I identify it here as: pornography that contains performers of both sexes and content that includes mainstream sexual acts such as penetration, fellatio and cunnilingus, omitting acts that could be described as fetishist or deviant (this was distinguished by visiting a wide number of pornography sites aimed at heterosexuals and analysing what sexual acts they most proffered) (youjizz.com; pornhub.com; redtube.com; spankwire.com). No questions were asked in my emails to these women as to the specific content of what they watched for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted them to be open about the wide breadth of pornography that they consumed and felt

that by labelling things, ‘typically heterosexual,’ or, ‘fetishist’, this may deter some from being honest. Furthermore, the concerns of this project only required that the women categorised themselves as consumers of heterosexual pornography: I was interested in their relationship with what could be seen as a typically misogynistic genre, rather than the actual acts they consumed. This lack of definition could potentially leave the project unclear, but as I was more directly concerned with how the women negotiated, constructed and responded to what *they* term as pornography, I felt that this in fact made the project stronger. This thesis cannot establish a conclusive study of the types of pornography popular with the female consumer, but it can begin to break the surface of how and why women may choose to consume these materials against a societal background that remains predominantly sexist, negative and traditional in its presentation of women.

Chapter four will analyse the data collected via these methods through exploration of different consumer types, which I have split into three sections for clear distinction. I identify that there are several differing ways in which my participants approach their consumption of pornography and they are explored in detail here.

The key questions raised in this Introduction will be explored in chapter five, which analyses pornography’s relationship with capitalism, contemporary female sexualities and the hypersexualisation of contemporary culture and feminism. This will provide a cultural framework within which my participants’ consumption of pornography can be assessed. I suggest that pornography is such big business that it cannot fail to thrive within a predominantly capital-driven society such as Britain. I further argue that contemporary female sexualities, fuelled by a hypersexualisation of culture, are seeming to fall in line with this narrowing view of acceptable female sexuality: wanting to be seen as ‘sexy’, ‘sexual’ and ‘sexualised’ through conforming to stereotypical representations of women and becoming acquiescent to the content of pornography. Moreover, it purports that the idea of

feminism seems to have lost impact for these women because they struggle to identify its' relevance in their lives, especially alongside their consumption of pornographic materials.

Chapter 1 - Pornography and Feminism: A Critical

Evaluation

In this chapter, I address the key questions identified in my introduction using the theoretical framework of feminist ideas from Dworkin to Walter; with particular focus on their relationship with sexuality and pornography. Rather than providing a strictly chronological account, I choose to focus on the main themes and issues that have emerged across time. Situating this research within a feminist framework allows me to assess its importance against views already existing, whilst contextualising the societal consequences of the representation of female sexualities. I first explore Dworkin and the limitations of some of the more extreme anti-pornography views. I next focus on the link between pornography and the female victim, suggesting that this link plays a major part in women's struggling and seemingly contradictory relationship with the pornographic text. Thirdly, I make reference to sex-positive feminists, whose views on sex refer to the right of women to embrace their sexuality and reclaim previous words of abuse as a challenge to patriarchal dominance. Finally, I consider the growing popularity of pornography amongst women and how this consumption has been perceived negatively by much contemporary feminist literature, which identifies subsequent representations of women as remaining unchanged. I make reference to how the internet has changed women's consumption, making access much more efficient, and enabling much greater choice. I conclude by arguing that dismissing pornography as simply anti-feminist is unproductive and unhelpful, and identify the great need for an argument that thoroughly explores this new emergence of female consumers and what this means for feminism as a whole. I analyse and explore a spectrum of feminist literature from Dworkin to Levy; making no distinction between academic and popular feminist thought, as with a subject such as this, I feel that both views hold equal weight.

The most high profile, most notably enduring debates surrounding pornography that emerged out of second wave feminism include those of Andrea Dworkin, who argued that, 'pornography is the essential sexuality of male power [and that] every rule of sexual abuse ...and sexual exploitation is

encoded in it' (Dworkin, 2002: 11). She identified pornography as inherently negative and debilitating for women, stating that, 'the fact that pornography is widely believed to show "sexual representations" or "depictions of sex" emphasises only that the valuation of women as low whores is widespread and that the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself'; she suggests that all women's sexuality is contaminated by 'demeaning' pornography (Dworkin, 1981: 201).

These extreme views remain prominent in the popular perception of feminism, though more contemporary literature concerning pornography, explored below, has developed dramatically. Dworkin's assumption that pornography shows, 'widely believed...sexual representations', relies on the whole audience processing these texts in the same way (1981: 201). I suggest that female consumers, whom Dworkin does not account for, can and do use pornography for sexual arousal; managing to separate it from links with sexual abuse and rape, whilst also maintaining a separate sexual relationship with a partner. This distinction of one's sexuality into a number of separate categories is a concept identified as inherently important: 'while both pornographic representation and action do have an intimate relation to fantasy, and to each other...retaining the distinction among the three terms- representation, action and fantasy- is important, not only theoretically but also politically' (de Lauretis, 1994: 146). This distinction is so theoretically and politically important as it helps promote and support a much wider spectrum of female sexuality: one that does not presume homogeneity but gives women a more active role in establishing an individual pleasure narrative. We must then question Dworkin's assumption that all audience members process an identical view of women from pornography and explore this process in much greater detail.

Secondly, I draw attention to the identifiable link in much feminist literature across time, from Dworkin (1981) to Walter (2010), that concerns pornography and the victim; in particular the use of childhood sexual abuse as the *reason* for women's involvement in the pornography industry. There was an overwhelming sense from anti-pornography feminists that women are, and can only be, victims of pornography. Bebe Moore Campbell, talking in 1990 to Angel Kelly, 'the most famous Black adult actress in the...hardcore porn industry' (1990: 32), uses her control as interviewer to

presuppose Angel's reason for being involved in pornography. Angel's answers contradict Campbell's assessment but she is still stereotyped into the victimised figure, 'Although Angel said she was a star, she reminded me of a wounded child grieving for the loss of her innocence' (1990: 33). Campbell also talks in depth about Angel's experiences of child abuse; '“My time with my father wasn't right”... she looked at me with a pain-filled expression and suddenly all my questions were answered' (Campbell, 1993: 35); which presumes an inevitability that this abuse led to Angel's career path. Furthermore, Mackinnon identifies that, 'all pornography is made under conditions of inequality based on sex, overwhelmingly by poor, desperate, homeless, pimped women who were sexually abused as children (Mackinnon, 1993: 20). Using words that all connote desperation, it is Mackinnon who situates female pornography actresses as victims. Rather than allowing them to tell their own stories, she is rendering them silent and powerless.

This link with the victim is highlighted as problematic across the movement in general. As Siegel suggests, 'the primary reason young women flee from the term [feminism] today is because the feminist movement has gone seriously awry. The problem? “We feminists” has come to mean, unilaterally and unequivocally, “We victims.”' (Siegel, 1997: 63).

Presenting the female porn star as a wounded and abused child continues to be used today to 'explain and account for' women's participation in the pornography industry. Sasha Grey, a prominent and popular adult film actress, was interviewed on the Tyra Banks show in 2007 and was presented throughout as, contrary to her own words, a naive victim. Her argument against this presentation only became apparent to me when I viewed her website blog (youtube.com). She stated that the wardrobe department changed her hair, clothes and make-up prior to the show to make her appear younger and more child-like. Like Campbell, Banks questioned Sasha about her childhood, trying to unmask a horror that could account for her pornographic career choice. Sasha had never been abused and explained, in a particularly articulate way, that she saw her porn career as an expression of her own sexuality; which her loving family were happy to support. However, Sasha was still portrayed as a victim of circumstance. Presenting the women associated with pornography as victims acts as comfort for mainstream society, countering the view that a diverse range of women can and do choose

to enter and consume pornography. As Joanna Angel, a self-proclaimed alternative porn star, producer and feminist says, 'I don't think you need to have a bad childhood in order to do porn...There are so many girls that want to do porn! We have to turn a lot of women away' (Spread, 2009: 42).

Nonetheless, this increase in popularity has still left the generalised view of women involved in sex work unchanged. Only recently the British government brought in a ban that stopped the Job Centre advertising for strippers and lap dancers: 'It's absolutely wrong that the government advertises jobs that could support the exploitation of people' (Martin, 2010). The law continues to presuppose that sex work is exploitative and very far from empowering; implying instead that it remains an act of desperation.

These views of Dworkin, Mackinnon and Campbell identified above, which present the harmful effects of pornography are, although too extreme to provide a framework for my research, important to acknowledge in contextualising the background to feminism's relationship with pornography. However, I find it very limiting to talk of all women as passive agents in the consumption and participation of pornography: 'there is a lesson feminists have been slow to learn: that there are variations between groups and categories of women and that at the very minimum, one group does not speak for all' (Evans, 1995: 6). The views above that cite women's participation in sex work as only damaging homogenises women and could endanger the relationship with their sexuality in general. This issue, amongst others, was taken up by the more 'sex-positive' feminists of the late 1990's; also not without its problems.

In terms of pro-sex feminisms, there are many ideas that have emerged over the last twenty years citing a woman's right to be as sexually charged and adventurous as her male counterpart. 'Do-me feminism', which, 'claimed women's right to be as hedonistic as men' (Spin, 1999: 72) was one such strand. Women were encouraged to be as vocal about their sexual wants and preferences as men, being unashamed about promiscuity and, 'embracing their inner slut' (Spin, 1999: 72). Here, previous words of insult are adopted as challenges to traditional conventions; 'The slut, the dyke, and

the whore are thus embraced by Sex Radicals as a potent symbolic challenge to confining notions of proper womanhood and conventional sexuality' (Chapkis, 1997: 13). Nevertheless, I find this reclamation of previous words of abuse problematic. It is certainly true that the reclamation of certain words can prove positive for their presumed victims. The word 'nigger' for instance, and its reclamation by many African-American men has certainly allowed it to be seen differently and, although still used offensively, is seen by many in its reclamation as a powerful and transcending force: 'if one takes into account in-group reclamation then the semantic shift for...nigger moves from negative to positive...in-group reclamation works by creating that sense of ownership to turn a pejorative into a positive' (Jelsomeno, 2010). This is where I believe the reclamation of sexist words like 'slut' differs dramatically. Easton and Liszt's *The Ethical Slut* (1997) uses slut as, 'a person of any gender who has the courage to lead life according to the radical proposition that sex is nice and pleasure is good for you' (1997: 2). However, I argue that the term slut is too rooted as a derogatory term for the female, noticeably embedded in the core words of pornography, to refer a person of either gender. Furthermore, Nagle identifies that the condemnation of the slut and the whore is still active within feminism itself, 'Whores...are the dykes of the nineties, the lavender menace whom it's still considered okay to ostracize' (Nagle, 1997: 3). If the reclamation of these words fail to be consistent within feminism itself, it is impossible for them to hold the weight needed to symbolise a change in society in general.

I argue that this lack of society-wide acknowledgement is caused by sexism failing to be taken as seriously as other forms of discrimination. The reclamation of 'nigger' works because it is understood that racism is intolerable; but sexist jokes are still funny; lap dancing clubs are opening all the time- having doubled to nearly three hundred since 2003- and *Nuts* magazine sells nearly 250,000 copies every week (guardian.co.uk). As Walter states, 'it's not surprising we often feel complacent even when confronted by the reality of renewed sexism...if you feel irritated by the sale of ironers labelled 'Mummy and Me' in a high-street store...you may feel that it would be a little extreme to complain' (Walter, 2010: 232). It is important to understand that, for women, sexuality is constructed within a framework in which sexism is rarely acknowledged, so these acts of reclamation are in

danger of reiterating traditional forms of sexism rather than rendering change: 'this sexed-up feminism offers not a whit of female empowerment... [and is a]... sexual submission not only to male fantasy, but to male aggression' (Bean, 2007: 1). Whilst I think it is too generalising to suggest that women gain no sense of empowerment from this branch of feminism, I suggest that an over-emphasis on issues of sexuality can be misconstrued as a parody of the exact sexism it is aiming to combat.

It has been suggested by some that women's engagement with the pornographic text has emerged to try and transcend the stigma of victimization and to gain sexual power (Levy, 2006). Women are said to be adopting the more traditional and patriarchal representations of power through their overtly sexual actions; watching pornography, dressing like a porn star and buying Playboy magazine (Levy, 2006). However, Levy suggests that adopting these actions to gain power causes a juxtaposition that renders this power transitory and useless: 'Our national love of porn and pole dancing is not the by-product of a free and easy society with an earthy acceptance of sex. It is a desperate stab at free wheeling eroticism in a time and place characterised by intense anxiety. What are we afraid of? Everything... which includes sexual freedom and real female power' (Levy, 2006: 200)

Whisnant's views link closely to Levy as she argues that, 'pornography has become the ultimate cool, - quotidian and yet thrillingly audacious,' and that, 'the way to be a cool, modern, liberated woman is not only to tolerate it but to join in' (2004:16). The view that pornography is an inevitable part of the mainstream is present in much contemporary literature on pornography; Attwood agrees that, 'porn has turned chic and become an object of fascination in art, film, television and the press', thrusting itself wholeheartedly into the public sphere (Attwood, 2010: xiv).

However, this blurring of pornography into the mainstream and the growing knowledge of the female audience has done little to alter content:

'Some things in pornography never change: the body fragmentation, photographically cutting up women's bodies into isolated and fetishised parts, the sexualising of childhood and the infantilising of adult women...the bondage; the rape myths; the vacant; taken-aback; and/or fearful expressions on the women's faces' (Whisnant, 2004: 17).

Two interesting points emerge from this statement. Firstly, it seems that pornography has not made any conscious moves to change in order to be accepted into the mainstream; instead it is the boundaries of peoples' acceptance that is allowing this change to take place. Whisnant suggests that pornography is now only a reflection of the world within which it exists, rather than responsible for its creation. This suggests a worrying number of female consumers and participators are willing to constantly push these boundaries to keep their audience, be it male or female, entertained (Whisnant, 2004: 19). Secondly, the infantilising of women further supports the female as victim argument; with the female positioned as weaker in terms of both gender and age. Whisnant concludes that pornography is a form of, 'hate propaganda', which represents, 'contempt for and endangerment of women' (2004: 18), sounding remarkably like the views of Dworkin - but twenty years on.

However, certain feminists see little to be gained from simply criticising pornography:

'Any type of blanket condemnation of pornography will discourage us all from facing up to women's own sexual fears and fantasies, which are by no means free from the guilt, anxiety, shame, contradiction and eroticization of power on display in men's pornographic productions' (Segal, 1994: 197).

Her views represent an emergence of feminist thought that was not prepared to simply dismiss pornography as wholly damaging. Although Segal identifies several negative features of heterosexual pornography that coincide with a more extreme anti-pornography stance, she further emphasises that a, 'blanket condemnation of pornography', actually harms the understanding of woman's relationship with their sexuality, acknowledging pornography's enduring link and necessity for exploration.

Pornography is no longer simply the enemy of feminism, but is emerging as a distinct area of conflict; being identified as sexist, negative and dangerous but also as a potential source of pleasure and sexual emancipation for a feminist agenda.

