A Qualitative Exploration of Self-Perceived Problematic Pornography Use Amongst Young People

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Abstract

Pornography use is prevalent amongst young people, with technology developments meaning that it is now available like it has never been available before. Research to date has indicated that for a minority of users that this may be problematic for them. However, there had been no research interviewing those who experience this difficulty. This thesis explores the experience of young people with self-perceived problematic pornography use.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine 16–24-year-olds with self-perceived problematic pornography use. The data was analysed from a social constructionist paradigm following Braun and Clarke (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. There were seven themes constructed which are: 1. What is problematic use? Too much or too extreme?, 2. Using porn as a coping strategy, 3. The shame/guilt associated with pornography use, 4. The negative effect of problematic pornography use on relationships, 5. Things can get better, 6. People minimising the problem, and 7. A lacking in education.

The experience of self-perceived problematic pornography use is not a stand-alone issue. It is important when working with people who present with this experience that counselling psychologists hold this in mind, understanding this is not just an individual problem but also a relational one, and that understanding what the client exactly means about the problem is key to supporting them.

This thesis has a very broad scope, and the participants were not a homogenous group aside from age and self-perceived problematic pornography use and the research questions were very open. It could be useful for future research to either look into particular identity groups, or to broaden the research more to people of all ages. It could also be interesting to do quantitative research to investigate whether there is a relationship between pornography use and beliefs about sexual education.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis will explore the experience of young people (16-24) with self-perceived problematic pornography use. It has used reflexive thematic analysis from a social constructionist paradigm to analyse the interviews of nine young people. In line with Braun and Clarke (2022) it is written in the first person throughout, to acknowledge that this is my understanding of the literature and data and that it was analysed or conducted by somebody else, they may have differing interpretations.

This research began in my first year of the professional doctorate in counselling psychology, when a young man walked into my therapy room seeking support for school stress. On this placement I was seeing plenty of this with young people sitting their A- levels, so this was a pretty typical client. What I wasn't expecting was him revealing to me halfway through a session that he hadn't been honest, and he wanted to tell me the real reason he had sought therapy. "I am addicted to pornography" he said. This statement itself didn't surprise me I had colloquially heard about 'pornography addiction' being an issue, especially for young men. What did surprise me was as we explored what he meant by this, he wasn't watching pornography as much as I would have expected to consider it an "addiction", only once per week. This had me considering what assumptions I was making about how young people view their pornography use, what "normal" use is and how common were these assumptions. When I then went to research this, I was surprised by how little academic literature there was on young people with problematic pornography use.

With headlines such as "DOPEY & SLEAZY! Teenagers addicted to porn are putting themselves at risk of memory loss, new study show" (McDermott, 2019), and "Clinic says teenage porn addiction is 'on the rise'" (BBC, 2019), mainstream media would have us believe that pornography addiction in young people is everywhere. However, when looking for academic evidence it was hard to come by.

Pornography as defined by Segen (2006) is sexually explicit pictures, texts, or other material whose primary purpose is to cause sexual arousal. This encompasses all pornography; online, print, and video. There is a long history of pornography use in a multitude of cultures from Europe to Peru to Japan to Egypt to China and yet the taboo and stigma around pornography remains (Levenson, Oberhuber, & Sheehan, 1973; O'Connor, 2001; Parent, 2001; Weismantel, 2004; Yimen, 1997). The media of pornography has continued to develop as technology has developed initially from drawings, to photographs to film and now to online and live streaming (Corliss, 2005). In the current research problematic

use has been left to be defined by the individual participants. Allowing participants to self-identify fits with a social constructionist paradigm, viewing it as not a singular experience, but rather recognising that it is possible that there have been multiple constructions of problematic use, which will be relevant based on the cultural, socio-historical location, with all of these being as equally valid as others (Burr, 2015). Self-identifying is also aligned with the counselling psychology ethos, moving away from a medicalised, expert model of distress (Douglas et al., 2016). If I had defined what problematic use is, it was possible that I will have alienated potential participants and caused them more distress. It is also important to note that within the existing research problematic pornography has been defined as many things, The majority of the research will use either an addiction model (that people have developed a dependency on pornography) or a compulsion model (that there is an internal irresistible urge to use pornography) (Binnie &Reavey, 2019). Both models have many flaws which is discussed later in the literature review, however what is clear is that there has been no consensus with previous research on what constitutes problematic pornography use, and there has not been a compelling definition provided by previous research.

It was decided that the current research would focus on young people, which has been defined as 16-24 The upper age was selected for two reasons, this is what is commonly defined as a young person within the literature and also because this is at the age in which there appears to be a change in accessibility and availability of pornography during their developmental years. Unlike previous generations pornography is more accessible than it has ever been previously, technology has not only changed the production of pornography but accessibility too. Online pornography is available to almost everyone almost all the time. There has been a significant change in accessibility to the internet over the last decade with now the majority of households having the internet and also the majority of young people having their own device (Ofcom, 2018; Office of National Statistics, 2019). For previous generations who grew up with the internet, it was not the norm to have your own devise on which to access pornography, but it was more likely that access was contained due to access only being via a shared family computer. This means that young people today have had constant access to pornography during a pivotal time of their development (Spear, 2000).

Literature Review

As described previously, Mainstream media is presenting pornography as an epidemic harming young people; however, when we look at the academic research to date there has been limited research with young people and their experience of pornography, with even less looking at problematic pornography use. I will now go on to discuss this research, first exploring the quantitative research studies that have investigated young people and their pornography use, and then go on to explore the qualitative research. Finally, I discuss a proposed model for self-perceived problematic pornography use.

Quantitative Research

Within the quantitative research reviewed for this thesis, there were no studies that specifically addressed problematic use in young people; however, much of it did include some assumptions or specifically ask about whether use was a problem for the young people. There has also been much research that has researched the effect of pornography on young people, this is often looking at how pornography is affecting the functioning of the brain, rather than how the individuals are finding they are affected and therefore has not been included in this literature review. The first article discussed is a systematic review by Peter and Valkenburg (2016), of 75 studies, the decision was made to review this rather than the individual research, as the research included did not specifically include problematic use.

The aims of this systematic review were to investigate whether pornography is related to adolescents' sexual attitudes and beliefs, self- development, and sexual behaviour. It was conducted with research published between 1995 and 2015 (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Regarding prevalence of pornography use in adolescents, there was large variability across the different studies included in this review, which would be expected based on the method of the research, the age range included and the location of the research (cultural variability and access differences). It was found that up to 95% of males and up to 60% of female adolescents had had some form of exposure to pornography. The second finding was related to predictors of pornography use. The systematic review required cumulative evidence to consider the factor a predictor of pornography use. That means that at least three studies found it as a predictor and no studies have found the opposite. The systematic review concluded that the predictors of use are gender (male), stage of puberty (more advanced), personality trait (i.e., sensation seeker) and family relationship (weak or troubled). The final finding was that pornography use has a relationship with the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents. This was particularly with regard to more stereotypical beliefs related to

gender roles and behaviours within a sexual relationship and more likely to have been involved in sexual intercourse. However, the researchers are clear to point out the effect sizes for these findings were small. This systematic review has been useful to summarise the majority of the quantitative research available, it is clear that it is not possible to make cause and effect statements based on the research available. It has provided a base understanding of the research available relating to young people and pornography use.

As mentioned in the systemic review, one of the goals of research has been to understand predictors of pornography use. One study not included in the systemic review that looked into the predictors was also interested in pornography use in relation to psychological symptoms (Mattebo et al., 2013). This was a longitudinal study conducted in Sweden with 477 participants (16 yr. old male). It was found that pornography use in follow up could be predicted by not being born in Sweden and having higher use at the baseline measures. It was also found that less pornography use at baseline was a predictor of depressive symptoms at follow up however psychosomatic symptoms (headache, stomach-ache, nervousness, irritation, stress, and trouble sleeping) were predicted by higher pornography consumption. This research was conducted with a large sample and was able to provide some statistics around demographics in relation to consumption of pornography as well as data about pornography habits over time. However, it appears that this study is perhaps insinuating causation where in fact it is correlation. The study has not attempted to control for the many variables that may be present in the young people's lives that may be present for the development of their psychological symptoms. While this research has not looked at problematic use, it has linked pornography use with psychological distress. I think it is interesting that according to this research, not using pornography is potentially associated with depressive symptoms. It also makes us begin to wonder what problematic use could mean due to the association with pornography use and the psychosomatic symptoms.

Research has also tried to understand possible protective factors related to the use of pornography. One such study was interested in the protective factor that religion may be for pornography use (Hardy et al., 2013). This study investigated whether religiousness, measured through participation in religious activities and internalisation of religion, would protect from the use of pornography. It also sought to understand how this protection was occurring through measuring the participants level of self-regulation, social control, and pornography attitudes. The study consisted of 419, 15 – 18-year-olds. It was found that higher religiousness did correlate with less intentional viewing of pornography but not accidental. This study has increased the understanding of a sub-group (religious) teens

pornography use. It does appear to start from the position that pornography is something that one needs to be protected from, rather than whether there is a relationship between religiousness and pornography use. I think it also needs to be considered who the participants were and what that might mean for the results of the research. It is possible that many of the religious teens included in the study have grown up in a conservative religious household. In this research to understand the mechanisms of protection from social control, the researchers asked the participants questions such as "how would your mother react to you viewing pornography?" This could prime the participant into thinking about how their mother might respond to the rest of the survey and potentially affect the way they responded to further questions. Even though this survey was anonymous this may have resulted in young people not feeling like they were able to be honest about their pornography use. This study is particularly interesting as it opens up consideration of other factors in people's lives that may be influencing their ideas and relationship with their pornography use.