Nevertheless, Attwood suggests that trying to construct a more nuanced contemporary feminist critique around pornography, and in particular hardcore pornography, is highly difficult:

‘the history of highly charged and emotional political debates around porn, a reluctance to return to ‘anti-porn’ stances and the economic power of the porn industry itself [has all made it extremely difficult]’ (Attwood, 2010: xvii).

Contemporary feminism’s stance against pornography seems to suffer from being linked to the extremist views of past debates.

Another challenge that many anti-pornography campaigners face is linked to the emergence of the Internet and how online pornography has, ‘blurred the boundaries between public and private space in a particularly comprehensive way, becoming accessible to audiences who have traditionally been forbidden it, and potentially, to all’ (Attwood, 2010: 2). Online pornography has allowed accessibility to increase and has thus aided in the spill-over of pornography into the mainstream. Attwood suggests that the internet has, ‘domesticated porn’ (2010: 2), and it is this domestication that hinders challenge and critique of its dominance.

Williams agrees, arguing that, ‘discussion and representations of sex that were once deemed obscene in the literal sense of being off (ob) the public scene, have today insistently appeared in the new public / private realms of Internet and home video’ (2004: 3). This suggests that the ever decreasing gap between the public and the private sphere is encouraging female consumers of pornography to the fore.

More contemporary literature has referred to this blurring of the public and the private by suggesting that the internet has been used as an instructional manual for what it is to be sexy, sexual and have sexuality. Nikunen refers to this blurring of the boundaries between sexy, sexual, sexuality and pornography in her article, ‘Cosmo girls talk’ (2007: 73). She identifies how *Cosmopolitan* has become, ‘part and parcel of postfeminist discourse that produces a new feminism geared toward female sexuality’; the newly emerging feminist version of female sexuality in this magazine, looks increasingly like ‘sexuality’ represented in mainstream heterosexual pornography. She identifies how Cosmo internet forums, ‘make evident the conflation of pornography and sex: porn is used as an instructional material, as if echoing the legitimizing of pornographic representations as sexual

education (Paasonen, 2007: 40): if we refer to feminist research concerning the content of pornography, we see how dangerous this could be. It is only the woman in pornography who is, 'constantly orgasmic' (Dines and Jenson, 1998: 77). It seems that everything, including the giving of pleasure to their male partner, seems to produce an 'immense pleasure' in the woman that is not seen in the man (1998: 77). This then becomes a required sex 'performance', with the most danger occurring when this 'performance' narrows to become women's only way to experience a sexuality.

Nikunen finds that questions on the Cosmopolitan internet forum surrounding an inability or ignorance of sexual techniques are, 'framed with apologies and blushing smileys' (2007: 80), suggesting, 'ignorance and innocence require apologies' (2007: 80). It seems that pornography, or the ability to perform well sexually, has become so linked with what it means to be a successful and contemporary 'woman', and in some cases, 'feminist', that the relationship with one's 'sexualness' (or the conflation of sexuality and sex) becomes difficult to understand, as its presentation is one of 'necessity' rather than personal choice.

Attwood agrees, highlighting that, 'what sex means is changing' (2010: 6); it becomes a tool to appear sexy and sexual rather than to gain sexual pleasure and enjoyment. Women's concern with fulfilling the expectations of the sexy, contemporary woman has caused a conflation of sex and sexuality that has dramatically changed the view on what pornography is and does. For many, pornography is no longer seen as a social taboo, but a tool to become better sexually, further suggesting a new feminist discourse on pornography needs to arise:

'[Sex] is now strongly tied to discourses of consumerism, style and therapy; to hedonistic and often auto-erotic practices;...to the expression of self and the creation of communities ...A politics of sex and intimacy, based on the earlier feminist insistence that "the personal is political" attempts to theorise the intimate aspects of life and reconsider these in ethical rather than moralistic terms' (Attwood, 2010: 7).

Attwood highlights that feminism hasn't become stagnant in its critical approach to pornography, but it needs to create a political feminism that focuses more closely on the ethical concerns of pornography and its consumerist attitude towards sex; a nuanced view that is a product of its context.

In conclusion, this account of feminism's relationship with sexuality and pornography is by no means all-inclusive, but it does give us a sense of feminism's relationship with pornography; which continues to appear particularly one-sided in its condemnation of content and representation of women. There is a distinct lack of literature published on women's consumption of pornography as it seems widely presumed that women will not want, or should not want, to be viewing this material. With the myriad of different feminist views on pornography that I have discussed above, it seems worrying that this extreme and traditional view is still the one that is most high profile. Williams does attempt to address the, 'serious limitations of much of the earlier writing on pornography [that assumed] that pornography [only] expressed the power and pleasure of heterosexual men', but seems to only address this problem through, 'Gay, Lesbian and Homosocial Pornographies', which, although adding an interesting dimension, still excludes heterosexual women, leaving their engagement with pornography ignored (2004: 7). Segal expressed a similar view previously, acknowledging, 'some powerful, yet positive writing on female sexuality, but it [only] comes from and addresses lesbian desire and practice – in terms of its specific challenge to the heterosexual matrix' (1994: 192) and since this was written, little progress has been made.

We are thus left in a situation where women's interaction with the pornographic text is increasing, but our understanding remains startlingly absent. Pornography and feminism will inevitably have a complicated relationship, but it is one that continually needs to be analysed, argued and negotiated.

Chapter 2 – The Porn Audience: Why would they

consume this material?

In this chapter I explore research into the pornography audience to understand existing debates on how and why women may choose to consume this material. I first make reference to the specific reasons for consumption, before addressing how cultural influences may affect this consumption and finally, how pornography may subsequently be negotiated into women's lives. Although the body of work surrounding this subject, particularly those concerning the female consumer, is relatively limited in scope - 'empirical work on women's consumption of pornography is practically non-existent' - it is vital that it is explored, in order to situate my own research in context (Parvez, 2006: 609). The more traditional representations of the porn audience as, 'pimpily teenagers, furtive perverts in raincoats, and asocial, compulsively masturbating misfits' (Kipnis, 1999: 161), has moved on considerably, but the presupposition of a predominantly male audience of pornography still holds strong. With emerging arguments suggesting that the female porn consumer can no longer be ignored: 'if the female porn consumer did not exist before, she is in training and under construction', it is essential that her role is explored as a valid and very real member of this audience (Attwood, 2007: 4).

The most dominant view presented in much of the literature surrounding the pornography audience is concerned with its problems and effects. The conclusions of much popularised texts concerning societies' 'problem' with pornography has led to, 'an inability to escape the logic of effects, or to maintain any kind of reality checking in relation to porn' (Attwood, 2007: 5). Attwood suggests that the overarching concern of what pornography 'does' to its

consumer, makes it increasingly difficult to research why consumers engage with pornography, as it seems so inextricably linked to these perceived effects. To discard pornography as a text which only causes effect, too easily ignores the relationship between audience member and text and the active and conscious decisions that surround consumption.

Attwood further acknowledges the naivety in presupposing one mass of consumer, be it male or female:

‘Sexually explicit media takes on a range of meanings; different decodings and uses are reported and consumers display both critically distanced and highly engaged audience behaviour’ (Attwood, 2007: 5).

Just as an audience member may have a different reaction to a religious documentary, so the individually contextualised consumer will have different responses, reactions and reasoning for their consumption of pornography.

In terms of the specific reasons for consuming pornography, Parvez found that it was primarily used for, ‘erotic arousal and masturbation’, signifying a conscious and active desire to view these texts for sexual pleasure; not a forced interaction, but one undertaken by a variety of different women with very different sexual contexts (2006: 616). Parvez also found that, ‘the second most common reason was curiosity about sexual practices’ (2006: 611). Smith also identified the reasons for consumption as being, ‘acquisition of knowledge: new techniques, ideas and means of achieving orgasm’, and, ‘being turned on, physical sensations and/or satisfaction’ (2007: 175). The development of new knowledge is cited so frequently in literature concerning women’s reasons for consumption, but it is rarely mentioned in literature surrounding a male counterpart. It seems that women need to provide a reason for their consumption that goes beyond gratification; possibly as alleviation of guilt

and as part of the negotiation and justification process described below. Moreover, it is telling that much of women's concerns are on an improvement in their 'sex' that would benefit a male partner, rather than consumption simply for their own pleasure.

These concerns continue as Smith found that the women she interviewed did not see pornography as actively trying to appeal to a female consumer; but were unable to conceive of a 'woman's' pornography that could. Smith suggests that this is because the consistently promoted image of the non-desiring woman has left women, 'unable to see or shape their own desire for themselves, [or understand] their own experiences on their own terms', and that pornography is the nearest accessible medium to acknowledge this desire and experience (2007: 144).

This inability to, 'see or shape their own desire' (Smith, 2007: 144), could suggest why, 'some women report an inability to object to [pornography's] use in heterosexual relationships, while others display anxiety about speaking openly about their enjoyment of it' (Attwood, 2007: 4). Some women were found to be acquiescent or secretive consumers of pornography, having had their consumption tainted by confusion surrounding its acceptance according to cultural and societal norms. Attwood suggests that this difficulty arises due to the limitations of the, 'network of available sexual experiences', that female consumers have access to (2007: 3). She argues that, as researchers, we have to ask:

'What patterns of consumption are there within the network of available sexual experiences? How are these combined and how do they come to mean what they mean in the life of an individual, a relationship, or a community? How do particular choices and combinations of choices gain approval or disapproval and how does that impact on our experience and understanding of sex?' (Attwood, 2007: 3)

To negotiate consumption of the pornographic text in such a complex way may seem unlikely, but Parvez suggests that this negotiation is inevitable as, ‘the way women consumers think about the workers and sex work in general (labor process) would affect the way they experience pornography (labor product)’ (Parvez, 2006: 606). She suggests that we first need to understand the relationship between women and the female sex worker to fully comprehend how a relationship with the pornographic text is negotiated. She argues that female consumers, ‘are conflicted between their sexual arousal on one hand and their uncertainty over the authenticity of the actresses’ pleasure on the other’, creating an anxiety and guilt that must be negotiated; coinciding with the already negotiated space of available sexual experience that Attwood identified above (Parvez, 2006: 606).

This view is also echoed in McKee et al (2008) who found that the most popular pornography for women in particular, was one where you could identify, ‘real enjoyment’, or where there was, ‘genuine chemistry’ between the actors (2008: 41); it seems that women’s enjoyment is as much concerned with the relationship between audience and actress, as it is with the specific content of the text itself.

Unlike the male consumer, the mainstream negativity that surrounds women in sex work creates a conflict within the women consumers of pornography that causes inevitable anxiety (Parvez, 2006: 611). I suggest that this anxiety is also furthered by the negative way that women consumers of pornography are represented in mainstream culture; automatically situated into the homogenous mass of ‘bad girl’. As Attwood acknowledges, mainstream society still uses, ‘bad girl and good girl figures in order to mark out territory in which the pleasures of sex consumption for women can be represented (Attwood, 2007: 3). The good girl turns her back on pornography and allows, ‘her bravery and chastity to triumph over evil and violence’, whilst the bad girl represents the sex-positive feminist who has, ‘learnt to look

at porn with a critical eye' (Attwood, 2007: 4). No matter how differently females approach, negotiate or use pornography, they are automatically situated in binary opposition to what is 'good' and 'normal'; becoming the deviant or, 'bad girl' (Attwood, 2007: 4).

I agree in part with both Attwood and Parvez, arguing that one can still identify the stereotyped 'bad' girl in the mainstream, and determine the possible harm that this may cause in women's ability to use pornography as a tool for arousal. However, I question whether these views are also too simplistic. Just as Parvez acknowledges that some sex workers, 'strive towards performance that appears emotionally authentic' (2006: 609), whereas others, 'find it necessary to invest some of their own personality into their work performances' (2006: 609), one must assume that a number of women are also able to disengage themselves from this social guilt of emotional labour.

Furthermore, although the cultural and societal influences on women's relationship with the pornographic text may be seen as negative, Parvez also highlights a small number of her participants who made reference to the, 'rebellious nature', of porn and identified that this had some bearing on their decision to watch it (Parvez, 2006: 611). It is then too simplistic to argue that all women are negotiating their consumption of pornography *despite* society's view. With an emerging insistence on the need for women to be sexually open and experimental, some women may indeed be consuming pornography *because* of these cultural influences. Parvez concludes by stating that, 'the analysis of women's ambivalence reveals how the sexual experiences of most of the women, vis-à-vis their pornography consumption, could not be extracted from the larger social context of power in which gender and sexuality operate', emphasising that understanding the social and cultural influences that affect consumption, is crucial to the concerns of this project (Parvez, 2006: 627).

To counter these cultural and societal influences, Juffer suggests that women approach their consumption through negotiating it into their everyday lives. Linked to views highlighted previously, concerning how the internet has, ‘domesticated porn’ (Attwood, 2010: 2), Juffer identifies women’s relationship with pornography as one that takes place through the computer as, ‘a technology that claims the material site of the body as one of pleasure, within the privacy of home, yet allows one to escape the body and the home momentarily’ (Juffer, 1998: 103). If, as Parvez suggests, women’s ambivalence towards pornography is created through an inability to escape the emotional labour of women in sex work, it seems that access to these new technologies of pornography allows women to escape domesticity and embrace a fluidity of fantasy that has previously been inaccessible; the plethora of available pornography on the internet making justification of its use easier than ever before.

This negotiation of pornography into the, ‘mundane’, is also hinted at in Smith’s, *One for the Girls*. She identified that the consumption of pornography was controlled by these women through, ‘the ways in which it fits with aspects of its readers’ lives’ (Smith, 2007: 130). They could choose when and how to watch and thus felt in control of their own consumption. However, because this negotiation is still so contextually loaded, Smith suggests that the female consumer may expect more from her consumption of pornography. In her study of pornographic magazines, Smith found that, ‘when the magazine moved to a more ‘ladette’ style in 1996...Jane was angered by its failure to deliver its promises’ (Smith, 2007: 130). It seems that Jane’s relationship with the text, considering the ambivalence that it is said to promote, has to be much less transitory than that of the male consumer.

In conclusion, critical debates concerning the consumption of pornography argue that it involves, particularly for women, a number of differently negotiated, justified and analysed relationships that are altered through highly individualised contexts. Consumption is still very much shaped by a rigidly executed framework of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable for women to view. These influences also taint much of the research, leaving women's relationship with the pornographic text continuing to be negotiated within an established patriarchal framework.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The choice of methodologies used when researching a topic as personal and sensitive as women's consumption of pornography is extremely important; especially as I found that participants were less willing to talk to me than I initially predicted, shown through the low number of responses received and the hesitation shown in the interview sessions. My topic is defined as, 'socially sensitive research', that is, 'research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it' (Lee and Renzetti, 1993: 9). Researching women's consumption of pornography may not appear to provide a particular threat to its participants, but I was conscious that people can become overwhelmed and unsettled when asked to think critically about why they make the choices they do: 'sensitive research raises methodological, technical, ethical, political and legal problems as well as having potential effects on the personal life of the researcher (Plummer, 1983: 86). I was extremely conscious to avoid causing any type of 'harm' to the participants involved, but as Graves and Shield argue; 'it is not at all clear in most forms of social science research who we are protecting, how we are protecting them, what we are protecting them from, or what constitutes the limits of our capacity to protect' (1991: 136). Therefore, my approach was to consider how the questions and research could be received in a number of different contexts and to do all I could to minimise the potential risks, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of research questioning. Consequently, I thought critically about the content of my questions and made sure the participants were acutely aware of the sensitive and personal nature of the project, alerting them to the potential consequences before they began.

The ethical issues surrounding this project were emphasised by the lengthy process it took to gain ethical approval in order to begin. The ethics panel were initially concerned with many aspects of the project: this included the requirement that all participants should be over

eighteen; the nature of questions asked; the safety of setting for the conducting of interviews and the wider implications of researching a topic that may be seen as controversial. To overcome these issues, a number of redrafts of the project outline were required that meant altering some questions that were deemed too personal, and an insistence on meeting all participants beforehand to obtain identification that confirmed their age. This also constrained me to conducting interviews in the library and making library assistants aware of my presence, which caused the interview to seem a lot more formal than I had first envisaged. I was told that the implications of women under the age of eighteen taking part in this project was dangerous for the reputation of me as a researcher and the university in general. However, I still find it startling that although the age of consent in this country is sixteen and research on sexual practices with under-eighteens is conducted, the rigidity of the ethics panel was unyielding. There still exists a very alarmist view surrounding women's consumption of pornography, and emphasises further why research into this area is so important.

Furthermore, in terms of this research project, I was conscious that for data to be obtained, certain questions needed to be asked; 'the fact that sensitive topics pose complex issues and dilemmas for researchers does not imply that such topics should not be studied' (Renzetti, 1993: 10). I was aware that being anxious with the content of the questions could cause my project to limit itself in terms of data obtained. Equally, if I worded the questions in too personal a way, it could cause participants to resist answering particular questions, or worse, become offended and not answer any of the questions at all.

My intention throughout was to gain honest and open opinions from the women about their personal consumption of pornography. To achieve this, I needed to create a positive rapport with the participants; an atmosphere in which they felt they could express themselves freely, whilst also stressing my professionalism so that the seriousness of this project was not undermined. I chose to use a mixed methods based research strategy, as I felt this was the

best way to obtain a larger number of opinions as well as the answers necessary to tell the stories of these women's motivations and experiences.

I initially decided to conduct a large scale survey which would be placed on the internet, followed by twelve longer semi-structured interviews, but I did not receive as many responses as I hoped so the project was inevitably scaled down. To recruit the participants, I sent out an email via the social-networking site Facebook (Appendix 1), inviting women who identified themselves as heterosexual and who were over the age of eighteen, to participate in a questionnaire about their personal consumption of pornography. I decided that the internet would be the most viable recruitment tool for me because of, 'cost- and time-efficiency and access to a large and diverse population of potential participants...particularly important for smaller institutions that have little time and money available for research'; and I most definitely fell into this category (Hewson et al, 2003: 51). I felt that Facebook would be a particularly effective recruitment tool as it allowed me to target my audience quite accurately and eliminated the face to face element; avoiding anxiety in participants and leaving the women free to ignore or decline my invitation. As well as targeting heterosexual women over eighteen quite specifically, I could also target particular areas of the country, which also made it lot more logistically viable since I had to meet the participants in person. However, recruitment via Facebook did exclude a large number of women, including those who may not have had access to the internet; those who had their profiles set to private and those who may not have been connected to a particular area network. Another concern with Facebook was the inability to target the whole of Birmingham with one email, so I had to send individual messages to women, which was a laborious and time-consuming task, limiting emails sent to around two hundred and fifty. After considering all these limitations, Facebook still seemed the best way to target the highest number of women in the shortest

amount of time. I decided against recruiting via particular pornography interest sites, as I was keen to target women who may not have made their use of pornography known publicly. I decided to focus only on heterosexual women as I felt that, although a large percentage of the British population would define themselves in this way, as Segal identified previously, there seemed to be a lack of sex and sexuality research in this area (1993: 192). Within three weeks I had received twenty-five responses from women who ranged from nineteen to fifty-two, with the majority of the respondents being below thirty. I met each respondent individually to confirm their age and asked them all to sign the consent form before the questionnaire was sent to them (Appendix 2). At the end of the questionnaire, I invited the participants to take part in a more in-depth interview, to which seven women agreed. Of the seven women, I chose three to interview in depth. All the women were reminded throughout that they could withdraw their answers at any time.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) consisted of twenty-nine questions, ranging from the type of pornography the participants watched, to the definition of sexiness as portrayed in the media. I wanted to create as detailed a picture of the participants as possible, as it was important to understand their wider views on female sexuality as well as their relationship with pornography. I was wary that some participants may have felt uncomfortable disclosing such personal details as, 'it is assumed that respondents wish to manage impressions of themselves in order to maintain their standing in the eyes of the interviewer' (Lee, 1993: 75). This ordinarily wouldn't apply to the questionnaire situation as it eliminates face to face interaction, but as I had to meet the participants to verify their age, this conventional code of practice was broken. To combat this, I made the email particularly generic and, bar the brief

face to face encounter, the questionnaire reduced interaction as much as possible, making it more impersonal and less seemingly prone to judgement.

I decided to present the questions in a predominantly formal way, being conscious not to use a tone that suggested that the women should be embarrassed or cautious about disclosing their patterns of behaviour. The formality of questioning would aid in reassuring the women that they were taking part in an academic research project whose intentions for the data were serious and socially important.

The questionnaire was designed within a framework that was aiming to understand the viewing patterns of the women's consumption of pornography; what external influences they identified as being involved in this; how they saw the position of female participants and viewers of pornography and how they saw their own sexuality in relation to this. Appendix three highlights the questions asked here and their linear progression covered all the key questions that I highlight above. Also considered here was how much information I wanted to gather against time taken to complete the questionnaire, which led me to simplify the questions as much as possible.

The questionnaire consisted of a mixture of multiple choice questions and questions that allowed greater space for comments, as this provided the option for some participants to quickly scan through and answer whatever questions they could, whilst also allowing for people who had more time to think and reflect in greater detail on their answers. Realising that, especially in questionnaires, 'people make choices without explicitly taking into account all the points in favour of and against each side' (Hoinville, 1983: 38); I chose to use the questionnaire in conjunction with interviews so that many of the simple yes/no answers in my questionnaires could be clarified and explored in greater detail.

Interviews

In terms of selecting the three women for interview, I was conscious that I wanted to pick three women with the most contrasting views to offer the greatest range of opinions that were put forward by my participants. After analysing the questionnaires, I became aware of the need to interview women from the three categories of response that began to emerge. I chose participant one because she seemed to have a very positive outlook on her relationship with pornography; the only reason she wouldn't enter the porn industry was embarrassment, rather than seeing it as dangerous or degrading. She took control of introducing pornography into her relationship and saw women's and men's role in pornography as very equal.

Participant two was chosen because of her admittance that she always masturbated to the pornography that she watched; it was always for arousal and she had the highest response in answer to how many women watched pornography, suggesting to me that she thought her behaviour common-place and thus less likely to be judged. Finally, I chose participant three because her answers suggested that she was the most cautious about her use of pornography. She didn't agree that a separate sexuality was necessary, and said that it was a joint decision to bring pornography into the relationship, suggesting that her use of pornography may be closely bound with her relationship with her boyfriend. She circled, 'dangerous and degrading', a number of times on her questionnaire and was one of the few participants who thought that women were not free to explore their sexuality openly today. This seemed an interesting contradiction to explore in terms of her use of pornography and I felt that it was an issue that I would like to address further.

The interviews took place in the library at The University of Birmingham on Saturday 19th June 2010. The overly formal setting of the University library would not have been my preferred choice of venue for conducting the interviews, but for the safety of the participants

and myself it was decided that the library would be the most appropriate venue. I offered each participant a drink beforehand and we had an informal chat before conducting the interviews. I felt that familiarising myself with the participants would put them at ease and make them feel more comfortable about being honest about their personal views. The interview room was private and provided a viable space in which to conduct the, ‘semistructured life world interview...whose purpose [was] to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale, 1996: 6). I wanted to explore the women’s relationship with pornography and sexuality in general, finding out where and why it fitted into their lives. Furthermore, I was interested in whether they saw themselves as feminists; whether feminists can have a relationship with pornography that isn’t contradictory and whether they see feminism as being able to play a role in their lives. I began with more general questions, progressing to more personal questions dependent on my gauging of the participants attitudes and responses. My basic framework of questions (Appendix 4) was identified through the issues and questions that arose from the questionnaire results, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Questions were not asked in order, and not all questions were asked; they were instead chosen as stems for conversation and questioning as the interview progressed. However, this approach didn’t necessarily work as well as I had first hoped as participants seemed a little reluctant to elaborate on their views. Oppenheim notes that the conversational aspects of semi-structured interviews may make respondents uncomfortable for many reasons; ‘they resent the intrusion by a complete stranger; they do not want to be so accurate or attentive in their responses...and they fear the potential use to which their responses may be put’, so I had to work quite hard with some participants in order for them to discuss their opinions with me in detail (Oppenheim, 1992: 66).

Methodological Reflections

After conducting the interviews I felt it was important to reflect on the interview process before analysing the outcomes. The strength of social research lies in one's ability to be a reflective interviewer, as personal context can indeed have implications on the outcomes of such research. Researchers such as Harding have argued that the, 'researcher is partial and this partiality impacts upon the research process in numerous ways' (1987: 273). Louise Archer argues that, 'the assumptions, interests and identity of the researcher influence, and will be reflected in, the selection and conceptualisation of topics for enquiry, formulation of research questions, interactions between researcher and participants within the research context and subsequent analysis and representation of the research' (Archer, 2002: 109). One must understand that the research undertaken and the data subsequently produced is involved in its own socially constructed process, whereby it could change under different circumstances. Furthermore, the 'knowledge' produced is only 'true' in this singular context. I understand that I, alongside my relationship with the participant, questions and methodologies chosen, shape and mould the knowledge produced.

As Plummer notes, 'The meanings of stories are never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction between producers and readers in shifting contexts' (Plummer, 1995: 22). As the participants and I shared many similarities on the surface, this may have helped in creating an atmosphere that was less likely to be blurred by social and cultural noise. All participants were white women from the Midlands area; all were middle class and fairly well educated and all had no particularly strong religious beliefs – traits all shared by myself. I suggest that being a fellow woman led the participants to feel more comfortable talking to me about their personal issues; further confirmed by their answers to this question at the start of the interview process.

By recruiting via Facebook, this gave the women access to my Facebook page, and although it doesn't give any particularly personal details, they could certainly have made judgements about my lifestyle and identity from my photographs, should they have chosen to view them. They would also have known that I was in a relationship with a male, situating myself as a fellow heterosexual woman, which could have had an effect on how they chose to answer my questions, particularly in relation to heterosexual pornography.

Nonetheless, there was a noticeably unequal division of power in the interview session. The participants relied on me more than I had envisaged to ask questions and begin discussions; 'shared social statuses do not guarantee understanding or make possible a presumption of equality and associated openness in responses' (Davies, 1999: 100). I felt the women were quite hesitant to be open with me, and although I had hoped that the interview would play out like a conversation, it did not progress to this stage, leaving me very much in control throughout. This made it especially important that during the analysing process I used a, 'reflexivity that constantly assesses', the relationship between "knowledge" and ways of doing "knowledge" (Calas and Smircich, 1992b: 240), so that my role in the research was acknowledged and assessed.

Chapter 4 – Consumer frameworks

I begin this section with a brief discussion of the twenty-five participants that took part in my study as I felt it important to frame these women first before moving on to discussing, ‘consumer types. I start by focusing on the women’s sexual experience and the contradictions that arose from many of their answers, before assessing why these discrepancies may have occurred.

All of the twenty five women interviewed had slept with at least six men, with the majority (fifteen) having slept with between eleven and fifteen. A recent survey for the Observer found that the average British woman had seven sexual partners, so the majority of my participants claimed to have slept with nearly twice the national average. However, I am reluctant to draw any specific conclusions from the numbers received, as the contradictions contained within individual responses seem to tell us more about the women’s relationship with their sexuality, and the importance of sexual experience (observer.co.uk).

Fifteen of the women said that they had a regular sexual partner, yet only eight women said that they were in a relationship, suggesting that seven women are having regular sexual intercourse with a man that was not their partner. It seemed important that they were identified as having regular sex; believing that this made them appear sexually powerful. This was especially true of the women engaging in regular sexual intercourse with someone who was not a partner:

‘When I have a one-night stand I suppose I do feel powerful yea (sic), I mean I don’t have to call him, or worry that he’s not calling me. I can go a bit crazy I suppose because I don’t have to care what he thinks’ (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

Walter identified this as a popularised trait in the production of the successfully sexual women, who, 'now needed to learn to take sexual pleasure for themselves and to experiment, and that would necessarily include having sex outside of committed relationships' (Walter, 2010: 86).

Twenty-three of the women said they were having sex four times a week or more; twice as much as the national average, highlighting a further number of questions and contradictions (observer.co.uk). Only fifteen women said they had a regular sexual partner, which would mean that eight of the women were having sex at least four times a week with four different men. This data does not tally with the number of sexual partners the participants told me they have had, leaving one to presume that some of the participants may not have been entirely truthful with me. Again, this leads me to question why they felt they needed to exaggerate the figures.

I also question the validity of these answers in light of the responses to the question concerning masturbation. Most of the women admitted to only masturbating once a week, suggesting that they were happy to share with me a constructed image of promiscuity, but not actual sexual fervour with their bodies. This suggests a relationship with their bodies that views them as tools to be sexually appealing rather than sexually aroused. The women were keen to admit to me that they owned sex toys and masturbated to the pornography that they watched, yet most of their sexual encounters took place with a partner. From their answers, it seems that many of the women were keen to develop an independent sexuality outside of a relationship, but were ambivalent about taking it forward, or discussing it with me. I suggest that having regular sex with a male partner is still seen as the most acceptable way of expressing one's sexuality, with female masturbation still carrying a stigma.

The amount of non-committal sexual intercourse proclaimed by the women also positions them right at the heart of a hypersexualised society that views the admittance of promiscuity as a positive attribute: ‘Because they had so successfully subtracted emotion from their sex lives, these young women were perfectly in tune with the culture around them’ (Walter, 2010: 90). I do not necessarily identify this as a negative thing, as I found no evidence in my interviews that the act itself was harming my participants’ relationships with sex. However, it was the contradictory nature of how promiscuity is viewed, that the participants found most frustrating:

‘Don’t expect to be able to sleep around with whoever you want and still not be called a whore, it’s sad but it’s still true’ (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

‘It does annoy me that guys don’t have to think of the consequences, I would love to be able to be honest with him about how many blokes I’ve slept with, but I just couldn’t... He’d think I was a slag! (laughs)’ (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

I further suggest that the ability to subtract emotion from one's sex life is another tool used by the contemporary British woman to transcend the stereotype of feminist as victim: ‘I dreaded the idea of a romantic first time...I wanted sex. It felt really good. I felt empowered.’ (Walter, 2010: 89). Young women seem to find the act of unemotional sex empowering because for so long the view that women were unable to detach emotion from sex was the main stereotype that existed: ‘Men often view sex as a physical, pleasurable act while women tend to view sex as an act to increase emotional closeness’ (Leigh, 1989). The ability to feel empowered through differing types of sexual intercourse certainly suggests an important change in the fluidity of female sexuality, but as the majority of my respondents were still very much aware of the judgements women face in embracing an openness to sexuality, and

altered their behaviour accordingly, this fluidity of sexuality may not extend as far as is thought.