Dwulit and Rzymski (2019) completed a cross-sectional study of over 6000 18–26-year-old polish university students with the aim of understanding the prevalence of pornography consumption and its self-perceived effects as well as general thoughts about pornography among young people. It was found that 79% had viewed pornography with 84% of those being current viewers. The frequency of use was most likely to be once per week with 11% reporting daily use. This pornography was mostly reported as online video. 51% of those who reported being currently consumers of pornography also reported having attempted to stop watching it. Those who had attempted to cease reported an increase in erotic dreams, irritability, attention disturbances and loneliness while attempting to stop. The perceived effects of pornography were reported as 50% of the consumers felt some embarrassment related to their consumption, a "need to change" the pornography content (i.e. change in genre to more explicit material), that it took more time (12%) and stimuli (18%) to reach orgasm when using the material and negative effects on relationship quality (28%) and sexual satisfaction (7%). Self-perceived addiction to pornography was reported in 12% of those that completed the survey. With regards to the participants general opinions towards pornography, they reported that pornography may have a negative effect on social relationships (59%), mental health (64%) sexual performance (68%), and the social and psychological development of children and adolescents (78%). This research was conducted with a younger demographic who have grown up with an ever presence of the internet. The research was a survey which enabled the researchers to get a lot of data to show the broad realities of

pornography consumption. This also meant that the individual voices and nuance of answers could be lost especially those that perceived some form of difficulty relating to their pornography use. This is the first research discussed that has directly asked young people about their use that might be conceived as problematic use. It is noteworthy that 51% had attempted to stop watching but only 12% identified as "addicted". It would be interesting to be able to further explore what it was that had led to them attempting to stop and whether it was related to some of the perceived effects discussed. It is possible, that this study is suggesting some young people perceive their pornography use as a problem but not as an addiction and that would account for this difference. This research has made me curious about the young people in this research's experience of pornography and of attempting to stop watching, given these findings it is essential that there is research that attempts to understand this at greater depth.

The next quantitative study to be discussed in this research proposal is some of the findings from a large research project in Italy. Damiano and colleagues, (2015) found that in line with the systemic review, the majority of the participants had accessed pornography (78%) with over half accessing it at least weekly (51%). Of those accessing pornography 22% reported that it had become habitual, 10% that it had reduced their sexual desire to the outside world and 9% reported that the felt they had some form of addiction to pornography. This paper is a publication of a small part of a much larger research project and as such the information gathered was succinct and did not give the young people an opportunity to further explain their answers but does support the research discussed previously by Dwulit and Rzymski (2019). Again, this is giving us some information, but also suggests that there needs to be more to understand the psychology of this, and for in-depth qualitative research.

The final quantitative study discussed here is based in New Zealand and looked at the pornography use of teenagers aged 14-17 (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018). This research was a representational sample where 1% of all young people took part with key demographics including age, gender, urban living and race which were considered in ensuring that it was representational. The research was a survey, which included some questions in which open ended answers were possible where a content analysis was conducted of the themes found in the answers. The research found, as with the other research discussed, that most young people (67%) have viewed pornography at some point with more males (75%) having viewed than females (58%). It was also found that 27% had seen it by age 12. In addition, most of the young people surveyed had not sought out pornography when they first viewed it but had either seen it by accident (37%) or somebody else had shown it to

them (34%). Only 15% of those surveyed identified that they view pornography at least once per month. The survey also enquired how these young people were accessing pornography, and it was found that the majority used a mobile phone as their main source (56%) with the next most common being a computer, tablet, tv or other device (37%). This could possibly have been more useful in understanding the pornography use habits of young people if this category was further divided. These devices are very different to each other and therefore are used in very different ways. For example, a TV is usually set up and not mobile whereas a tablet can be used anywhere. One interesting finding was that young people who identified as non-heterosexual were more likely to purposefully look up pornography. This might be linked to (as the study goes on the mention) young people using pornography to learn about sex, and as sexual education is possibly heteronormative and therefore young people who don't identify as heterosexual are seeking further education. The young people surveyed felt that pornography could influence the way people think and act with 86% thinking it could have a negative influence and 52% reporting it could have a positive influence. 54% of the young people surveyed reported that they had used pornography as a way to learn about sex, 22% had tried something they had seen and 34% said they would like to try something. This survey as with others had looked into the reasons people had looked at pornography in the last 6 months. Curiosity (75%) was the most common reason, followed by accidental exposure (58%), entertainment (57%), sexual arousal (57%) and boredom (56%). When asked how they feel while watching pornography they reported that they felt curious (75%) sexually aroused (71%) and worried about getting caught (63%). It was also found that 42% of regular viewers felt that they would like to watch less pornography. When asked why they felt that they described going through times of wanting to watch less. A content analysis found that they found it hard to stop watching pornography, especially in times of boredom, or when they were using it as a way to help manage stress and emotions, one respondent reported that they found it hard because they are addicted. The young people were also asked about who should be able to watch pornography, with only 7% of those surveyed responding that anyone should be able to watch. 31% responded that it is ok for people my age but not children, 27% that it should only be for adults. In addition, 71% of the young people felt that young people's access to pornography should be restricted in some way. Following this quantitative research, the researchers went on to complete qualitative research which will be discussed later in this literature review. This research did ask about addiction and problematic use however the findings were not presented in the main report. The researchers asked about the influences of pornography, and it was found that 6% of those surveyed felt that it encouraged unhealthy sexual habits or addictions, with 2% saying that one can become

addicted or watch too much. This research has been interesting as the statistics of who is watching, how much they are watching and how they were first introduced to pornography is similar to that of the other research discussed. However, where it differs is the number of those that perceive their pornography use to be a problem, the New Zealand statistics are much less. It may be potential future research to look into the potential socio-political reasons for these differences.

The quantitative research into younger people's pornography use is limited and even more so when looking at "problematic use". In the research discussed thus far there have been questions about whether the young people experience difficulties such as addiction or sexual difficulties but no research to further understand these difficulties. It would be interesting to understand further the experience of young people's pornography use which is the realm of qualitative research. As quantitative research is used to seek an explanation whereas qualitative research is more interested in the meaning making practices of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Qualitative research

There were five qualitative research papers found that looked at younger people and pornography use. None of these were looking at problematic pornography use but instead were aiming to understand young people's use of pornography more generally.

Mattebo et al (2014) utilised grounded theory with focus groups of professionals who work with young people discussing young people's pornography use in Sweden. These professionals included teachers, physicians, midwives, social workers, nurses, and personnel from youth centres. They were recruited via their jobs at three secondary schools and four youth centres. The core findings were that pornography is providing "conflicting messages about sexuality." It was found that the participants had a sense that the messages in pornography and the media conflicted with the national public health goals, current laws and regulations regarding sexual health and gender equality. It was found that the participants believed that young people were using pornography as an educational source and there was a concern when this might be the only source of information for some young people. It was also felt that because the young people were using this as a source for information that it was creating norms in the minds of young people for how they should look and behave to be more sexually attractive. This ideal norm was then a cause of anxiety for young people if they were not able to live up to the perceived norms. There was also a belief that the pornography viewed was influencing young people's views of gender roles and was creating demands on both males and females to live up to certain gender roles sexually, for example woman were

to be submissive while men are supposed to be able "to last for a long time" (meaning to maintain an erection). The final finding was that the professionals felt that it was important to maintain a professional approach when working with these young people. While they as professionals may not understand the content of the pornography that the young people are discussing, they had to maintain a trusted relationship with the young people where they were able to talk about how the pornography made them feel. This study acknowledges that the nature of focus groups may be such that the participants may not have felt they could express personal opinions. I think it is also important to note that this study focuses on the opinions of professionals working with young people and how pornography is experienced for young people. These professionals will have their own biases and have been subject to different education and cultural norms growing up. Whilst hearing the perspectives of professionals is helpful and important it is essential that we elicit the voices of the young people directly about their experiences.

The second of these qualitative research papers focused on why adolescent same sex attracted males used pornography (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015). In this study all the participants were black, aged 15-19 and had had a prior sexual experience. The study was a part of a larger project that included an intake survey and three follow up interviews. The material for this study was from the first semi structured interview. The first finding of this research was "general sexual and sexual orientation development". It was thought that the participants were using pornography as "a manual for sex". The participants felt as though they had little understanding of sexual organs and the mechanics of same sex intercourse. Therefore, the pornography was able to act as a visual aid or tutorial to explain how to have sex with a partner. The participants also reported that watching pornography had helped them in recognising their sexual orientation. Some of the participants reported that they recognised that they did not get aroused when watching heterosexual pornography or that they got aroused when looking at the male actor's penis. The next finding was "readiness for sex". Participants reported watching pornography and feeling as though they understood how to perform meant they were ready to have sex themselves, some reported using pornography to calm nerves related to having sexual intercourse, this could occur alone or within a relationship. The final finding was "learn about sexual performance". This related to participants learning about positions and the roles that the two partners will play in a sexual encounter as well as how it should feel (i.e., pain and pleasure). It was discussed in this research that pornography often does not include the use of safe sex, for example using of condoms. It is clear from this research, that some young people are using pornography to fill

in the gaps that they are not getting from other educational sources. This research is also interesting in that it doesn't position pornography as problematic, which is different to other research. People in their lives may come to experience pornography as problematic, rather than pornography being essentially problematic. Suggesting we need to focus our attention to stories of lived experience.