Consumer Types

The data obtained from the questionnaires suggested three emerging categories of respondents: ‘performance’ consumers, ‘vacuum’ consumers and ‘pleasurably-torn’ consumers; all of which I discuss in detail below. I use assessment of agency in order to make distinctions between the groups, using Anthony Giddens’ definition that: ‘agency is action to intervene in the world and about the capacity to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or cause of events’ (1984: 14). I attempt to distinguish between the categories through assessing agency in relation to negotiation of the relationship with pornography.

However, I first analyse the questionnaire responses to show how they informed and influenced the three differing heterosexual female consumer types of pornography. I noticed a strong correlation between the women who sometimes masturbated to the pornography they watched; who saw the relationship between the participants as generally equal and who identified the main reason for not entering pornography as embarrassment rather than fear of abuse or degradation. I highlighted this group as important for further exploration as they seemed most similar to the women identified in the work of Walter (2010) and Levy (2006). All of these women, apart from one exception, only ever watched Man / Woman pornography. I was anxious to identify whether their use of pornography was for arousal, or associated with creating a performance of ‘sexuality’ that conformed strongly to mainstream representation, with little thought given to the consequences; or whether these women had made a conscious and informed decision to approach their consumption of pornography in this way. I term these women ‘performance’ consumers, and of the seven women that were willing to be interviewed, four of these women were identified as performance consumers;

their greater number further suggesting that performance consumers have an openness to their consumption of pornography that is more comfortably professed than in some other participants.

Of the fifteen women who always masturbated to the pornography they watched, fourteen identified arousal as their main reason to consume. These women were also those who believed higher percentages of women watched pornography, suggesting that they do not consider their behaviour deviant to the norm. This is emphasised further through the majority of these women identifying the clitoral aspect of pornography as aimed at women; their acknowledgement that an aspect of heterosexual pornography is aimed specifically at women, situates them as valid, legitimate and targeted audience members.

I was interested to discover whether the women who seemed to use pornography for a very specific purpose, had any thoughts as to the social consequences of their consumption, and whether they considered the traditionally sexist representation of the female in pornography as having an impact on the representation of women society wide. Of the seven women who agreed to be interviewed, two women emerged as what I term 'vacuum' consumers; able to view pornography outside of a sexist or patriarchal context, and simply enjoy for arousal in a metaphorical vacuum.

There then emerged a small number of women who appeared to be more cautious and concerned about their use of pornography. Of the women that identified the introduction of pornography as a joint decision, six also answered that it was not important to have a separate sexuality to their partner. This suggested that their consumption of pornography may be entwined with their relationship with a partner, rather than independently accepted; an issue that required further clarification through interview. Furthermore, all but one answered that women in general were not free to explore their sexuality openly today and I was interested

whether, as viewers of pornography, they saw this relationship as contradictory to the equality and openness of female sexuality. These women also had the lowest number of sexual partners and I was concerned to ascertain whether a more culturally aware or conflicting relationship with sexuality, sex and sexiness was directly related to this, in reaction to the mainstream representation of promiscuous and sexually active women. Thus I identified a category of ‘pleasurably-torn’ consumers, whom I thought warranted further investigation regarding what they saw as the social implications and cultural influences of consuming pornography. There was only one woman in this category who agreed to be interviewed, so conscious selection was unavailable.

Consequently, I have split the female consumers of pornography into the three differing groups suggested above. I consciously chose three contrasting interview participants, resulting in them being representative of each type of female consumer. There are indeed overlaps between groups, and some participants fall more perfectly into groups than others, but for clarity of argument these three groups help to explore the three most dominant patterns of consumption that emerged from my research. This could be seen as artificial, but does help in identifying trends of consumption in something that could easily be dismissed as being simply individualistic.

Performance Consumers

Firstly, I explore the group of ‘performance’ consumers. I identify them in this way because they are the group most likely to ‘perform’ sexiness, sexuality and femininity through their use of certain ‘tools’: the consumption of pornography, multitudes of sexual experience and public displays of sexual prowess, using exaggerated performances of popularised hypersexualised sexiness. Walter identifies these women as, ‘Babes...women in tiny

hotpants and towering wedge heels, [with] their dark fake tans and shiny straightened hair...primarily sexy dolls' (Walter, 2010: 19,28).

Performance consumers view pornography alone, with partners or with friends. They are aware of the hypersexualised nature of contemporary culture and believe that openness to pornography is one of many positive aspects. They have seen a wide range of pornography, gaining most of their material from free internet sites that show small snippets of pornographic scenes. They are unlikely to have a critical engagement with the material they view, as it is the act of consumption that is important, rather than the actual content of what they watch:

'I have a lot of boyfriends and they show me porn on their phones, all sorts of stuff... with this lad I'm seeing, he shows me loads of different things...we just have a laugh about it, try things out and then have a laugh with it' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

Pornography is viewed outside of context; there is little consideration given to what the external implications of pornography might be. Rather than linking it with issues of sexism and misogyny, it is used as social inclusion to interact with partners and friends; 'they are stories about girls gaining acclaim socially, for which their sexuality is a tool' (Levy, 2006: 146).

Like the 'pleasurably-torn' consumers below, these women do not watch a lot of pornography and do not always masturbate to what they see:

'I sometimes just watch it to watch it. I know that sounds funny but sometimes, if I know I'm seeing a bloke later, I'll put it on to get me in the mood or to pick up tips or something, if it's getting a bit stale (laughs.)' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

Here, the viewing of pornography is not linked to becoming more sexual, but sexier. I identify these particular consumers as being unable to distinguish between sexy and sexual, conflating the two as inextricably linked. These women seem to follow the performance of being, ‘constantly orgasmic’ (Dines and Jenson, 1998: 77), using the female porn stars ‘performance’ of sex to prepare for their own ‘performance’. They are most likely to embody what they see:

‘I think [sexy and sexual] are the same aren’t they? I think you can’t be sexual without feeling sexy...and being sexy and sexual are the same thing in a man’s eyes as well, they wouldn’t know the difference’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

I suggest that the linking of sexuality and sexiness has been caused by increased mainstreaming of sex and sex culture. The publicly performed acts of sexiness that we are bombarded with in popular culture are being adopted and copied in the bedrooms of ‘performance’ consumers. Sex is now a constructed performance of what popular culture says is sexy and what is sexual:

‘going to strip clubs or talking about porn stars was a way of showing themselves and the men around them that they weren’t “prissy little women” or “girly girls”’ (Levy, 2006: 4).

‘Performance’ consumers are unaware of the negative connotations of their sexually performed behaviour, stressing that their consumption of pornography is empowering and liberating without acknowledgement of any negatives:

‘Being able to watch pornography makes me feel good. I wouldn’t want to be one of these women that was shocked by it or something, everyone does it now don’t they? It’s good for women to open up and experience these things; they’re not exactly going away’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

Consequently, 'performance' consumers are the least active feminists, believing that feminism's work has been done and equality has been achieved:

'I don't notice [feminism] no, I think it's worked hasn't it?...we can do anything men can do now can't we? Nothing is really stopping us anymore. Plus, sexism isn't allowed anymore legally is it? I just heard a story on the news the other day about a woman winning about ten grand because she was sexually harassed at work...I suppose feminism did that didn't it?'

(Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

'Performance' consumers view pornography without guilt, acknowledgment of previous sexism, or worry of how women may be represented in the texts, because they believe feminism has 'worked' and equality has been achieved: 'Since the idea has taken hold that women and men are now equal throughout society, it is seen as unproblematic that women should be relentlessly encouraged to prioritise their sexual attractiveness' (Walter, 2010: 119).

'Performance' consumers are also part of an emerging group that condemns women who are against pornography or find hypersexualisation troubling:

'Well, I'd say they need to just chill out about it really, it's not a big deal anymore, it's fine and these women make a lot of money from it' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

Through use of their sexual power, 'performance' consumers have found that watching and sharing one's consumption of pornography is important for acceptance in popular culture:

'Well I think the lads think it's cool, they like women that are cool with porn, they think it's amazing. And all my girlfriends watch it too so we think it's fine' (Int. with Participant 1,

June 2010).

These women are using their sexuality as a tool of power, which on occasions may work, but as this power is obtained through men, 'the lads think it's cool', it seems staged and false. One could suggest that, for these women, using pornography is an example of an active sexuality, but its use becomes troubling when the reason for consumption is with a view to appealing to men. This contradiction causes any power gained from this use to be partial, transitory and fleeting: 'for women, and only women, hotness requires projecting a kind of eagerness, offering a promise on any attention you receive for your physicality' (Levy, 2006: 33). Gaining sexual power through consuming for show and appearing eager to render this power to men, is no gain at all.

Vacuum consumers

I term the next group 'vacuum' consumers and use the ideas of participant two in detail, to demonstrate consumers in this category. From the interviews, there were fourteen women who masturbated for arousal. A large number of these women also suggested that women were free to explore their sexuality openly today, and I was keen to ascertain whether these women were able to masturbate for arousal without consideration as to the representation of women in pornography in general. I term them 'vacuum' consumers because their consumption consciously takes place outside of context. In terms of agency, I describe vacuum consumers as actively passive. This may seem like a contradiction, but I identify them as having control and choice over what they choose to watch but paying little attention to the implications of what they view. Even though they generally hold an awareness of what these implications may be, they are passive to the external negativity. As suggested in chapter two, these women appear to be able to separate themselves from an ambivalence surrounding pornography, and view pornography within their own vacuum.

'I don't think about the women's lives whilst I'm watching the porn. I know some may have had bad times but it's better regulated now isn't it? And you can't think like that can you? I mean, I'm not on a campaign am I? I just want to be turned on' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

They realise the implications that the pornography industry may have for the representation of women, yet they choose to ignore this during consumption as they feel it is off-putting to their sexual enjoyment:

'Yea, you could feel bad and worry about the girl, but then what are you watching it for? I know that sounds harsh but you're watching it to get turned on, not to make yourself feel bad' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

All twenty five of the questionnaire respondents stated that they would never enter the pornography industry themselves, calling it, 'degrading', 'scary' or 'embarrassing', yet all were happy to consume pornography in order to become sexually aroused; showing an ability to disconnect content from personification of the performer. Parvez suggested that, 'the way women consumers think about the workers and sex work in general (labor process) would affect the way they experience pornography (labor product)', but it seems here that some women have the ability to not think about the workers or sex work at all (Parvez, 2006: 606). Many identify pornography as inevitable, so justify their consumption through highlighting positive aspects of pornography that attempt to challenge existing stereotypes. They are aware that a spectrum of women may choose to enter the pornography industry for differing reasons:

'I know people think that a lot of women get into it because they're desperate and see it as a way out. I don't necessarily think that this is the case though and I think some women are

just good at sex and they like it and they can make good money off it' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

'[pornography can be empowering] if you're very strong minded and have made a conscious decision and thought about it long and hard...most of these women must be strong enough women, I mean it's a pretty brave decision isn't it, they've certainly got to have some balls!'

(Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

'Vacuum' consumers use pornography to become sexually aroused. They always masturbate to the pornography that they watch, using it as a tool of arousal, chosen to fulfil a particular mood at a particular time. The positioning of the pornographic text as a tool to be utilised enables the women to distance themselves further from consideration of the performer; allowing guilt-free access to sexual arousal. During the act of consumption, these women do not think about the implications of the pornography industry and are rarely shocked by what they see. They actively choose from established acceptable genres accordingly, in response to their mood. Furthermore, if they do see anything that offends them or doesn't turn them on, they simply turn it off and find something else, with little thought or emotion to what they have seen:

'I watch the porn to experiment with my different fantasies...some days I might fancy lesbian porn, some days group sex, some days I might stray to something more fetishised... I just type it into the search engine on the website and then all these different things come up' (Int. with

Participant 2, June 2010).

'[if I saw something I didn't like] I'd just turn it off, we all know it exists don't we. I mean there is [sic] some absolutely revolting things out there and I just think, my God not even all the money in the world would make me do that, but I just don't watch it...I don't worry about it though really no...I mean, what can I do?' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

‘Vacuum’ consumers tend to hold feminist views, but see them reproduced through personal actions in everyday life; they feel that they are strong, independent women so their feminist statement is complete. They are usually aware of the wider context of issues surrounding sexism that still exist in society, but as it does not directly affect them they tend to become passive to these issues:

‘I still think women have a rough deal with some things and if someone asked me I’d tell them I don’t agree...but I can get all the jobs I want to now, I don’t feel trapped because I’m a woman’ (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

These women appear to be the most ambivalent of the three groups. They know that negative aspects of the pornography industry exist, but they feel they can do nothing to stop them and do not want to sacrifice their own desires through abandonment of pornography altogether. Thus, they feel that by making distinct choices in terms of content, they are taking control of their sexuality. Most of my questionnaire participants fall into this group; they are complacent about the inevitability of pornography and feel that private consumption does little to affect their own feminist agendas, allowing them to explore their own sexuality in a contemporary, sexy and open way.

Pleasantly – Torn Consumers

Finally I identify a group of consumers as ‘pleasantly-torn’. They are the most politically aware of the issues surrounding female sexuality in contemporary society, seeing it is a step forward in terms of female sexual progress. However, they are also inherently aware that the continuation of the misogynistic and sexist messages portrayed through pornography, coupled with the hypersexualisation of culture, causes a problematic and contradictory relationship for female advancement. As Parvez suggests; ‘this ambivalence reveals how sexuality, as experienced through pornography, can be simultaneously a source of pleasure

and unease' (2006: 607). These women echo the idea that, 'what is objectionable about pornography, then, is its abusive and degrading portrayal of females and female sexuality, not its sexual content or explicitness' (Russell, 1998: 5). Where the other types of consumers can forgive representation as inevitably encased within pornography, 'pleasurably-torn' consumers are more consciously uncomfortable:

'I think it's great that women can be more sexually open, and porn is great for exploring your sexuality. I think it would be dangerous to learn your sexuality from porn though, that's what's happening in society nowadays isn't it and women think it's normal to be treated like that' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

As a way of negotiating this problem, these consumers tend to view pornography that doesn't differ too far from the mainstream in order to minimise their chances of seeing anything too brutal:

'I don't [watch a wide range of pornography], no. It's all pretty similar in terms of content....I also tend to stick to films with the same men in them that I find attractive and to women that my partner does' (Int. with Participant, 3 June 2010).

By identifying and developing a relationship with one actor or actress in particular, these women feel that they are consuming pornography in less exploitative ways; they are not simply consuming for a quick sexual purpose and moving on. This personifies the adult actress and creates an interaction less based on bodily use. Similar to this, these women tend to pay for all the pornography that they watch, feeling that if they are going to consume it, they can at least provide payment for the actresses' services. This can be construed as slightly naïve, as it is not always the female actors who get the main share of the money, but it is the idea rather than the reality that these consumers use to justify their consumption:

'With all the sacrifices that being in the porn industry entails, even if they do go into it with their eyes open, I always try to pay for the porn that I watch. I mean, it is their job isn't it, they deserve to get paid' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010.)

I identify these consumers as the most actively feminist. Most will not identify themselves in this way, but I have used this term to distinguish them as the group most concerned with women's issues and representation in society. They are conscious of the troubling relationship that feminism and pornography has in contemporary society, so tend to keep their consumption private:

'[I don't talk to anyone] about my consumption of pornography. It's private to me and not exactly something I'd like to broadcast' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

However, although I call these women actively feminist, they, along with all other participants, were unaware of more contemporary feminist debates surrounding pornography, with all agreeing in differing capacities that 'feminists hate pornography'. With the 'pleasurably-torn' consumers in particular, this causes their relationship with pornography to be extremely confusing. They are keen that women should be free to express their sexuality in ways that they choose - for them this means consuming aspects of pornography - yet they also believe this may be conflicting in feminist terms. This confusion can lead to physical effect when consuming pornography:

'I don't masturbate all the time to what I watch, sometimes I just can't get in the mood and what I'm watching just doesn't turn me on' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

This suggests that what the 'pleasurably-torn' consumers choose to view is, for them, inextricably linked to social context. Unlike the 'vacuum' consumer, who is able to view in isolation, 'pleasurably-torn' consumers are sometimes too consciously aware of the

perceived sexism behind the scene to become sexually aroused. Furthermore, if the 'pleasurably-torn' consumer is able to be sexually stimulated by what they see, this is usually coupled with a sense of guilt:

'I do worry about the girls sometimes. When I think about it, I'd never have to do porn and I never would. My family would kill me and they'd rather look after me for life than see me do that' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

This empathy for the actresses involved represents a way of consuming that is highly influenced by what society suggests pornography actresses must go through; perfect for creating guilt through pleasurable consumption. This fits succinctly with the views of Parvez expressed in chapter two, which suggest a conflict and confusion for the female viewer concerning the act of being sexually aroused juxtaposed with a worry about the female actress' 'authenticity of pleasure' (Parvez, 2006: 606). Further aspects of the contradictions present in these consumers continue with an awareness of how the consumption of pornography is split between genders:

'Well I do enjoy it but when I think about it, it's degrading isn't it? I mean, if we are equal we should both be able to watch and enjoy porn, but I don't think that's the case is it? Women are still thought of as sluts if they go into porn and I'm sure feminists would argue that what they are made to do in these porn scenes is degrading' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

'Pleasurably-torn' consumers believe it is each individual woman's responsibility to negotiate a relationship with sex and sexuality that is open, but not damaging to female progress:

'I don't think porn stars are to blame, but it's not as if we're equal yet is it? I think women just need to be a bit smarter don't they? Don't expect to be able to sleep around with

whoever you want and still not be called a whore, it's sad but it's still true' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

For these consumers then, pornography tends to only take up a small proportion of their sex lives in order for the relationship between feminism and their sexuality to be as less contradictory as possible. They are keen to promote, but also control its use, within what they term a healthy sex life:

'[Porn is] not very important in our sex life, I mean we watch it occasionally if we're both in the mood, but we both have to be. I wouldn't watch it if I wasn't feeling it and I wouldn't expect him to' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

For the 'pleasurably-torn' consumers, the consumption of pornography is a constantly uncomfortable, yet pleasurable process, as they negotiate their positive feelings towards their sexuality, coupled with uneasiness towards the continued persistence of sexism in contemporary society.

Chapter 5 – Cultural Influences and Effects

‘the sexual experiences of most of the women, vis-à-vis their pornography consumption, [can] not be extracted from the larger social context of power in which gender and sexuality operate’ (Parvez, 2006: 627).

Previously, I made reference to how important cultural considerations are in terms of women’s consumption of pornography (Parvez, 2006; Levy, 2006; Walter, 2010). The four areas of: capitalism, the hypersexualisation of contemporary culture, the importance of female sexuality in contemporary culture and contemporary feminisms, all emerged as sites of importance and interest through my data collection. Rather than simply discussing these areas in relation to my participants; this chapter aims to discuss these issues in relation to women and pornography in general, before considering links with the answers I received.

I begin by exploring how the relationship between pornography and capitalism encourages women to consume and ‘become’ the pornographic text, before addressing the issue of the hypersexualisation of contemporary culture highlighted by many popular feminists (Levy, 2006; Walter, 2010); seen to promote a nation of, ‘Living Dolls’, duped by pornographic culture (Walter, 2010). I follow this by focusing in detail on contemporary female sexualities and how pornography is so entwined in their presentation. Finally, I address what these influences mean for women who consume pornography and their relationship with contemporary feminisms.

Sex Sells – to women? Pornography and Capitalism

The hypersexualisation of culture flourishes within a capitalist regime that uses the exploitation of sex for profit. Below, I identify a number of emerging ways that a capitalist agenda supports and snares the female consumers of pornography, whilst dismissing any challenges to its dominance.

Porn and Business

Pornography is big business. According to Ropelato in 2006, ‘Worldwide Pornography Revenues ballooned to \$97.06 billion dollars’ (internet-filter-review.com). Of these consumers, approximately 30 percent are female (Internet Pornography Statistics, 2008); a huge emerging area of target audience. As Gail Dines, a leading anti-pornography campaigner argues, “‘I have interviewed hundreds of pornographers and the only thing that gets them excited is profit’” (guardian.co.uk). We cannot understand the women consumers of pornography outside a capitalist and economic system that exploits its audience to make money: ‘These audiences have a value in the marketplace of rate cards, circulation managers and media brokers’ (Burton, 2005: 86). As the audience is the main vehicle of profit in pornography, Burton suggests that, ‘it may be argued that the media manufacture audiences: they do not discover them’ (2005: 86). With growing pressure on women to conform to a narrow view of sexiness, it may well be suggested that a female audience has been created for profit: ‘Proving that you are hot, worthy of lust, and-necessarily-that you seek to provoke lust is still exclusively women’s work’ (Levy, 2006: 33). ‘Women’s work’ in contemporary culture includes being accepting of pornography, not professing that, ‘I’m embarrassed about it or I’m uncomfortable with it’ (Levy, 2006: 39). The pornography industry has changed little in the way of content in order to target these women: ‘some things in pornography never

change: the body fragmentation, photographically cutting up women's bodies into isolated and fetishised parts' (Whisnant, 2004: 17). Instead, the industry plays on the exaggerated promotion of sexiness that leads women consumers to actively seek out these texts as a way of 'fitting in' with contemporary expectations.

New pornographic videos are being created in the United States, 'every 39 minutes', (internet-filter-review.com). Alongside the growing saturation of pornographic material available, comes the increasing view of the act of sex as commoditised. As McGregor acknowledges, '[pornography] reflect[s] a society in which sex has become a commodity' (McGregor, 1989: 2). This is not only reflected in the consumption of pornography. In capitalist terms, the greater acceptance of the pornography industry and sex as commodity has benefits industry wide. As Levy highlights, 'Between 1992 and 2004, breast augmentation procedures in [America] went from 32,607 a year to 264,041 a year – an increase of more than 700 percent' (Levy, 2006: 22). In Britain alone, it is estimated that the number of lap-dancing clubs has, 'more than doubled to 300 since 2004' (bbc.co.uk); the popularity of pole-dancing lessons as exercise has increased greatly in recent years, with hundreds of classes taking place every week (poledancinguk.com), and Playboy's main target audience for its branded items is women (bbc.co.uk). The increasing presence of women consumers of the pornography industry, coupled with the openness to an increasingly sexualised culture, is too lucrative for pornographers to ignore. Furthermore, it is now naïve to simply blame men; if we agree that women are too naively labelled as victims, women's consumption of pornography cannot be based on overt manipulation by male producers. As Hebditch and Anning stress, 'The industry thrives by popular consent' (1988: 373).

Women in the Pornography Business

Here, I suggest that the emerging presence of women consumers of pornography is caused, in part, by the emerging presence of women in and associated with the pornography industry.

The traditional view that movement into the pornography industry was, ‘something that happened...after something in her life had gone wrong’ (Campbell, 1993: 33), is being pushed to the sidelines, being replaced with images of the happy and successful pornography businesswoman. Behind the camera, ‘Playboy is a company largely run by women’ (Levy, 2006: 35). Hugh Hefner’s daughter Christie is the CEO and Chairman of Playboy Enterprises and also, ‘founder of two women’s groups: Emily’s list, which raises money to support pro-choice, female Democratic political candidates, and the Committee of 200, an organization of female executives and business owners who provide mentoring programs and scholarships to young women and girls’ (Levy, 2006: 36). This literal linking of the pornography industry with women’s groups concretizes the seemingly juxtaposed but acceptable relationship of pornography with female progression. This was echoed in my interview answers:

‘People see pornography as a career now don’t they? It’s ok to be in porn because you make lots of money. It’s funny really because poor porn stars are seen as slags (sic) but Jenna Jameson is seen as successful – seems if you make money you’re ok’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

It is also representative of how pornography is seen as just another facet to be exploited for profit; it is no longer seen as a socially important issue:

‘Well, I’d say that [people that disagree with pornography] need to just chill out about it really, it’s not a big deal anymore, it’s fine and these women make a lot of money from it’ (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

Joy King, vice president at Wicked Pictures, a major adult film company, says that women's presence in the business helps lift the taboo that, "sort of lays like a mist over the whole industry" (msnbc.com), but stresses that women's presence in the industry does not necessarily mean different treatment for the actresses. Fellow female executive Kelly Holland agrees, arguing that budgets for better quality scenes may simply not be possible economically (msnbc.com): 'while women may call the shots, they have to respond to a market of predominantly male consumers' (Alexander, 2008). The presence of more women in pornography helps to justify consumption by fellow women, but as a result of economics, does little to alter its content.

Furthermore, the contemporary female consumer is bombarded with images of successful porn stars that convince us of the positive aspects of entering the business. Jenna Jameson, 'the biggest name in adult entertainment' (Ackman, 2004), is said to have amassed a 30 million dollar fortune through her pornography company ClubJenna (Miller, 2005) and is described on Wikipedia as an, 'American entrepreneur' (wikipedia.com). In 2006 she appeared on a 48 by 32 foot billboard in Times Square - cementing her position as porn star turned mainstream (adrants.com). This transition is not unusual in today's increasingly blurred distinction between the mainstream and the adult. Since 2000, over 34 porn actors and actresses have appeared in over 50 mainstream cinematic releases (wikipedia.com). This has helped Jameson and fellow pornography actors to transcend the view that entering the world of pornography is an act of desperation; it is now a career path to fame and success:

'I think most men think [porn stars] are cool and sexy as well as successful businesswomen nowadays. Porn stars aren't looked down on as much and some porn stars move from the porn business to Hollywood so it shows how they aren't judged as much' (Interview with

Participant 3, June 2010).

This view was carried through nearly all the questionnaires and in all three interview sessions:

'I think some women are just good at sex and they like it and they can make good money off it...I think some women are very sexual and porn is the perfect job for them' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

'It allows them to do something that they enjoy and they get paid for it, which is positive for them I suppose' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

However, I did begin to notice some contradictions in these views as the interviews and questionnaires progressed. Participant 1 was clear in making a distinct clarification between those in front and behind of the camera:

'All the stars of the porn can't hide their faces, so although they benefit financially from it I think they sacrifice a lot more. All the others [producers, directors etc.] can be part of this huge business but not be known for it, so it's definitely their agenda it's supporting most' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

There is definite acknowledgement of the sacrifices that one may have to make as a pornography actress, but it seems that the capitalist agenda provides acceptable justification. The view that the women were, 'enjoying' their work and 'making money', seemed to provide reasoning for my participants feeling comfortable consuming pornography. However, several answers throughout did acknowledge that female pornography star was still a problematic career choice:

'I mean you're still massively judged as a whore and a slag and whatever else: and you're still seen as a body to be used; I doubt many of the men would respect you if they saw you in real life' (Int. With Participant 1, June 2010).

'[I would never enter the industry myself] I don't think I am 'hardcore' enough to do some of things that they do, nor am I physically equipped – some of the things they do must hurt...also the embarrassment factor, for example a family member may come across one of your films'

(Questionnaire answer June 2010).

The current popularised trend for presentation of life in the pornography industry as 'no big deal' has led to a masquerade that sees it as desirable, fun and consciously dismissive of its dangers. This may be linked to appearing to have a, 'more grown-up, comfortable, natural attitude about sex and sexiness', that I discuss below or it may be that the lure of money, alongside the growing acceptance of the pornography industry, can work together to silence transcending views (Levy, 2006: 39). It seems that capitalism still calls the shots:

'Kitten – who was in Big Brother 5 – was a complete feminist, or that's how she presented herself – and then she came out and she was offered money by a newspaper and appeared in a PVC kitten outfit. I didn't see that one coming...[but]if it's a choice between that, between the glamour of that, and the financial rewards of that and working in Superdrug for the rest of your life, well, kind of, why not?' (Walter, 2010: 31).

If the pornography industry is providing such prolific financial gain, then it is unlikely that challenges are going to hold any real significance, particularly to an industry as big, successful, and durable. The emergence of new consumers of pornography, and the beneficiaries this creates in other areas of industry, just seeks to show how far-reaching and expansive the pornography industry is.

The Hypersexualisation of Culture - Negotiating Female

Sexuality

The emergence of a hypersexualisation of culture, particularly in the last decade, has been identified as having substantial influence on women's relationship with their expression of sexuality and their consumption of pornography; particularly pornography aimed at the heterosexual male viewer (I work here on the understanding that mainstream pornography is stereotypically created for the heterosexual male viewer) (Levy, 2006; Walter, 2010; Paul, 2006).

My participants described contemporary culture as:

'very open about sex and sexuality...particularly amongst girls, it's like a new trend to be dramatically candid about your sex life isn't it' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

'it's very linked to one night stands, drinking and sleeping around, not that that's necessarily a bad thing, but I just think people don't care as much anymore. Sex just isn't a big deal is it; it's just something you do, something you're expected to do in fact' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

All the participants charted a rise in the sexualisation of culture that had lost regard for a female sexuality that was private or privileged, with some suggesting that the most dominant pressures to have sex were from influences in contemporary culture. To be sexually 'successful', women are expected to be as open and candid as possible about their sexiness and sexual exploits; highlighting the, 'equation of empowerment and liberation with sexual liberation...women [have] been seduced by the idea that [sex] work could enhance their sense of individual power' (Walter, 2010: 6). The linking of sexual liberation and power is

also identified by Levy: ‘nobody wants to be the frump at the back of the room anymore...It’s just not cool. What is cool is for women to take a guy’s eye view of pop culture in general and nude girls in particular’ (Levy, 2006: 92).