Löfgren-Mårtenson, & Månsson (2010) gathered data from a combination of individual interviews and focus groups with a total of 51 participants aged 14-20. The aims of this research were to get a deeper understanding of young people's experience of pornography. They wanted to understand the function of pornography for these young people and the participants' thoughts on the physical ideals displayed in pornography. In addition, to what effects do the young people believe pornography has on their view of sexuality and gender. The researchers were also interested in gender differences in the discussions related to these questions. The first finding was that while all the participants had accessed pornography, there was a difference in that male participants were more likely to have sought out the pornography than the female participants. However, the male focus group felt as though males have been misrepresented and that they aren't all watching pornography all the time. The female focus group felt that females might be watching less for two reasons, firstly that it is less acceptable in society for females to be watching, and secondly that pornography is "made for men by men" and that it is not made to entice the female viewer. It was also felt that females were more likely to watch pornography with somebody such as a partner. The researchers identified three main functions of pornography for young people. "Pornography as a form of social intercourse", "a source of information" and "a stimulus for sexual arousal". Some of the young people reported watching pornography with friends, and for the most part this form of consumption was not associated with arousal, but instead described as a way to test theirs and other's reactions to the content of the pornography, as a form of norm testing. The young people also described the pornography as a source of ideas of things to try themselves however this was done critically, and the participants were aware that the pornography was fictional and that it may not be an accurate representation of a sexual relationship. The final function of sexual arousal was described by the participants as being either alone or with a sexual partner. The researchers also reported a theme of "ideal bodies and perfect performances". This was the idea that pornography gave young people an example of what a sexual body and performance should be. The participants reported that the woman's role was to satisfy the man's needs, however this portrayal was critiqued by the participants. The participants also discussed how the pornography made them feel about their

bodies, that the females should be hairless, and comparing themselves to the actors with large breasts. The final theme was "navigation of the pornographic landscape". The participants felt that while they couldn't escape from being somewhat influenced by pornography, that not everyone who has viewed pornography is psychologically harmed. The participants felt that as they got older, they were more able to manage the influence and with personal experience their self-confidence was increased. This research has centred the voices and experiences of the young people that were interviewed. The researchers were aware of the influence that being there may have had on the research itself. This research does appear to be epistemologically confused. It states that it's taking a social constructionist stance as well as a phenomenological stance. Within the analysis they speak of discourses while also attempting to generalise and validate their findings through triangulation at the analysis stage. It is not clear which method was used for analysis as this is not stated however it does read as if it is thematic analysis, in which there is no need to establish the reliability of the themes as it is acknowledged that they are constructed through the researcher's interaction with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The fourth qualitative study included was by Mattebo et. al., (2012). The researchers held six focus groups (three male and three female) to get an understanding of how young people discuss and reflect on pornography with a focus on its spread in society and the media as well as its possible influence on the young people sexual behaviour and relationship. Grounded theory was used in the analysis of the data and a preliminary model for understanding the process of pornographic spread in the media was developed. The core category was labelled as "A discriminatory sexuality" – participants felt that pornography presented unrealistic body ideals, that the women were symbolised as "Barbie" being represented as thin with large breasts and the man as "Hercules" being the leader and muscular. The categories that are also included are "it is everywhere", "pressuring sexual messages", "distorted reality – 'fiction'", "ambivalence", and "inspiration". "It is everywhere" refers to the participants referring to the ease of availability and therefore that pornography is almost impossible to avoid now. "Pressuring sexual messages" was expressed primarily from the female participants with them describing how the media will use sex to apply pressure to look and behave a certain way. This included the lack of condoms in pornography. "Distorted reality – 'fiction'" was experienced by the participants with the actors behaving in gender typical ways with exaggerated physicality. This was seen as the women being represented as easy going, and therefore accessible for sex and the men being dominant. The women were seen as small with large breasts whereas the men were muscular.

"Ambivalence" was experienced as contradictory feelings that they would feel arousal but also fear and agony, that they preferred an equal relationship but enjoyed watching the unequal relationships. There was an acknowledgment here from the participants that the constant presence of pornography may be difficult for those who either experience sexual difficulties or difficulties with pornography. Finally, "inspiration" meaning pornography would offer ideas of sexual activities that one might want to try in a relationship. It allows the participants to see sexual fantasies that they may be interested in to test out for themselves. Again, this study has prioritised the voice of the young people interviewed, yet while the young people do acknowledge that some people experience difficulties with pornography, these young people's voices (those with difficulties) are not heard.

The final qualitative research found in the review process is the study from New Zealand which follows on from the research described earlier in the quantitative research where they interviewed 52 14- 17-year-olds from a cross-section of places across the country (Classification Office, 2020). This research like those previously discussed, did not talk to young people who themselves have problematic use but did speak to the young people about problematic use. The findings of the research are three main themes - that young people are growing up with pornography, that they feel there is an impact of pornography, and that there are some things that they think could change in relation to pornography. In terms of growing up with pornography there were three sub-themes; the young people felt that it had become normalised for them, that they were curious about sex and pornography can function as a learning tool, and that girls watch pornography too but experience a double standard. When discussing the normalisation of pornography, the participants spoke about how they assume all their peers have seen pornography and that many of them will be watching it regularly. When discussing the curiosity, they acknowledged that while they primarily viewed pornography for sexual pleasure that there was an element of sexual education, that they knew they could find out anything anytime, potentially like other areas of their life, the answer can be found on the internet. The final sub-theme of girls watching pornography too, was in the context of the female identifying participants discussing the double standard that they experience, that while they use pornography for the same reason as their male peers that they experience different societal expectations, that there is a greater taboo about girls watching pornography. In terms of the impact of pornography, the sub themes are - that it can have a negative impact on body confidence, most young people aren't worried about the amount they watch, and that it can negatively influence sex. When discussing the negative impact on body confidence, like the research discussed previously participant spoke about

how watching pornography can make them feel bad about themselves as they do not look like the idealised bodies portrayed in the pornography. When discussing the amount, they were watching, the young people would discuss how the amount they would watch varied over time and they were not concerned about their own use but did discuss the existence of "porn addiction" but how they felt this was rare. When discussing the influence of pornography on sex and relationships, they spoke about how pornography is not realistic and can give people false expectations of what to expect from sex, particularly in terms of gender roles. In terms of what they think should change, there were three sub-themes- how pornography is spoken about needs to change, that pornography should be a part of sexual education, and that access is too easy. When discussing how pornography is spoken about the young people spoke about the barriers to open communication about pornography and how adults need to lead the way with being more open to having conversations free of guilt, shame, embarrassment and without the fear of punishment. When talking about including pornography in sexual education there was an acknowledgment that different schools had different approaches to sexual education but that many schools did not include enough about pornography, and that it is important that the information is informative rather than personal. Finally, when discussing access to pornography the participants felt that pornography was too easy to access for children and young people and felt that more needed to be done to do age verification or at least warning attached to online pornography. This research generally is in agreement with the other research discussed. As with the other research while it has been true to the voice of young people those who identify as having problematic use are missing.

A Model of Self-Perceived Problematic Pornography Use

Previously in this literature review there has been a focus on young people and pornography use. Given the limited research it is pivotal to also consider the research exploring problematic pornography use more generally. When searching, it was clear that this was an area that also has limited research. In order to understand this concisely I will be discussing a paper that first conducted a narrative review which is a comprehensive summary of the existing literature, which then proposes a model of problematic pornography use based on this (Binnie & Reavey, 2019). Considering a model of problematic pornography use is important when considering individualised formulations and how to support people.

Binnie and Reavey (2019) first consider the classifications of problematic pornography use that are currently being used in research. They found that most research considered problematic use a behavioural addiction or an impulsivity/compulsivity disorder. The paper goes on to explore both of these models.

When considering addiction Binnie and Reavey (2019) considered the DSM V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) classification of addiction and reviewed papers using this model to establish whether this was an appropriate model for problematic pornography use. The DSM V diagnosis of a substance use disorder has the following 11 criteria: (1) hazardous use, (2) social/interpersonal problems related to use, (3) neglected major roles due to use, (4) withdrawal, (5) tolerance, (6) used larger amounts/longer, (7) repeated attempts to quit/control use, (8) much time using, (9) physical/psychological problems related to use, (10) activities given up to use, (11) craving. While it is unclear in the literature what the difference between tolerance and increased use is as the current research is not focusing on an addiction model for the purpose of this literature review, they will be considered together. While the DSM does not use the word addiction, this classification is often the criteria found in the literature (Binnie & Reavey, 2019). It could be questioned whether the DSM is the best framework to use to establish an addiction model as there is no pornography addiction in the DSM, however there is no agreed definition for pornography addiction in the literature or in any framework. As this is the framework used by Binnie and Reavey (2019) I too have used this.

In terms of impact on functioning it was found that there was some support that there is a relationship between problematic pornography use and peoples functioning. One study by Cavaglion (2009) found that the people with problematic pornography use reported problems with productivity and with relationships, often feeling isolated. Binnie and Reavey (2019) reported that Levin, Lillis and Hayes (2012) found that viewing pornography predicted social functioning difficulties, and a third study found that the that problematic pornography use was associated with relationships, and problems at work. This study did find that these problems were not increased with increased use but rather attempts to control thoughts and urges. This suggests that, possibly, functioning is reduced due to cognitive and affective components rather than use of pornography itself. While this shows that there is likely a relationship between problematic pornography use and impaired functioning, it cannot be stated as simply that problematic pornography use is causing the impaired function. The opposite could be an explanation in that difficulties with functioning are turning people

towards pornography. Or of course that a common underlying cause is producing both phenomena.

Frequency of use was one of the most common defining features within the literature reviewed by Binnie and Reavey (2019). However, it was clear that there was a large variation of what was considered excessive use. The research reviewed in this narrative review had a range of excessive use being defined as anything from 10 times in three months to 5.7 times per week. It can be argued that 5.7 times per week is not excessive use as this level of masturbation is the same as about 1 in 6 US men (Humphreys, 2018). It is important to also consider that within the research that there is at times conflation with pornography use and masturbation, the research does not make clear when discussing excessive use whether they are establishing the difference between frequency of viewing pornography and the frequency of masturbating. While it can be assumed that the two go frequently together, as the research states that most people view for sexual pleasure, it is possible to masturbate without pornography and view pornography without masturbating. The narrative review found no empirical evidence that there is an increase of use in those who perceive themselves to have a pornography addiction, however this is due to the lack in the longitudinal studies required to establish this evidence. This discounts the tolerance requirement of the addiction model, however tolerance may not just be higher use but could also be viewed as increased tolerance for the content of the pornography, there does appear to be some evidence that that there is a desensitisation of the content of the pornography and that people over time can move into more extreme forms of pornography.

Binnie and Reavey (2019) rejected the existence of hazardous use and withdrawal symptoms. They could find no evidence that anybody had died from their pornography use. They did acknowledge the "death grip" which is associated with excessive masturbation and also that people have died due to associated sexual practices such as auto-erotic asphyxiation. One could posit that while there is lacking evidence of harm associated with pornography use that injury could be considered as a result of hazardous use. Also, if people are moving towards riskier sexual behaviour such as asphyxiation due to their pornography use and perhaps a tolerance of content, it could be argued that this is hazardous pornography use. In terms of withdrawal, Binnie and Reavey (2019) discounted this due to the impossibility of a physiological dependence and have included potential psychological withdrawal symptoms in with psychological difficulties discussed later. It needs to be considered however that this approach could have the effect of minimising of the experience of people who report problematic use. It also needs to be considered what is meant by withdrawal symptoms, and

acknowledge that the DSM criteria does not establish it has to be physical withdrawal symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), However as I am reviewing their understanding I will also include psychological withdrawal with other psychological difficulties, therefore I would hold this in mind while reviewing their findings, I too will include it with psychological difficulties.

It was found that within the literature reviewed, there were reports of participants difficulties with controlling their pornography use or struggling to quit (Binnie & Reavey, 2019). This is consistent with the addiction model; however, Binnie and Reavey (2019) go on to discuss a potential relation between self-regulation of sexual arousal and the difficulty of hypersexual behaviour. This could also be viewed as semantics, and that what is being reported is difficulty with stopping which is key. Therefore, it can be said that for some that report having problematic pornography use, there is a difficulty with quitting, controlling use or abstaining from pornography.

When thinking about physical and psychological problems relating to problematic pornography use Binnie and Reavey (2019) began by discussing sexual problems associated with excessive use. The term Pornography Induced Erectile Dysfunction (PIED) is often reported on, and there are several studies that correlate pornography use with erectile dysfunction and delayed orgasm, which is also reported in qualitative studies. However, the claims of causation are not supported by the empirical research. In fact, in research that has found erectile dysfunction in younger men, there was no association found with pornography use, but rather drug use, smoking, depression and poor physical health. One study reported by Binnie and Reavey (2019) was Grubbs and Gola (2019) which did find that those that self-report problematic use have higher levels of erectile dysfunction but without causation, and other factors such as depression and anxiety were not controlled for. As there is such high anecdotal reporting of PIED and yet little empirical evidence, Binnie and Reavey (2019) suggest this is an area of further research while also proposing an explanation of the refractory period following an orgasm that is not being accounted for when experiencing sexual problems associated with pornography use.

When considering psychological problems associated with problematic pornography use, there is often a link discussed in the research, however the exact links are unclear. There have been mediating factors identified including depression, anxiety, stress as well as loneliness. This is consistent with some of the research discussed earlier in this literature review regarding young people's pornography use. It was also proposed that experiential avoidance may be one explanation for problematic pornography use. Binnie and Reavey

(2019) reported that Grubbs, Stauner, Exline, Pargament & Lindberg, (2015) also reported that the relationship between pornography use, and distress was mediated by the perception of addiction; in essence if the belief of addiction wasn't there, there would not have been the same level of distress from the frequency of use. Another factor that has predicted distress in relation to pornography use is the belief a moral transgression has occurred. That is the shame and guilt associated with using pornography is a predictor of the distress felt, or those that believe pornography use is incongruent with their belief system.

When considering craving, it was first needed to be established what is meant by craving. Sexual images can create stronger motivation than other images which has been established through neuroscience through increased blood flow and increases in dopamine, which is similar to the process to substance addictions(Binnie & Reavey, 2019). The neural changes seen, seem to occur when in substance addictions the use has changed from pleasure seeking to craving relief. Therefore, the craving described by people with problematic pornography use may be better understood as a colloquial use of craving rather than a clinical use, as it is a psychological rather than biological craving.

Based on the evidence discussed, Binnie and Reavey (2019) rejected the use of an addiction model for problematic pornography use. While it is clear that pornography use for some has an impact on their functioning it does not have an impact on enough of the areas established by the DSM criteria for substance misuse.

When considering an impulsivity/compulsivity model, one must first establish what is meant by impulsivity. Binnie and Reavey (2019) used the Moeller and colleagues (2001) definition "a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reaction to internal or external stimuli without regard to negative consequences". With problematic pornography use this would be responding to sexual desire with pornography use without considering the consequences of this action. Whereas they defined compulsivity according to the American Psychiatric Association, "a performance of repetitive behaviours with the goal of reducing or preventing anxiety or distress". While in the research pornography use has been seen as repetitive, the function of the use has been debated. At times it has been theoretically linked with emotion regulation. Experimentally it has been found to have the opposite effect. Binnie and Reavey (2019) discount both models to explain problematic pornography use as they could find no evidence that fully supports either.

Following the discussion of current models used in research for problematic use, Binnie and Reavey (2019) go on to discuss what the current research has established. When

looking at the research of the experience of those with problematic pornography use, they were only able to find one complete study, which did not include young people. There were case reports but often these were not focused on problematic pornography use but rather sexual problems that included problematic pornography use. Other studies focussed on the experience of partners of people who have problematic pornography use.

The first study discussed by Binnie and Reavey (2019) in this section was Cavaglion, (2009), this was the only one to be the experience of people who have problematic pornography use. The study was a narrative and interpretive analysis that looked at messages from a self -help forum. This research found that there was a theme of isolation, and that isolated users pornography use would escalate. They also found that there were different groupings of the users of the forum. One group was described as shy introverted and lacking self-esteem, it was found that they would use pornography instead of doing other activities and that they felt as though they developed a tolerance for the content, seeking more extreme content over time. Another group was described as having a double life, these were often older and had partners and children. They described their "normal" life as being affected by their pornography use. All groups tended to be disgusted by their pornography use. When religious, this disgust would often be a demonization and if not religious it tended to be a disease model. This supports the idea that morality plays a role in problematic pornography use. It was also found that the users reported a decrease in function and isolation from the real world and missing out on life. There was also a report on difficulties in sexual functioning relating to their masturbation, however, for not all was pornography just for masturbation, as there was a group that were fixated on downloading and organising their pornography.

The next research discussed by Binnie and Reavey (2019) is the four research papers that explore of the experience of partners with problematic use. The first, Zitzman and Butler (2009), interviewed 14 women who were attending couples therapy because of their partners pornography use. The themes discussed focussed on attachment and tended to centre on the discovery of pornography use and perceived infidelity, a sense of disconnection and feeling emotionally unsafe in the relationship and therefore the relationship ending. The next research discussed was Cavaglion and Rashty (2010) which explored partners experience used the same self-help forums discussed earlier analysing messages from partners. There were themes of trauma, betrayal, being in limbo, loss of partner, loss of sex life, and idealised past relationship and inadequacy. The next study included, Bergner and Bridges (2002), looked at written accounts made by the partners of heavy pornography users and were gathered from online forums. It was found that due to the pornography use of their partners,

the women perceived themselves, their partner and their relationship negatively, that discovery of problematic pornography use was a traumatic betrayal and they felt rejected or sexually used. They appeared to have two positions of their partners pornography use, either they were addicted or had a mental health problem and therefore not as responsible, or that they were bad and selfish for putting pornography before their family. The final study discussed, King (2003), used an addiction perspective of problematic pornography use and was focussed on the partners of clergy who had used pornography. There was no analysis of this data and just quotes included, which Binnie and Reavey (2019) report as being interesting seeing quotes with a focus on self-blaming, shame and isolation.