This idea is followed through in several of the respondent’s comments:

‘I think [the women that are against pornography] kind of give women a bad name cus (sic) they’re so prudish about it aren’t they? They make us all seem really boring’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

The respondent then informed me that no-one would suggest she was sexually boring because she,

‘talk[s] to the lads about watching porn. They think it’s cool that I do it. They think it’s brill (sic)’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

Inclusion into mainstream society now seems inextricably linked with acceptance of mainstream pornography’s portrayal of female sexuality. Participant 1 told me that she had seen, ‘all sorts of stuff’ which included anal sex scenes, gang bangs and ‘some S&M stuff’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010). Her vocalisation of how, ‘the boys’, react to her consumption of pornography suggests that her consumption is more concerned with social inclusion and acceptance than exploration of her sexuality. Furthermore, I suggest that the boys’ reaction of thinking it is, ‘cool’ and ‘brill’ is endemic of a society that assumes girls are going to have sex with you: ‘when you see [a girl dressed provocatively] your first reaction as a guy is that you think; that girl wants it. Wants you. Wants any guy out there.’ (Levy, 2006: 149). As a woman, feeling comfortable to talk about one’s consumption of pornography may be seen as empowering and liberated, but as it is professed in the context of a society that

continues to have ingrained views about women and sexuality, its message of empowerment is likely to be lost.

Levy suggests that the continuation of these sexist views is the result of, ‘Raunch Culture... [which is] like a fantasy world dreamed up by teenage boys. A world of sun and sand where frozen daiquiris flow from faucets and any hot girl will peel off her bikini top, lift up her skirt...all you have to do is ask...Girls Gone Wild is not extraordinary, it’s emblematic’ (2006: 17).

The expectation for women to be as sexually experimental as women in mainstream heterosexual pornography is further emphasised through an inability to identify with pornography aimed specifically at women. My respondents identified that the sex portrayed in women’s pornography was too tame, romantic and soft-core. Women are now so used to the presentation of hard-core sex equalling good sex, that pornography aimed at women does not reflect the sex they believe they should be having:

‘I have watched one porn film ‘for women’ but it just hid all the good bits and had too much talking’ (Questionnaire answer 22).

‘I find women’s porn almost offensive as if they’re saying we couldn’t possibly take the men’s stuff. It’s rubbish, I mean we all like a bit of romance but if we’re watching porn, we’re watching it for the fuck’ (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

My respondents seem to identify more with a genre of pornography that reflects a less emotional, more detached relationship with sexual intercourse; where sex becomes an isolated act with no real acknowledgement of build-up or aftermath. As Walter states, in mainstream heterosexual pornography, ‘there is no before and no after; sex occurs in isolation...there is no emotional resonance to sex; everything happens on the exterior’

(Walter, 2010: 109). This aids the continuation of a commodification of sexuality that plays on a vacuous and doll-like sexuality, disabling anyone from questioning female sexuality's distinct lack of depth. Levy stresses the continued need to question the empowerment of female sexuality, as it is presented as a battle already won: 'having the most simplistic, plastic stereotypes of female sexuality constantly reiterated throughout our culture [has] somehow [proved] that we are sexually liberated and personally empowered... and we have accepted it' (Levy, 2006: 197). Although I agree with much of Levy's condemnation of the shallow contemporary culture of female sexuality, she too easily presupposes a generation of women duped into acceptance. Young women may be more actively engaged than this, recognising the return of sexist values, yet trying to negotiate a position from within; a position that allows them to be sexually open, yet still maintain their own values of what it means to be feminist:

'Nuts probably wouldn't have been mainstream in the eighties, yet now, instead of boycotting it, women choose to send naked photographs of themselves in for free! Every time I see that I think, come on, have a bit of respect for yourself. It's not the men doing it is it? It's the women doing it to themselves' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

'Let's not pretend...I mean you're still massively judged as a whore and a slag and whatever else. And you're still just seen as a body to be used' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

These women recognise the sexism that is still inherent in our society, identifying where women still need to be conscious about their representation, yet admit to watching pornography identified as, 'so often reliant on real or imaginary abuse of women' (Walter, 2010: 115). Contemporary female sexuality has become so confused, that women are forced to dwell in this uncomfortable area. All at once the hypersexualised culture in which these women sit promotes this behaviour, but also judges it, in confusingly contradictory terms.

Although the use of pornography to negotiate sexuality against hypersexualised bombardment may be useful, I suggest that this also leaves some consumers in danger of positioning the ideas of sexiness and sexuality as one and the same:

'I definitely don't feel sexual if I don't feel sexy. In fact I think they're pretty much the same;

I am sexual when I'm sexy and vice versa. (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

However, as I have highlighted throughout, consumers use and respond to the pornography that they watch in differing ways according to individual context. I argue that the respondent's view above, is in response to the specific way that she consumes pornography; as a tool to appear sexy and cement her sexiness, rather than as an exploration of her own sexuality. I found the responses from other participants very different:

'I'd say being sexy is having an effect on the opposite sex, or whoever you're trying to attract, whereas being sexual is inbuilt and is what makes you feel good when things are being done to you. So when I'm watching porn and masturbating I'm exploring my sexuality and being sexual, not sexy.' (Int. with participant 2, June 2010).

'Sexiness is false, sexual-ness is real. So when I masturbate, that's my expression of sexuality, when I'm all dressed up in a nice dress looking nice that's sexiness. So sexiness is based on opinion I suppose. ...we only see the porn stars sexiness too because that's false, it's an act. I don't think we are seeing their real sexuality there, but that's ok it's an act put on to turn us on so if it works it doesn't matter' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

These two women make a distinct differentiation between sexiness and sexuality; affording them an approach to hypersexualised culture that is more actively nuanced and negotiated, rather than being duped, as Levy presupposes. The hypersexualisation of culture does not encourage women's use of porn but it does normalise it, making it appear less deviant and

sidelined. However, women still feel that they must justify their consumption of pornography, as the underlying facets of sexism and misogyny are still languishing at the forefront of mainstream sexual culture.

The Importance of Female Sexuality

After exploring the wider contexts of representation and relationships between contemporary sexuality and culture in general, I now focus my analysis on the impact and affect that these components have on more individualised female sexualities. There was a clear voice that overarched all answers concerning contemporary female sexualities; one that highlighted the importance of female sexual progress, female enjoyment of sexual relations and female agency. By sexual progress I refer to the adoption of, ‘a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire...[allowing] us the freedom to figure out what we internally want from sex instead of mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy’ (Levy, 2006: 200).

All the women questioned agreed that pornography held a place in construction of their sexuality. Of the twenty five women interviewed, nineteen women stated that they mainly watched pornography alone, with only six women acknowledging that their main use of it was with a partner (Question 2). All of the women masturbated to the pornography that they watched at least some of the time, suggesting a definite link between the use of pornography and sexual arousal. Eighteen of the women owned sex toys that they used without their partners, and eighteen women also agreed that it was very important to have a personal sexuality that was separate from their sexual interactions with a partner. These both oppose ideas from classic feminist critiques that fail to acknowledge the female viewer:

‘It became clear that the classic feminist critique of pornography had left something very important out: it assumed that women never take any pleasure in pornography. This is clearly wrong. There are intelligent women, choosing and thinking for themselves, who do enjoy watching pornography...we can no longer deny the intense sexual power of pornography for women as well as men’ (Walter, 2010: 105).

Of the ten women who acknowledged watching porn with a partner, only one of these women said it was their partner’s idea to introduce it (Question 4). However, the suggestion that the pornography was under female control was quashed when asked what they like to watch as a couple. Answers included:

‘I don’t really mind what we watch as long as it’s not too brutal’ (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

‘He really likes gang bang scenes, and girl on girl stuff. Some of it is ok I suppose and I like that he gets turned on by it’ (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

‘We mainly watch straight couple things, sometimes it’ll be two girls and one guy’ (Who chooses?) ‘Well he buys it; I’m too embarrassed to go into the shop (laughs).’ (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010)

It seems that once pornography has been introduced into the relationship, the males take the opportunity to assert dominance over its content. This may be why more of the women choose to watch pornography alone; it gives them back the sense of control over their sexuality, highlighted as very important to these women throughout the interviews:

‘[pornography] is a way of exploring your sexuality isn’t it and that’s important to me’ (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

'(Is it important to be sexual then?) 'Very important, you can be successful and sexy now, you don't have to sacrifice one for the other anymore' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

'Women are suddenly realising they can have a sexuality...and that's a good thing, I mean we need to know what we like so we can have good sex' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

This is similar to the views of Greer in 1970, who argued that knowing one's capacity for sexual pleasure would lead women to have greater control over their sexuality: 'real gratification is not enshrined in a tiny cluster of nerves, but in the whole person' (Greer, 1970: 43). My participants seem aware of the importance of understanding their own sexual desires, but as these ideas of sexual liberation are so similar to those professed forty years before, it seems little has changed, and women's liberation remains stalled. The sense of a separate sexuality seemed strong, but I still identified a strong correlation between these personal sexualities and an altogether more inextricable dependence on a partner for personal 'permission' to explore this sexuality. This is not problematic in itself; but it is the ignorance towards it, or reluctance to acknowledge this, that seems most troubling.

Acceptance of Women's position as submissive

I discuss in this section women's increasing acceptance of their position as submissive; which is linked to many of the arguments discussed above. All twenty-five participants agreed that they watched pornography primarily aimed at the male heterosexual viewer, and eighteen respondents said that the women's role was submissive. Of the others, four said they did not know, and three put 'other', but did not specify. Of the respondents who identified the women's role as submissive, the majority of them were happy to admit this type of pornography sexually aroused them. The constant barrage of sexual images showing women as submissive, has aided the continuation of a female heterosexuality that presuppose this as the only way to be sexual. The female porn star is made to perform acts of obscenity, yet

does not challenge or question them, but simply performs her submissive duty; acts frequently being copied in the sexual lives of women consumers:

'Pornography is still focused on the man with the big penis and the woman who can take it. Sorry that sounds really blunt but it's true. The sad thing is I think women see that and then think they have to put up with it in their own lives, even when [the penis is too big and it] hurts. Friends of mine have actually seen it like a challenge if their bloke has a big one; to see if they can take it; crazy isn't it?' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

'Women still aren't allowed to be dominant lovers are they? I mean you can say what you like in the bedroom, but you couldn't say it publicly' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

Furthermore, there were few answers offered as to what aspects of pornography were aimed at women. Smith also found that many women consumers were conscious that the content of pornography may not specifically be aimed at them, but didn't question the content of these scenes (2007: 144). Walter suggests this is because, 'the old feminist position against pornography has been so discredited it often feels as though few people are ready to speak out against pornography...I picked up a real sense of hopelessness from these women' (Walter, 2010: 11).

I am not suggesting that some women are not turned on by watching another woman in a position of submission; indeed many women may feel sexually aroused by this: 'the sight of a woman in a collar (or handcuffs and gags) is a turn-on' (Califia, 1997: 112). However, the overexposure to this material emphasises a still limiting and standardised female sexuality that continues to constrict fluidity of desire:

‘The models we are offered of female sexuality are of passivity and submission...where we live under oppression and where there is virtually no escape for us...we have little alternative but to take pleasure from our oppression’ (Jeffreys, 1993: 179).

Whilst I may not necessarily agree with the extent that Jeffreys sees women’s oppression, I certainly agree that the construction of the submissive female, under rules of sexuality predominantly controlled by traditional patriarchal values, is an inevitably problematic relationship.

Feminism and Pornography: Still at odds

I now return to discussions around Feminism in relation to the ideas expressed above. I capitalise Feminism in this section rather than exploring it as a series of discourses, as my participants saw it as a singular concept; citing the most enduring, popularised views on pornography, rather than understanding it as a number of differing facets. As I suspected, the ideas and influences of contemporary feminist thought, especially concerning their views on pornography and sexuality, are not being received at ground level. The women I interviewed saw themselves as feminists, yet were confused about what this actually meant and how it would manifest itself through their actions. They had each created an individualistic notion of feminism that seemed to help justify their consumption of pornography (if they felt in needed justifying at all), but had little thought as to the wider effects and implications that feminism could have for women’s sexual progress¹ on a larger scale. The issue for contemporary feminists then, is not whether women still hold ideas and hope for female

¹ By sexual progress I refer to, ‘a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire...[allowing] us the freedom to figure out what we internally want from sex instead of mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy’ (Levy, 2006: 200).

progress, but how a more viable feminism can emerge to tackle the issues of pornography and sexuality, in order to create a wider and more all-encompassing branch of feminist thought.

Twenty-one respondents identified themselves as feminists, yet when asked to clarify what this meant, submitted a variety of answers that seemed somewhat unsure:

'I don't really see myself as a feminist, I mean I agree that women should have equal rights but I think we have now really...This probably sounds really bad but I still think of blokey (sic) women as being feminists, I mean, you don't see gorgeous feminists do you (laughs)'

(Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

'I suppose I am feminist, I don't really know what it entails but I'd say I was more one than not one, if you get what I mean. I still think women have a rough deal with things and I don't agree with it so I suppose that makes me a feminist. I am very pro-choice and I don't think men should be able to take that choice away, and women shouldn't feel like they are forced to be housewives either' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

Some women were particularly sure of their position as feminist, but were unsure about how ideas and issues concerning Feminism could be achieved:

'I'm definitely a feminist yes... [which means] fighting for equal pay, equal jobs and getting more women into politics and power. How we do that though, who knows (laughs)' (Int. with

Participant 3, June 2010).

The impact of Feminism on these women's lives is varied, and strongly based on an individual decision as to whether involvement in a Feminist movement is required. This was shown through the myriad of differing responses across the questions.

However, one question stood out as having extremely similar responses across the board.

When asked about Feminism's relationship with pornography, answers included:

'I suppose [feminists] don't like it do they. They'd say it's sexist and bad for women' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

'I guess [feminists would] really disagree it and say it was sexist and misogynistic' (Int. with Participant 2, June 2010).

'Well, I'm assuming [feminists] hate it' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

All respondents identified the relationship between Feminism and pornography as inherently negative. Citing extreme and outdated views supported by feminists such as Dworkin and Mackinnon, these women could only see themselves as positioned outside of Feminism. Feminist writers such as Greer - writing earlier than Dworkin - recognised the need for a plurality of female sexualities, but it seems that the academic literature of more liberal and pro-sex feminists has failed to have impact on these women. If their individual views of Feminism and pornography are such that they don't see a comparable link, they are unlikely to see Feminism as a desirable pathway towards female sexual equality.

Ciclitira's work on, 'The impact of Dworkin's anti-porn writings' (2004: 289), attempts to explore this issue. Her study found that, 'strong anti-porn views could arouse fear and anger, even among some women who had not seen porn' (2004: 289). Ciclitira's participants told of a dissatisfaction with anti-porn feminism and pornography that they felt, 'impinged on their sexual enjoyment' (2004: 290): some said they, 'continued to buy porn but found that it made them uncomfortable' (2004: 290). The relationship between pornography and Feminism was viewed as inherently negative, even though her respondents were aware of the distinction between more sex-positive and anti-porn feminism. This suggests that the more extreme views have a much greater impact on these women. It is then even more difficult for participants in my study to have a positive relationship with Feminism alongside their consumption of pornography, as most saw Feminism's view of pornography as only

condemnatory; causing most to shy away from Feminism altogether. Dworkin's analysis of pornography - that it was a, 'system of male sexual domination [where] the women's sex is appropriated...used and despised', has remained the spearhead of the relationship between Feminism and pornography (Dworkin, 1981: 223). This was evidenced further in participants' views on being a Feminist and a porn star:

'Yes, I think you could personally... but I doubt many people would agree, they'd say you were being a hypocrite wouldn't they?' (Int. with Participant 1, June 2010).