Based on the narrative literature review Binnie and Reavey (2019) propose a model of problematic pornography use. They have attempted to include several of the mechanisms that affect problematic pornography use based on findings of this literature review. They have attempted to highlight what is known and also what is not yet known. There is an acknowledgement that the current research has lacked any real depth of the voices of those with problematic use. The hope of this model is to help people who are supporting those with problematic use.
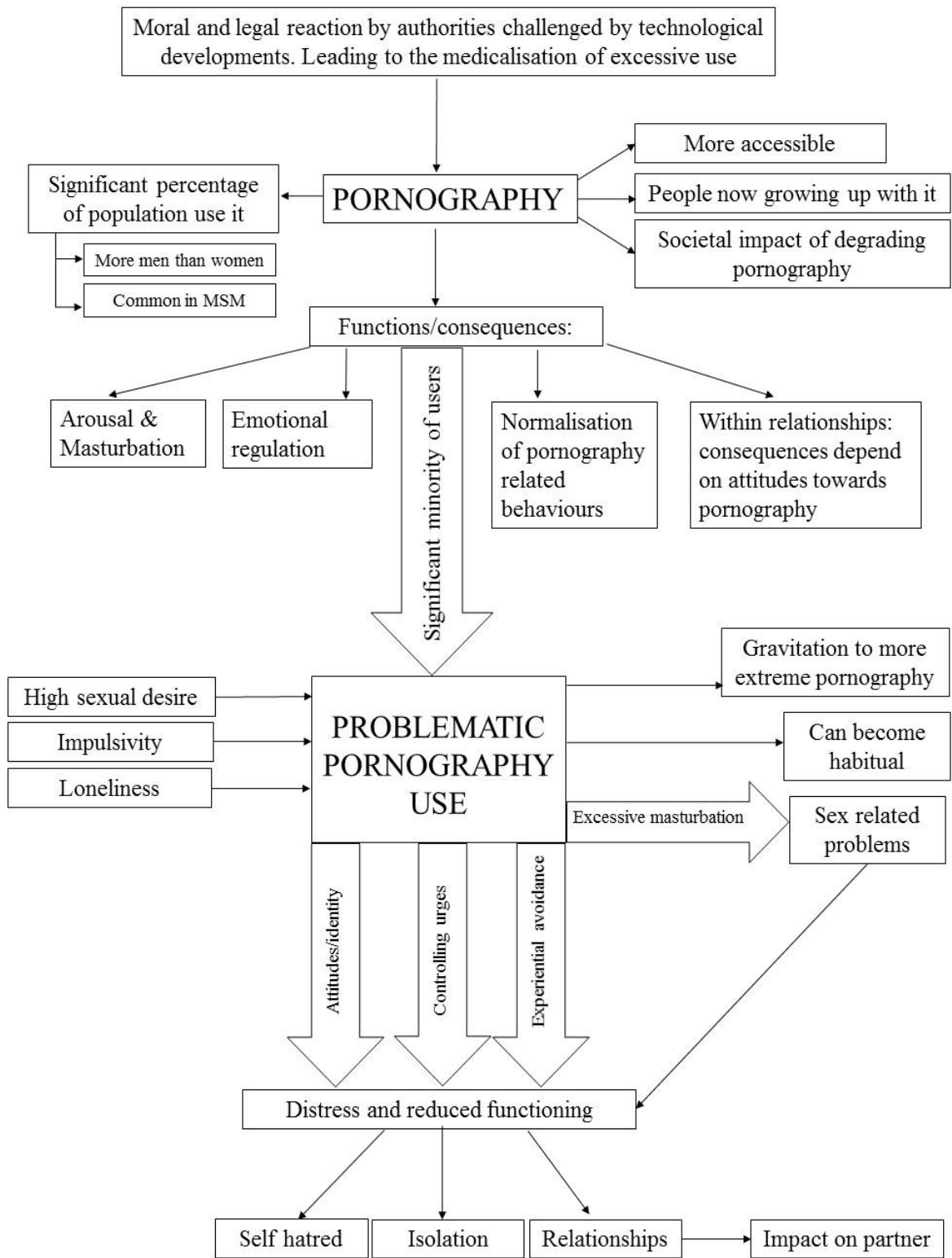
Figure 1: Diagrammatic version of proposed model Binnie and Reavey (2019)

Pornography is abundant, its availability and accessibility has only increased as there are developments in the availability of the internet (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018). Usage is high across young people with up to 95% having viewed (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) . Pornography is complex it is positioned in a variety of ways, good and bad, problematic or normal, and helpful and harmful. It is used in variety of ways sexual arousal, educational, social etc. There are tensions in how and why and to what effect it is positioned and functions in the way it does (popular culture, youth culture, educational value, the media, sexuality). And a Range of potential benefits and range of risks and challenges.

Pornography can certainly be understood as problematic and experienced as problematic. Research points to this in many different ways – primarily quantitative, some qualitative, all from a wider population level, none from the specific population who experience it as a problem. But what of the experience of this problem or harm, we have very little. Little research on the exact nature of problematic use, the lived experiences and stories of problems, how and why it becomes problematic, trajectories and what helps and doesn't help. Small subgroup of people likely to have difficulties yet this group has not been researched in depth, we are reliant on population-based research primarily and theoretical models. If there is a small group experiencing difficulties, they are likely to desire or need support, likely psychological support, therefore we need to know much more about this group and their lived experiences, their psychology, their understanding, in order to respond therapeutically. If counselling psychology is to support people, from a person-centred humanist position, then we must hear their voice in relation to their lives, difficulties, experiences. Research of this nature in this area is urgently needed if we are to respond adequately sensitively and appropriately.

Current research aims

Given the literature discussed, there were multiple options for further research. As a counselling psychologist I am interested in the experiences of individuals and the meaning that they are making from their experiences. In the research discussed there is none that is explicitly the experience of problematic pornography use in young people, and no research interviewing anyone about their experience of problematic use. Given the difficulties in establishing what constitutes problematic use and my interest in individual experience, it was

clear that self-perceived problematic use was the area of research. Given the sparsity of research available it was clear to me that the current research would need to have a broad focus and research question. Therefore, the current research explored the question: What is the experience of young people with self-perceived problematic pornography use? This broad research question had three sub questions: 1. What is their experience of pornography? 2. What is their experience of problematic use? And 3. If they have attempted to change their use, what was their experience of this?

Methodology

The research paradigm and assumptions for this paper, describe what reflexive thematic analysis is, justify its appropriateness for this research, describe the steps, discuss recruitment, and ethical considerations.

Paradigm and Assumptions

A research paradigm are the beliefs and principles that shape the way researchers see the world and therefore how they interpret the data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I adopt a social constructionist (sometimes called social constructivist) lens as I align with the position that all we know about the world is socially constructed and that what is "true" is only true in that particular socio-historical location (Burr, 2015). Moreover, this paradigm is appropriate in understanding the multi-level influences that impact problematic pornography use (Willig, 2013). The assumptions shaping social constructionism are considered below in the context of the current study.

Axiology

Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting research (Morrow, 2007). The social constructionist usually adopts a balanced axiology, that research cannot be conducted outside the values of the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) . I have already covered my background and values previously and will continue to discuss my reflexivity throughout the research, in line with Braun and Clarke (2022).

Ontology

Ontology is the understanding of what is reality (Ponterotto, 2005). The social constructionist paradigm usually adopts a relativist ontological position, which assumes there are multiple possible realities all of which are able to be apprehended and equally valid (Ponterotto, 2005). The relativist approach stands to provide a convincing account of the meanings of participant perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Epistemology

Epistemology is the understanding of how we have come to know something (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The social constructionist paradigm positions itself within a social constructionist epistemology where knowledge can only be understood through the social context in which it exists (Burr, 2015). In this particular research it is evident throughout data collection and analysis in which the understanding is co-constructed between myself, the

researcher, and the participant (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and is particularly notable given Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive guidance.

Counselling psychology

Pluralism, understanding the value of different approaches, is a central value of counselling psychology (Hanley et al., 2013). While pluralism is usually thought of as applying to the practitioner in the scientist-practitioner dyad, I believe it is equally important to apply it to the research as well. Morrow (2007) speaks of how it would be simplistic to assume research would sit neatly under one paradigm and rather encourages the counselling psychology researcher to knowledgeably and carefully cross paradigms if and when this is appropriate.

Qualitative research

In line with a social constructionist paradigm, the current research has taken a qualitative research design (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research is focused on understanding the meaning of a situation and is trying to generate contextual and situational knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Within the qualitative research, trustworthiness and authenticity are ensured through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability which are often called upon to ensure rigour within qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). However, this criterion for rigour has been questioned and it has been suggested that the researcher's reflexivity, their insight into their biases, rationale for the decisions made in the research, is critical to the research rigour (Johnson et al., 2020). Johnson and colleagues (2020) have produced a stepwise approach to best practice to ensure academic rigour. Step 1: Identifying a research topic; this is split into two tasks formulating a research question which was discussed earlier and choosing a conceptual framework, understanding the research paradigm. Step two: Qualitative Study design; choosing the appropriate study design to answer the research question which I will go on to discuss later in this chapter. Step Three: Data Analysis; Specific standards of rigour are commonly used to ensure trustworthiness and integrity in data analysis, the current research is being guided by the 6 stages of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022; Campbell et al., 2021) which is discussed in detail later in this chapter. Step four: Drawing Valid conclusions. Qualitative research is to develop the understanding of certain perspectives, therefore the discussions included in the research should include rich interpretations. With a social-constructionist paradigm it is understood that these interpretations come from the researcher's interaction with the data and through the reflexivity it should be clear how the researcher has come to

these interpretations and conclusions. Through this transparency there should be an understanding and transferability to other contexts. Step five: Reporting Research Results; quality qualitative research is able to communicate the findings through clear and concise communication.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis is a qualitative method of analysing and interpreting patterns across a data set, whilst recognising that the researcher is subjective (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis is theoretically flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2022) this means that it can be used with a variety of research paradigms but does require the researcher to have a consistent research paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Using Reflexive thematic analysis with a social constructionist paradigm allows for the voice of the participants to be heard while also giving space for situating their experiences in the wider social context.

When selecting the appropriate method for analysing the data there will always be multiple options that would be "good enough" at answering the research question while all offering different strengths and weaknesses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis allows for both interpretive and descriptive accounts of the data, this means that it is able to describe the semantic meaning of what the participants have said as well as interpretive meaning from the researcher's engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis allows for both inductive and deductive analysis acknowledging that while I may be attempting to come to the research inductively, I have my own experience and assumptions that I cannot help but be engaging with the data through (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As I was looking to explore the experience of the participants, it would appear that IPA would be a good fit for this research, which is a widely used research methodology in psychology qualitative research. For the current research IPA was discounted because IPA is based in a phenomenology, and critical realism (Terry & Hayfield, 2020) therefore it is incompatible with the social constructionist paradigm of this research. IPA also requires a homogenous participant group (Braun & Clarke, 2021a) which this research was not aiming to recruit. As there has been limited research in this area, and there is a cultural taboo in speaking about this topic, it was thought that there may be some difficulty in recruiting participants for this research, therefore the flexibility that reflexive thematic analysis was able to provide in not requiring the participant group to be homogenous, or the data to only be interviews gave the research some flexibility.

Participants

Participants were required to be 16-24 yrs. old as discussed earlier, there has been a change in the accessibility of pornography and because of this, a change in the variability and amount of pornography, therefore this research has focussed on the experience of people under 25. The lower limit of 16 was decided for ethical reasons. The BPS Code of Human Ethics (BPS, 2021) speaks of vulnerable groups and considers the risk and benefits of researching these groups. The BPS (2021) classifies children as under the age of 16, as this research is also looking at sexual behaviour it was decided that this was a risk that could be mitigated by excluding children from the research. In actuality, the participants for the research were nine 19–24-year-olds: eight who identified as male and one who identified as female.

Recruitment

Recruitment was done using social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit and a student forum (Appendix B). There are many ethical considerations when recruiting via online including the policies of the websites, the safety and rights of potential participants and the safety of the researcher (Gelinas et al., 2017; Salmons, 2016). In considering this, different approaches were taken for the different social media platforms, for reddit I set up a new account purely for this research, I contacted the moderators of the subreddits that I deemed appropriate for the research as this is a requirement of subreddits. In doing this some wanted more information including seeing my ethical approval from the university, some asked that I not post, and others just said to post right away. On Facebook and Twitter, I used my existing profile to post the recruitment poster, temporarily making my profile public so people could see and share my post. On Instagram I created a video saying the information from the poster also temporarily making the account public. For all platforms I directed people to my email and asked them to contact me. When potential participants used the direct messaging features of the platform, I would answer their question but direct them to contact me via the email for any more information. All but one of the participants came from reddit with that one seeing my video on Instagram.

Recruitment was difficult and took much longer than I had anticipated. I was worried at times that I would not get enough data to conduct a robust analysis. During this time, I considered alternative data that could be used and submitted a change in ethics to include forum posts made by young people with problematic pornography use, however these were not needed (Appendix A).

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were decided as an appropriate tool to gather the data for the current research due to the openness of the flexible interview protocol allowing curiosity and exploration of the participants' thoughts and ideas (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). With semi-structured interviews there is a focus on the relational aspect of an interview and therefore it is understood that to create quality data, interviews should not be conducted in a question answer format but rather feel like a conversation (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This is congruent with the social constructionist paradigm of the current research (Hassmén et al., 2016) and also the relational values of counselling psychology (Douglas et al., 2016) (Appendix F).

For the current research the interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, which is an appropriate alternative to face-to-face interviews (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). Prior to the interviews the participants were provided with an invite to the Microsoft Teams meeting. Participants were offered the option of a face-to-face interview if preferred which none of the participants took up. Given the sensitive nature of the research, one of the benefits of Microsoft Teams was the option to have the camera off during the interview, which three of the participants chose to do. Microsoft Teams was selected as per the universities data protection policy (UEL, 2020) this ensured that all the interview recordings, and transcripts were able to be automatically stored within the universities secure IT systems.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, using the Microsoft Teams transcription function and then manually checked and corrected individually for accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

When thinking about ethical considerations and how to mitigate them for this research, I was guided by the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). I have previously discussed in this chapter some of the ethical considerations and the steps taken to mitigate them including the age of the participants, the recruitment process and conducting the interviews online.

All the participants provided informed consent. After getting in contact with me via email, I provided the participants with an invitation letter (Appendix C) which explained the purpose of the research and what would be expected of them, this included their right to withdraw from the research up until three weeks post interview. Following this I asked them to sign a consent form (Appendix D) to indicate that they had read and understood the

information provided. I also gave them the opportunity to ask me any questions they might have so I was able to address any concerns they might have.

All the data included in this write up has been anonymised, this means that anything that could be identifying of the participant has been changed including names and places at the stage of transcription. All participants had the anonymity process explained to them and I gave them the opportunity to pick their own pseudonym so that it could be one that they felt was appropriate for them. Some of the participants chose to do this so that if they saw the research published, they would know which quotes were theirs.

When considering the risk factors of this research there are two main areas, the risk to the researcher and the risk to the participant. When considering the personal risk for myself the physical risk was minimal as all the interviews were conducted online. I did have a risk assessment for conducting the interviews in person at the university. The other risk is the emotional risk in talking about what might be a distressing topic. I have been in personal therapy for the duration of this research and have been able to explore anything there.

The other risk is to the participants. As with myself the physical risk was low for the participants as they were in their own homes. With regards to emotional distress, following the interview participants were provided with a debrief sheet (Appendix E) that provided the numbers of organisations to call if they felt this was necessary. Another consideration was the potential implications of speaking about their pornography use for people who were concerned about their use of pornography. It has been shown that talking about pornography does not increase the use of pornography in young people (Doornwaard et al., 2015).

A final ethical consideration was if a participant were to bring up a historical sexual abuse. While it is possible that this may happen in any research, it was a key consideration given the subject matter. It has been shown that people who believe they have a problem with pornography on average began watching pornography younger (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). It has also been shown that the younger somebody began watching pornography the more likely it was to be as a part of sexual abuse (Alexy et al., 2009). While this is correlative information it was important that as the researcher, I was familiar with the BPS Guidance document on the Management of disclosure of non-recent (historic) sexual abuse (The British Psychological Society, 2016). This guidance is however limiting when supporting research psychologists, as a researcher it is likely that you are meeting with your participants once, where the guidance is making the assumption that there will be further sessions where you are able to support the person to disclose themselves, or decide to disclose the abuse yourself

once enough information is gathered. It was important that the participants were aware that I was at this time a researcher and not in the role of a therapist, but as a counselling psychologist we often wear many hats. Therefore, had a disclosure occurred I would have ended the interview at that point and discussed with the participant their option with regards to reporting the abuse. I would have sought more information to establish whether the abuser was still in contact with children and whether the participant would be willing to share their name with me. In the situation that this had occurred I would have myself sought the support of my supervisory team which included an experienced counselling psychologist. In this research none of the participants did disclose so I did not have to follow this guidance or consider whether to include their data.

Analysis

Completed the analysis followed the six stages of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022):

Familiarisation

Familiarisation of the data is the first step in reflexive thematic analysis. This step began when conducting the interviews and continues into transcription (described previously). Following this it is advised by Braun and Clarke (2022) that the researcher read and reread the transcripts making notes about any analytic ideas and insights. Familiarisation is also starting to critically engage with the dataset. This means while becoming intimately familiar with my data I was also trying to keep some distance to be able to remain critical. Note making with familiarisation can take many forms, I started these notes while doing the transcriptions. For some of the interviews I wrote quite a lot of notes, and for others very few. When I felt I was familiar with the data, I drew a familiarisation map (Appendix G) for each participant as well as one for the overall data set to check how well I knew each data set and to also collect my initial ideas.

Coding

Coding in reflexive thematic analysis is a systemic process to explore the diversity and patterning of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This process is a subjective, organic and evolving. Understanding will change through the process, codes will develop and change, due to the insight that develops through the analytic engagement. Coding is a subjective process as it will be shaped by what I am bringing to it, it is a process of meaning making through interpretation, rather than truth-seeking (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The strength of the

coding is established through the depth and rigour of engagement, and therefore there is no right or wrong coding (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

When approaching the data several orientations to the dataset will be established, including whether the coding is inductive or deductive – this does not need to be one or the other and can actually be understood almost as a spectrum. In this research there was an intent to be inductive and be driven by the data however it needs to be acknowledged that this is not wholly possible as I the researcher will already have my own ideas around pornography use from the society that I am in, and also the literature I had read prior to beginning this research project. I, however, did not take an already established theory which I applied to the data during analysis.