'Probably, whether actual feminists would allow you to be though is a different story I suppose.' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

The presupposition of 'feminists' as a judgemental army of condemnation, causes women to see their consumption of pornography as entirely at odds with the Feminist agenda; therefore holding no significant place in their sexual lives. The lack of awareness of more liberal and pro-sex feminist stances that could offer a possible alternative, causes the women to instead adopt a very individualistic view of feminism that is manifested through actions in their everyday lives, rather than seeking grounding in theory.

'I don't hear of any feminist marches and things like that anymore...it's just not nationally visible anymore is it, because people don't think it matters...I just make sure that I feel good about how I act as a woman, not being walked over; things like that' (Int. with Participant 3, June 2010).

My participants saw their consumption of pornography as outside of a feminist position; they still held what they described as feminist views on issues such as equal pay, abortion rights and the position of women in society, but saw no positive relationship between Feminism and sexuality, causing them to feel that they must take a conscious step outside of this framework

in order to view this material. This leads to women feeling unwilling to challenge their role as submissive in pornography, and in turn, wider culture. They accept the content of mainstream pornography as being sexist and misogynistic because, by viewing these materials, they step outside the Feminist framework that they believe to be rigid. This, in turn, causes them to lose all rights to challenge the content: one cannot consume pornography and also raise an issue with its inherent sexism.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to provide an account of how and why women choose to view mainstream heterosexual pornography in contemporary Britain. There are a number of issues that have been raised and I discuss these below, but I must acknowledge that a satisfactory conclusion has been more difficult to establish than first thought. There are a multitude of reasons why these women choose to consume pornography, and I cannot escape the fact that each circumstance is individually different; based on context, cultural influence and personal choice. This is somewhat problematic in providing a stable conclusion, but potentially incredibly positive in understanding women's consumption of pornography; challenging the notion that all women are 'duped' by the culture in which they sit. Some participants were more heavily persuaded by contemporary influences than others; some chose to consume without conscious thought of the implications and for others the consequences were of great importance.

The study faced several problems: that of the individualistic nature of the data I received; the huge area in which it was attempting to research at this level; and simple logistics. I was only able to interview three participants due to the amount of women that agreed to take part and the weightings of respondents in each group. Although the questionnaires covered a slightly larger number of women, there is still not enough data to make far-reaching claims.

However, this project can hope to act as a pilot study for what could be a far larger, more conclusive area of research. The three areas of women that I identified could be developed to see whether they hold broader validity and application across a greater sample of women and also to see where other types of consumers emerge. The conclusions here are based only on the respondents involved in my study, but I hope to present ideas and themes that could be extended further.

I identified the emergence of three consumer types who all approached their use of pornography in different ways; with differing relationships to the content of the texts.

‘Vacuum’ consumers actively picked what they watched in relation to their mood, with little identification with the performer on screen; able to view somewhat outside of a context. The ‘pleasurably-torn’ consumer limited herself to a small range of pornography types and performers. As a result, a personification with the actors could be used as a tool to reduce objectification, exploitation and guilt in consumption. The ‘performance’ consumers were different again, watching a wide range of pornography for social rather than sexual effect. I attempted to highlight the wide spectrum of female consumers that existed, even within my small participant numbers.

I argued that, for these women, the consumption of pornography was very much bound with societal and cultural factors that had differing yet substantial impact on their relationship with pornography, their sexuality and their bodies. I suggested that the hypersexualisation of culture has had a large impact on all twenty-five participants in the study, causing them to actively negotiate a female sexuality that was able to be ‘sexual enough’ to conform, but not falling into the trap of becoming a ‘slag’. Although ranging in acceptance of pornographic material, all the respondents seemed acquiescent towards a publicised female sexuality and representation of sexiness that was detached from emotion, plagued with depthlessness and full of contradictions. Rather than challenging and rubbishing these contradictions, the participants seemed to agree that the only solution was to negotiate and establish their sexuality despite them.

I suggested that the relationship between capitalism and pornography aided its growth and continuation, luring women consumers with promises of financial gain, better representation and new methods of female empowerment. The growing emergence of women in the pornography business has established its place in mainstream capitalism, presenting itself as a

sensible and financially sound career choice, causing a female audience to relish in this newly liberated area of capitalist consumption. However, the participants agreed that entering the pornography industry was degrading and that the women associated with it are still viewed in sexist ways; the 'liberation' of the pornography business is simply a masquerade and as such, these proclaimed acts of empowerment are unlikely to invoke change.

Through exploring the links between contemporary culture and female sexuality, I argued that the growing reliance on pornography in one's sex life, and the proliferation of a hypersexualised culture, have caused heterosexual women to talk less about their own desires and sexual preferences; rather they 'show' their sexiness through material reality and the adoption of hypersexualised actions. This has caused a generation of women to conform, albeit in differing degrees, to a 'narrow view of sexiness' that restricts fluidity and range of women's desire, rather than using this openness towards female sexual stories to create an expansive and complex range of female sexual expression. Talking about personal desire has become so alien for heterosexual women that it has led to what I term 'straight women's silence'. I suggest that because heterosexual women's desire is so over-publicised, the ownership of their sexuality has been taken away from women themselves, and has become property of the public domain. It is now the media that 'knows' what women want, resulting in women giving it little thought to it themselves. The proliferation of material objects of sexiness and sexuality has replaced the need to study one's own inherent feelings and drives, leaving a generation of women unsure of what it is they actually like.

All this has left feminism in an acutely difficult position. My participants continue to believe that all feminists hate pornography, so feel that it holds no relevance to them as pornography consumers: declaring themselves feminist is in danger of making them appear hypocritical. Furthermore, viewing pornography within this contradiction causes these women to believe that consumption takes place outside of a feminist framework, leaving them no space to

complain even if they see content that particularly offends them. The women either blamed themselves for looking, or accepted that some offensive and brutal material was simply inevitable.

Women aren't duped by this culture and a greater spectrum of female consumers does exist. They individually negotiate their use of pornography alongside their sexuality and ideas about female sexual progress. I found a differing range of socially conscious women who are all aware of the return to sexism in contemporary culture; who are all aware that pornography and the female consumer is still a contradictory relationship; and that sex work is still marginalised as deviant and desperate. This to me is even more problematic; these women don't need re-educating on the problems of female sexuality in contemporary culture, they already know what the issues are. They know how women are represented in society and they know that there continues to be only a very narrow depiction of female sexuality offered. But they are accepting of this; they try to conform to this; they all have personal issues and problems with aspects of this culture, but there is a sense that one must overcome these in order to achieve a successful sexuality. The use of pornography is not really the issue; women are approaching their consumption in differing, independently controlled ways that suit them. The problem is the uneasiness that women still have in embracing a wider, more inconsistent and non-apologetic female sexuality. [REDACTED] are complacent in letting only one version of female sexiness and sexuality be representative of the whole, this uneasiness seems unlikely to change.

Appendix 1 – Email to Women via Facebook

Dear

My name is Emily Hurst and I am studying at The University of Birmingham for my MPhil(B). For my thesis I am studying women in the UK, who identify themselves as straight, and their consumption of pornography. I am looking for women aged 18 upwards who live in the UK and watch heterosexual pornography to take part in this project. This will involve you filling in a questionnaire that will be sent to your email address once you have agreed to take part and I have confirmed your age. PLEASE NOTE: I will need to meet up with you before sending you the questionnaire to see some form of identification to confirm your age. The questionnaire will only take up a about 15-20 minutes of your time and I would be most grateful for your views.

Some of you will then be asked to take part in a face to face interview, which will include answering questions in more detail about your use of pornography and sexuality in general. This is entirely voluntary and will take up about an hour of your time.

All the results will be anonymous so there will be no trace of them back to you. If you think you may be interested in taking part email me at EXH654@bham.ac.uk and I will outline the project in more detail and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Emily Hurst

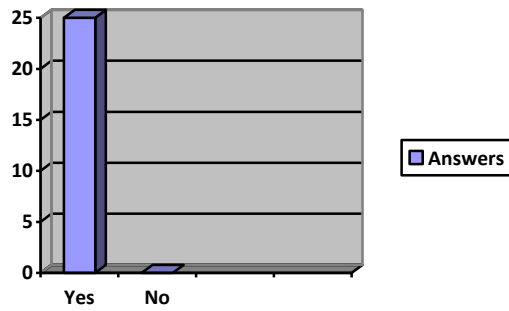
Appendix 2 – Consent Form

I confirm that I agree to take part in the above study and understand that the information I give may be used in the final research project on the understanding that it will be anonymous. Anything that isn't used will be kept by the researcher and will be accessible for 10 years. I have the right to withdraw at any time during the research process, and if so, my data will be destroyed and will not be used in the final project. I further confirm that I am over 18 years old.

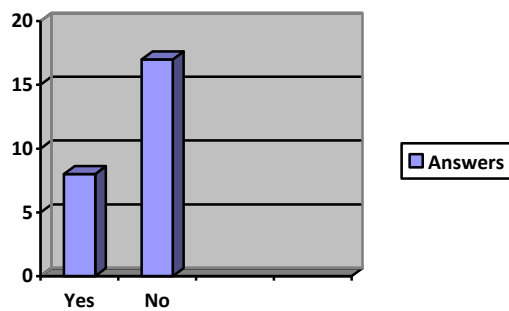
Signed..... Date.....

Appendix 3 - Questionnaire Results

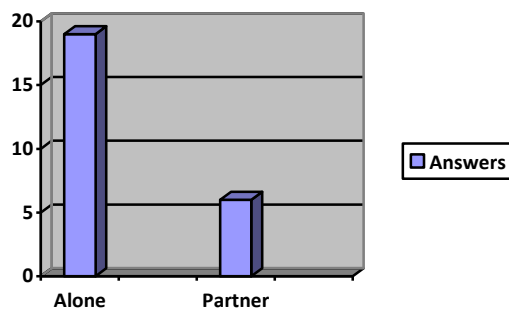
1. Do you watch any type of pornography?



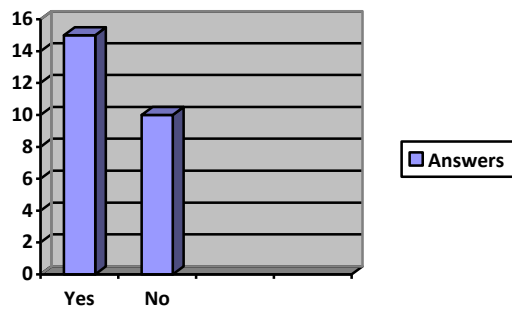
2. Are you in a relationship?



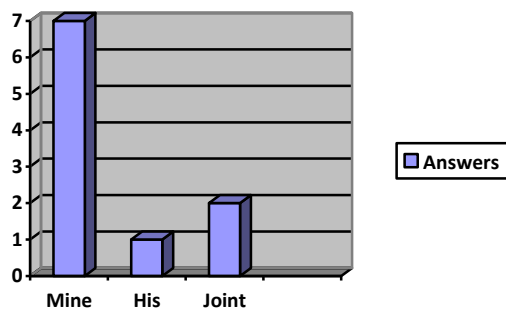
3. Who do you mainly watch pornography with (i.e. alone or with partner / friend etc.)



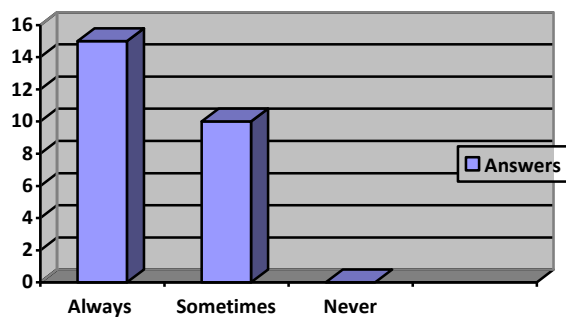
4. Do you have a regular sexual partner?



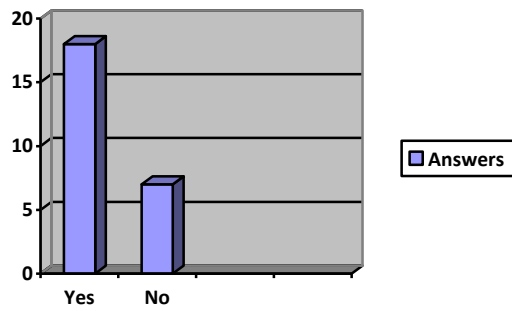
5. If you watch pornography with your partner, whose idea was it to introduce it into the relationship?



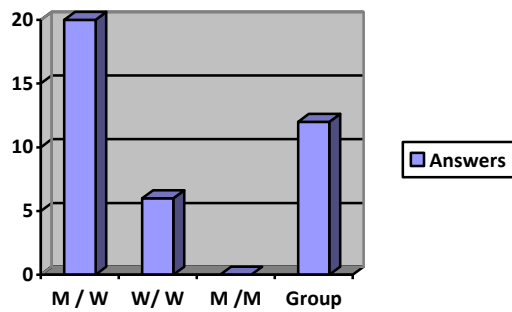
6. Do you masturbate to pornography that you watch?



7. Do you own sex toys that you use **without** your partner?

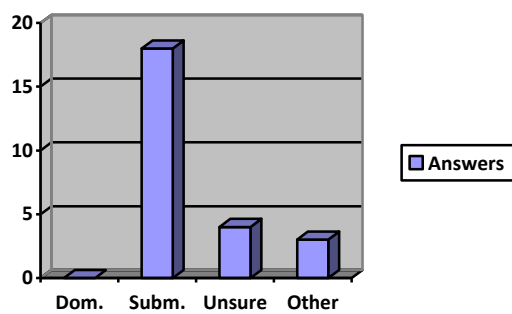


8. What types of pornography do you mainly watch?

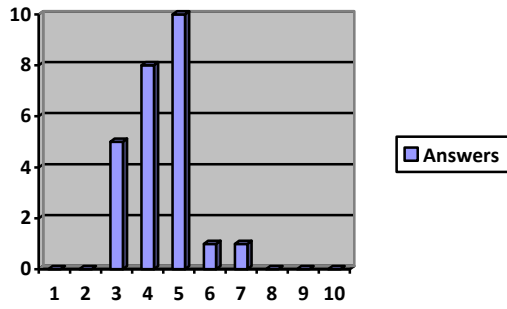


Many participants chose to identify a number of different categories here.

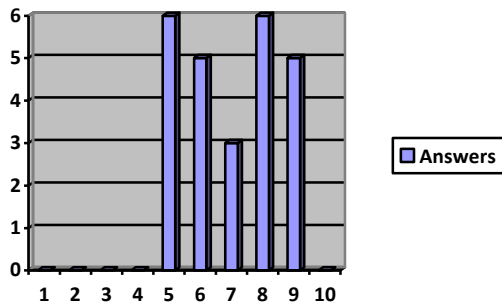
9. What do you think the role of women is in the pornography you watch?