Another consideration is the latent and semantic coding. Is what I am looking at the descriptive level (semantic) or looking at what is said implicitly (latent). This does not need to be a 'this or that' and can actually be understood as a spectrum as well, that all codes will sit on the spectrum from semantic (descriptive) to latent (the unsaid).

A code label should not just replicate the data but rather make sense of it, should not be too broad or too specific and contain information about the interpretation.

When coding for this research I systematically went through each interview completing my initial codes, I then did a second round of coding starting with interview number five. While coding is a systematic process, it is slow and messy. This was completed in my living room, occasionally in a garden, or beside the pool between swims. Coding by hand enabled me to be flexible with the location of the coding but also to be messy and make sense of the data in a way that would only make sense to me. My initial codes were in pencil whereas my second codes were in pink pen (Appendix H). Some codes were for three words others for whole paragraphs.

Deciding when to stop coding was difficult, it felt like a safe place in the research; I was actively doing something but did not have to start making decisions around what my interpretation of the data meant in the context of the whole data. To check my codes, I went through my data a third time, writing each code on a sticky note with an identifier so I would be able to find that code in the data. In doing this process I was preparing my codes to start generating initial themes but also able to check that the codes made sense when not in the context of the quotes associated with them.

Generating initial themes

A theme is used to capture a pattern of meaning across the dataset. These are generated by the researcher through engaging with the data, but it is important to note that these are generated by the researcher and do not emerge as described in other qualitative research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is understood that themes are a construction from the researcher's engagement with the data rather than something that is in the data waiting to be discovered. In reflexive thematic analysis a theme has to capture a shared idea that is evidenced in a wide range of the data, this may be obvious and in the semantic content and sometimes less obvious. It is important when generating themes that I was not just creating topic summaries, that the theme is based on a shared meaning rather than just a topic.

Themes are developed from a process of engaging with the codes developed in the previous stage. This process involves clustering potentially connected codes and exploring these initial meaning patterns, I clustered my codes using pieces of A3 paper and sorting the sticky notes with codes into groups of similar codes. When looking for patterns of meaning to remember that this needs to be across the dataset and not just in one data point. Colour coded sticky notes helped with this process as I was able to visually see quickly whether the cluster included multiple participants' data (Appendix I).

When developing themes in reflexive thematic analysis, it is important to remember that themes do not need to capture everything in the dataset, or even all the codes developed in coding. Each theme should have a central organising concept. To not get too attached to the themes throughout analysis themes will develop and change and it is important to hold them tentatively.

In this stage I was very aware of the time that my participants had taken to speak to me. There were stories that I had the privilege to hear that had left their mark on me, at times some of these stories did not fit into any of the initial themes. I stayed in this stage potentially longer than was necessary as I was feeling uncomfortable with some of these stories and ideas not being included in the final stage. However, eventually I was able to come to terms with this as I am doing reflexive thematic analysis, and it was important that I stayed consistent with this and that includes themes being present across the datasets and not just in one interview.

Developing and reviewing themes

In this stage the researcher goes back to the extracts and the entire dataset relating to the codes and review the viability of the clustering and initial themes developed. Through this

I was not only checking the viability of the themes but also developing the richness of them. Ensuring that the narrative that they are developing is consistent with the dataset and with the research question. However, it is important to note that while there can be contradictory themes from the dataset, within a theme there should not be contradictory meanings.

Reflexive thematic analysis is a recursive process so while it is being described here in stages and steps, I was at times going back to the stage of generating themes. Initially for this stage, I went back to my initial clustering and reviewed whether each cluster made sense for the codes involved and thought about how some clusters could be joined as a theme, and others were split into themes that made more sense. I next created a spreadsheet for each initial code and looked for the corresponding section from the transcripts (Appendix J). This enabled me to quickly find the quotes in the write-up stage but also allowed me to check that the different themes made sense when looking at the data next to a theme.

Refining, defining, and naming themes

This phase is further developing the themes, and a more precise refinement of the analysis. In this phase I wrote the themes definitions, a few sentences to capture the meaning of my themes.

The other part in this phase is naming the themes. A good theme name is informative, concise, and catchy. From just the name the reader should understand the essence of the theme which is further explained through the definition. It is important that theme names are not just subject headings but contain the meaning that the theme is demonstrating.

This stage involved me discussing my potential themes with my research supervisor as well as trying to explain them to friends and family. I was testing whether the name of the theme in itself was able to show the meaning behind the theme. In this stage I was still refining the final themes and was able to realise that there were some initial themes that were in fact groupings that made more sense to be divided into more than one theme.

It is important to note that that there are no reliability checks conducted with the themes. This is in line with my research paradigm and the understanding that the themes are developed thorough my interaction with the data and not something to be discovered within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore, the themes that another researcher would develop would also be unique to their interaction with the data.

Writing up

This is what you are reading now! The final stage of reflective thematic analysis is writing it up. Deciding what to include and what not to include in the final piece of work, how to decide which themes will be included and which might be left out. For me one of the biggest decisions has been whether or not to include more themes and spend less time discussing themes or leaving one out to discuss in depth. To me it feels as though all the themes contain important ideas and therefore deserve to be included however it is also important that the themes included are discussed in a clear and robust manner.

One of the other important tasks of this stage is selecting the extracts that best illustrate the different themes. I was aware that many of my participants have asked for me to send them any published versions of the research that are produced following this research, therefore it is important to me that all the participants will see their own words in the final write up somewhere.

Analysis and Discussion

With reflexive thematic analysis it is difficult to differentiate where analysis finishes, and discussion begins (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Analysis of the data is always rooted in the knowledge of the researcher and therefore will be linked with the prior reading. Thus, the decision has been made to integrate the writing of the two sections into one chapter. Following analysis, the following seven themes were constructed from the data: 1. What is problematic use? Too much or too extreme?, 2. Using porn as a coping strategy, 3. The shame/guilt associated with pornography use, 4. The negative effect of problematic pornography use on relationships, 5. Things can get better, 6. People minimising the problem, and 7. A lacking in education. Each is described here in turn with illustrative supporting data.

Theme 1: What is Problematic Pornography Use? Too Much or Too Extreme?

The theme of "What is problematic pornography use? Too much or too extreme?" explores the ideas of what the participants constituted as problematic pornography use for themselves. Participants focussed on two ideas primarily, the amount of time spent watching pornography and/or that the content of the pornography was getting more "extreme" based on their own moral judgement. There was this idea amongst the participants that there was a need for more, and as that need grew, they recognised that they had a problem.

In terms of time spent watching pornography, there were two considerations, time spent during individual session and time spent through the week. Participants reflected that they were aware that their pornography use had developed into a problem because of how long they would watch for while masturbating.

> *"I would always masturbate, but I do. Yeah, something. So, in the beginning I said that it started getting problematic around 18, 19. And I think the most obvious sign was that the sessions. Would just get way longer. Like when I watch it like even now if I realize if I have a bad period then like one session is almost always at least an hour "- Andrew.*

> *"Uh, spent a lot of time looking at it. I I'm not quite sure how much I was looking at when I was quite young, but" – Leo*

> *"Back with those years, I would say that I was consuming every single day." - Gavin*

And that also they were needing pornography every time they masturbated rather than some of the time, as well as the time required increasing.

> *"But I didn't necessarily need that every time, but as time went on, the more depressed I got, it became I needed it every time I needed it every day, and it grew*

from that. Could take an hour or two. It would take three or four hours or a couple 3-hour sessions every day. It would. It would. My weekends would basically disappear."- Adam

"What more did use it more than I had viewed it more than I had before in the past, which was already a lot before, like a daily or nearly daily, and then in college it was probably like. Either for longer occurrences or like multiple times, daily" - Chris

"It was usually just like one time a day. But then I mean, then it was sometimes twice. So perhaps an average of like 10 times a week"- Peter

"By the time I decided to quit, though, just a month or two ago it was 12 to 20 hours a week. It was it was consuming way too much of my time." – Adam

There was also an idea that they were watching it as a part of their regular weekly schedule. That watching pornography was something that they were doing to fill time in their day.

"It it was more of a way to just fill the time like it on a let's say a Sunday instead of worrying about not being out, hanging out with friends I, you know, I could do that and kind of numb myself out. It would give me something to do for half an hour, an hour and then" – Adam

There was also an idea that they were associating not feeling satisfied by the pornography due to them having not spent long enough watching the pornography.

"And there became there came to be a correlation of like a time requirement. Like I kind of began attributing it to this wasn't that great because I didn't build it up for that long. I only did an hour 40 instead of 2 1/2 hours. I I kind of felt my own tolerance of how much I needed to. It's it's almost like." -Adam

And a practice known as edging, prolonged delay of ejaculation, was used by some to intensify this feeling.

". I don't masturbate I will have held it back. Sort of edge. And after boiling point reaches like I cannot like handle. I cannot like get these thoughts out of my head. That's when I masturbate." - Gavin

Many of the participants described their problematic use as being associated with watching too much. However, when it is explored as to what they meant by too much there was no consensus. For some participants there was an idea that individual sessions were too long and for others it was that they were watching too much throughout the week. Even when the surface understanding of too much was the same, the amount of time which they considered too much would not be the same.

In terms of "too extreme" participants had different ideas about what too extreme was. For some it was what they felt others would think of as weird, some it was different fetishes

and for others it was the content becoming more violent. This was explained as the need for variety was when pornography started to become problematic for them.