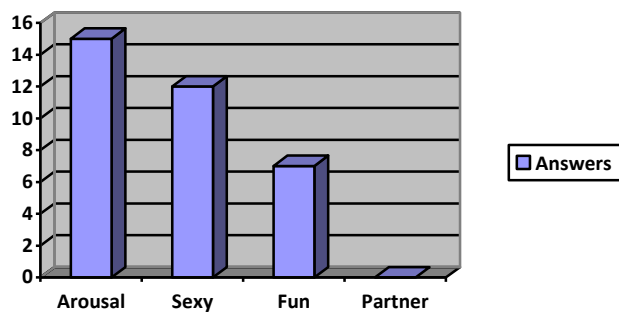
10. On a scale of 1 to 10 how in control of the scene do you think the women are in the pornography you watch?



11. On a scale of 1 to 10 how in control of the scene do you think the men are?

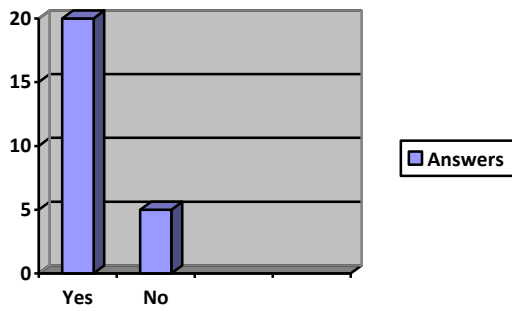


12. Why do you watch pornography?

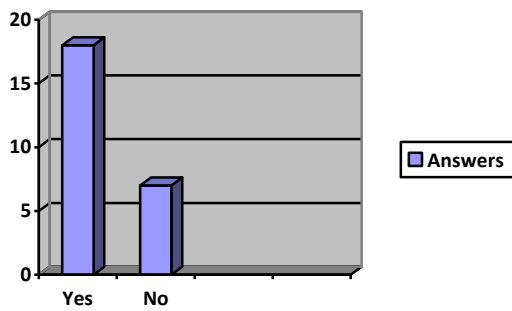


Many participants chose to identify more than one category here.

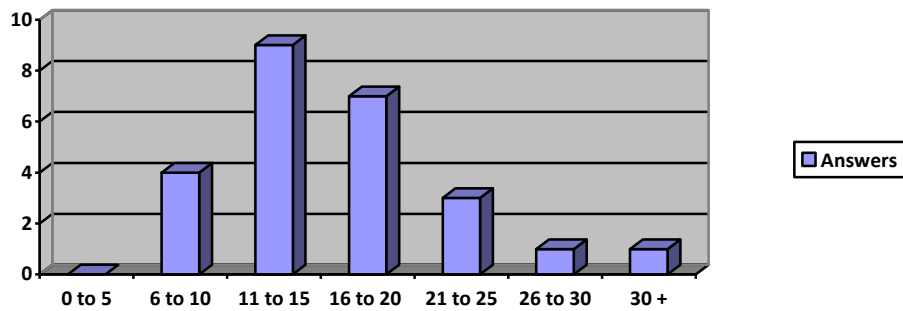
13. If you have a partner, do you have sexual fantasies that don't involve your partner?



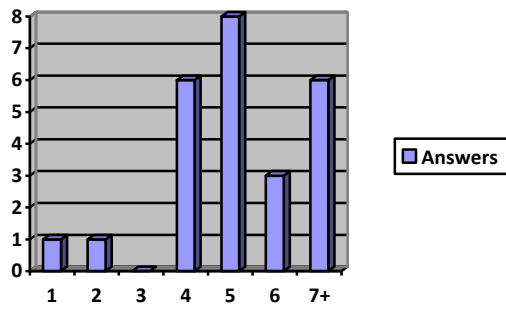
14. Do you think it's important for women to have a personal sexuality that is separate from their sexual interactions with their partner?



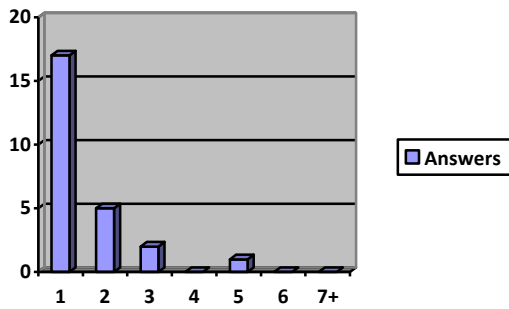
15. How many sexual partners have you had?



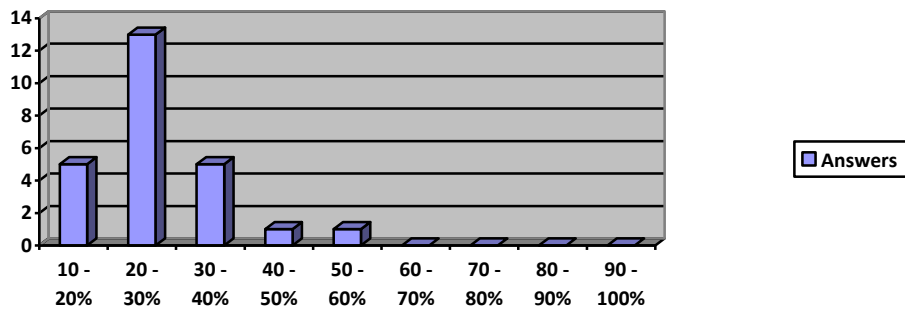
16. How often do you have sex a week on average?



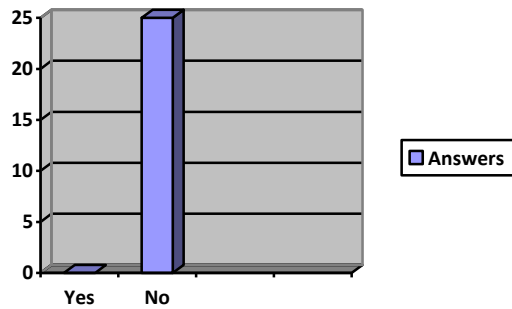
17. How often do you masturbate a week on average?



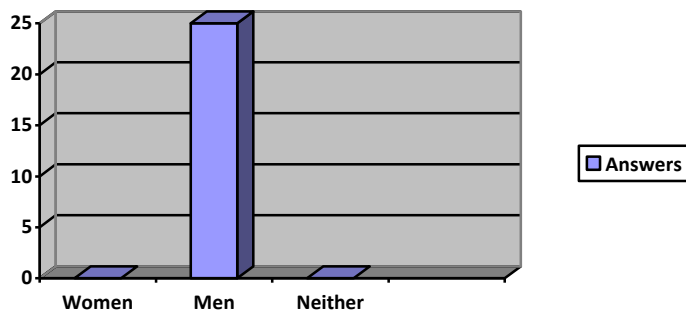
18. What percent of British women do you think watch porn?



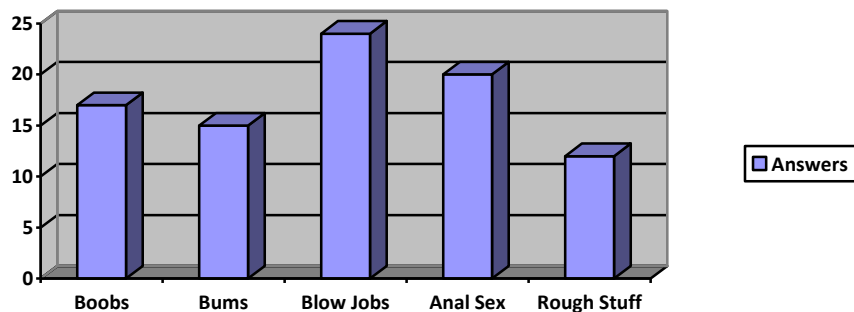
19. Would you leave your partner if you caught him watching pornography? This can be answered whether currently with a partner or not.



20. Considering the pornography that you usually watch do you think it is aimed more at women, men or neither specifically. Can you also identify why you believe this is the case?

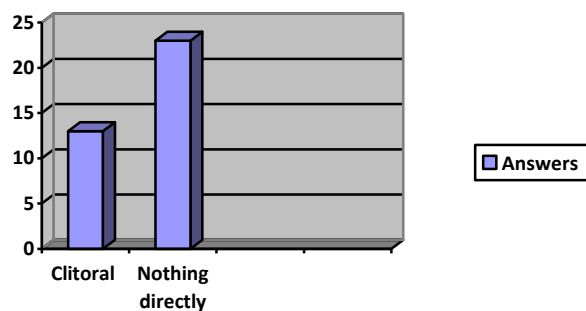


21. What particular aspects of heterosexual porn do you think are aimed at men?



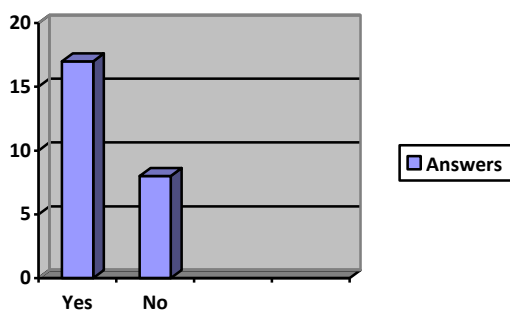
Many participants chose to identify more than one category here

22. What particular aspects of heterosexual porn do you think are aimed at women?

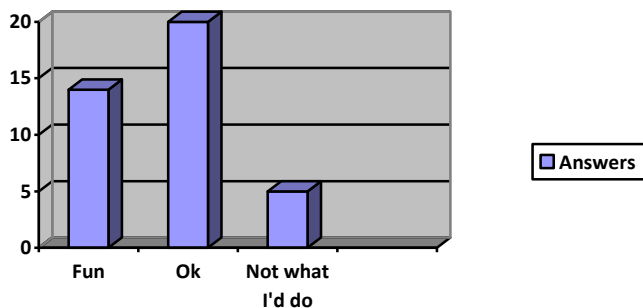


Many participants chose to identify more than on category here.

23. Do you think women are free to explore their sexuality openly today? Why or why not?

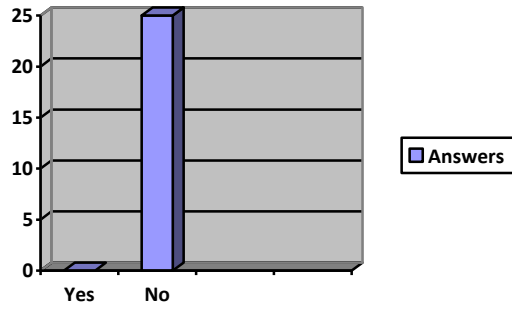


24. How do you feel about straight women going to lap dancing clubs?



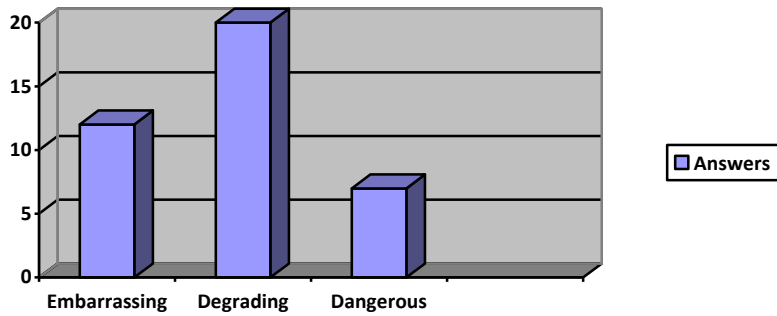
Many participants chose to identify more than one category here

25. Would you yourself ever consider going into the pornography industry?



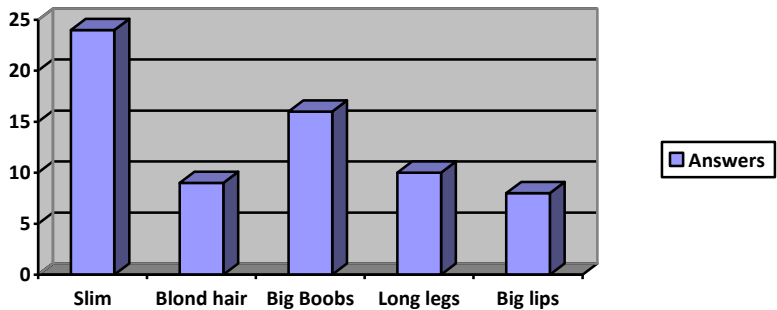
Many participants chose to identify more than one category here.

26. Why / why not?

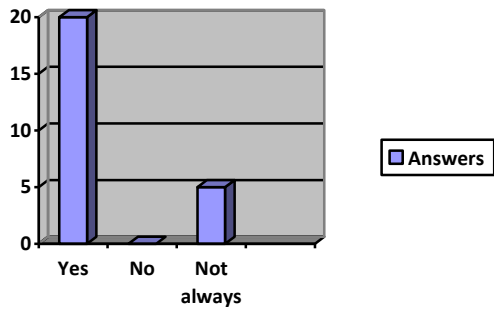


Many participants chose to identify more than one category here.

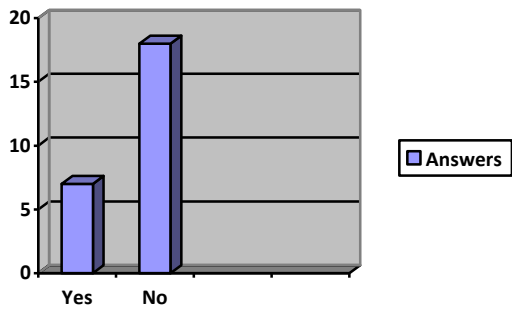
27. What is 'sexy' as portrayed in the media?



28. Does the woman porn star conform to this?



29. Please indicate whether you would be interested in participating in a more detailed, follow up interview



Appendix 4 - Basic Questionnaire Framework

1. Do you feel more comfortable talking to me about this because I'm a woman?
2. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
3. What does feminism mean to you?
4. What is feminism's relationship with pornography?
5. Why do you think that is?
6. Do you think pornography can be empowering?
7. How?
8. Whose agenda does pornography support?
9. Who does pornography benefit?
10. Can you be a feminist and a porn star?
11. How do you live as a feminist today?
12. Is feminism still around?
13. How would you describe today's culture in Britain?
14. Are women equal?
15. Why / How?
16. Can feminism aid women being equal today?
17. Does porn make it difficult for women to be equal or does it not matter?

18. What do you think of porn made 'for women'?
19. What's the difference between being sexy and being sexual? Is there one?
20. What affect do you think watching pornography has on women?
21. What turns women on in bed?
22. Do you find it difficult to talk about what turns you on?
23. Do you think you conform to the media's representations of sexiness?
24. How important is porn in your sex life?
25. How importance is porn in your sexuality?
26. Do you watch a wide range of pornography?
27. How could we improve the porn industry for women?
28. Who do you talk about your consumption of porn with?
29. What do you think of women that don't watch porn and are really against it?
30. What would you do if you saw some porn that really offended you?
31. Why do you think women watch pornography?

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