> *"the basics of addictions, I understand that novelty is a huge part of porn. So, I guess I was just. Using it didn't feel satisfied with normal porn and then want it. Fetish porn too." -Andrew*

> *"I can't remember if the usage was necessarily high, but I was definitely getting into the weirder genres. I guess you could say because that's like a huge thing of porn addiction, like the novelties. So, you go to look up more weird and weird stuff over time." - Andrew*

> *"If I didn't find it so young, and if I didn't come become so desensitized to it so quickly that I had to keep. One upping at each time. So being 19 and having watched for six or seven years. And yeah. Constantly getting more and more, finding something different or stranger. It's yeah." - Leo*

This was explained by Adam as a need to chase for the difference, that he noticed that he would feel the urge to watch more extreme pornography more frequently.

> *"You know that that need to chase the next high or whatever the something stronger. I found that instead of watching a 10% of the time, it became 50% of the time 70% of the time 80." - Adam*

And Leo recognised that he was wanting to view things that were different from the mainstream as he was having to actively seek it out rather than being able to find what he was interested in on the main page of the pornography websites.

> *"I was spending a lot of time searching for things and the stuff that was just on regular. When you open, the main page was like ah boring." - Leo*

And Gavin saw it as always looking for the next fetish or interest, and that these newfound interests would not remain interesting for long.

> *"like how taboo it was getting for me something did not satisfy me. It was always the next edge and edge like going to the next step, going to the next flow... Uh, not so appropriate fetishes, but they were all short lived. That's the thing. I noticed that it was only for a few moments, like one session or two session and that's it" - Gavin*

Harry would explain a similar need for variety but that the need for change could occur in one sitting of watching pornography.

> *"Yes, so I get kind of real. I get really like. I lose interest really quickly on certain things, so whenever I'm like looking for porn, I'll usually go on, oh, at the moment, it's sort of like. Rule 34 website and I'll. Just basically open a bunch of links, just which I found sort of interesting to look at, and whilst I'm masturbating, I'll switch between those tabs, just uhm. And it can't be the same stuff really. I know I said I have a folder on my computer, but I barely use that. I don't know why I have it honestly." -Harry*

There was an idea that violence, and a need for more violence was a development through their problematic pornography use.

> *"Uh, whereas starting to look at stuff that's a bit more like. I dunno violent, I would say. Uh. And then just more bizarre like any." -Leo*

> *"In more recent years, I'd like to say when I was like 19 a year or two ago, I've started watching stuff which like consensual non consent. If you've heard of that, so it's yeah, it's basically just rape play and. It, yeah, it's pretty weird after realizing what I'm doing, but. Uhm? It's well, I think that's the worst it's gotten at some point when I was around 15 or 16. I started watching BDSM which has sort of, I guess, ramped up into that or something like that" - Harry*

Participants expressed concern about their desire for violence in the pornography. One of the concerns about the violent pornography was the consent ambiguity.

> *"I I'd like to say consent play, obviously. I'm well, I hope most of the stuff I've been watching is legal. But yeah, mainly just. It's gotten to basically just rape play and sort of stuff like that. Umm" – Harry*

Another concern was what are people learning about sexual behaviour through viewing this violent pornography, even though they had themselves enjoyed it.

> *"I went through a lot of moods with it, like at first, I was like. Uh oh, this is fun. This is like everyone watches it this that's OK. And then I went to like. How can men watch this? And then I sort of like being terrified of men at one point so that I stopped watching it all together. Because I was scared that all men were watching it." - Sarah*

There was also an idea that not all that was unusual wasn't just more extreme because of taboo or violence but because it stretched into the impossible with animated pornography.

> *"And then after a session or like after a few days of consuming it, I would since switch to 2D and sort of animated and stuff. Then I would switch to other audio then." Gavin*

> *"Yeah, so it used to be mainly videos because I didn't actually know much about animated porn so I would usually go on to your usual video websites like porn hub and Xvideos and just look for videos from there. But once I found out certain like artists through um like media kind of umm because I heard a lot about this guy called Shadman. Or whatever, so I was like, oh, that's kind of interesting and I kind of just started looking into that sort of stuff which they do, mainly pictures there. So, I started taking a lot of these extreme pictures and enjoying them quite a bit. But then after I've well and that kind of led me into. The video, like animated videos. And then I got to the videos and I've kind of." - Harry*

However, even the participants wanted to make clear that there were limits to what they would consider watching even when they were continually looking for more.

"I started watching a lot of like actually animated stuff which. Can well which consists of like stuff like video game characters umm. Non-human stuff not not henti, but uhm. Just like. 3D animations UM." Harry

Many of the participants described their problematic pornography use as being interested in pornography as too extreme. However, as with too much, when the idea of too extreme is explored there is no one idea of what too extreme is. It is important to question what is shaping their ideas of what is too extreme? Are there socially normative discourses that are being self-policed through modern power (Foucault, 1978)?

As with the literature discussed previously, participants are also not in agreement with what is problematic use, there is a vast diversity in the stories of the difficulty. There is some belief that it is about it being more than what they considered normal. What that "more" is could be either or both time and extreme content. The more extreme is consistent with the model proposed by Binnie and Reavey (2019) which explicitly states more extreme but does not qualify what is considered more extreme. It could be argued that the more time is also consistent as the model does include pornography becoming habitual, however that does not account for the participants that were concerned about the length of individual sessions rather than the frequency of them. While these two ideas are related in the sense that both are watching more pornography there are differences. If the model was to include increases in sessions length this would potentially reflect better those who believe they have problematic use.

Another thing that needs to be considered here is the development of the ideas of what it is that to have problematic use. Where does the idea of what is considered normal pornography and what is considered abnormal pornography come from? This will be socially and historically contextual which was acknowledged by one of the participants.

"I would say that right now, back then, when I'm considered interesting fetishes, they were interesting. Right now, they're the norm, right? They're completely. It's insane. Like how the generation has changed" - Gavin

Within the literature reviewed and with the participants of the current study there have been such a vast idea of what is considered problematic use, and often to make up for this by using the thin descriptor of addiction, too much or too extreme to try to create a commonality. It does make visible the potential limitations of a purely quantitative research approach to researching this experience when there is such a diversity in what is considered problematic. While considering how what will be considered problematic use will also always by socially and historically contextual. Perhaps as counselling psychologists it is more important that we focus on the effects of the self-identified problematic use, rather than spending our time

focussed on trying to establish what is problematic use through a structuralist and pathological lens.

Theme 2: Using Porn as a Coping Strategy.

The theme of *"Using porn as a coping strategy"* explores the idea that for some participants their pornography use, while they identified it as problematic, also functioned as a coping strategy for when they were struggling with other areas of their life. The use of pornography was described by participants as a way to manage their different struggles at different times of their life.

> *"Like of porn can be like an unhealthy coping mechanism for like stress or other like things going on." – Chris*

> *"But then overtime you also start to learn more or like understand the addiction or the reasons why you're going towards the usage. Uh, which for me? were mostly either stress or loneliness." - Andrew*

Participants described using pornography as a way to manage the stress they were experiencing in different aspects of their lives. Andrew shared that he had used pornography during exam periods and a way to relieve the stress at the start of the day, in part so that he was able to manage the stress he was experiencing from studying.

> *"During exams that I would like have to watch it in the morning to kind of relieve stress, I guess. Yeah. If I didn't do it in the morning, I wouldn't start studying. So, I would like, ohh, I'll just watch it now and then I'll start studying." – Andrew*

Whereas Adam spoke about using it at the end of the day to remove the stress that he experienced while struggling with a new job in a new location.

> *"And if I if I needed to do it, but I was in a place where I couldn't, or I was trying to stop for a couple days, I might not feel right. But it was the extent to which I was using it to numb myself out or just feel, OK, let's say I have to get rid of stress from work" - Adam*

Finally, Stacey and Chris spoke about using pornography more generally as a way to cope with the general stress of life.

> *"And I dealt with a lot of bullying and the. The year before and the grade school and. Just like I've had had like. A lot of like things going on with like extracurricular stuff. So just like the stress of like time management or just like knowing what to do with my time." - Chris*

> *"It wasn't. I didn't go into it. Wanting. Pleasure. But I went into it because I knew that my brain would shut off and I knew that was not healthy, but.... Your your stress is and*

stuff, so I think it was a mixture of the pleasure and the. Boredom in the and turning off the mind thing.” - Stacey

Similar to this, Harry spoke of pornography as a way to procrastinate from doing things that he felt were important or necessary. That it was a way in which to avoid doing tasks that he was finding stressful.

> *“So, I'm actually planning on getting into university UM this year and I've got like my personal statement to write, and I keep putting it off just well. It helps me procrastinate. I I'd like to say so when I'm not doing anything. I'm like if I'm just bored. And I need to do something instead of doing that thing. I'll just sit down and masturbate and. It got it. Got to a time where I was doing it upwards of eight times a day I I've kind of cut that down to maybe like once or twice umm.”* - Harry

Participants spoke of pornography as a way in which they were managing the stress that they were experiencing in their lives. That pornography was not only something that was a problem in their lies but that it had a more complicated role in their lives.

Participants also spoke about pornography use as a way to manage loneliness or social isolation, that they would watch pornography when they were feeling these ways to combat this feeling. This was spoken about in different ways; one way was as having no friends. For Gavin this was that he had no friends so staying home to watch porn was a better option

> *“I consumed it. I I did not go out much. I always stayed home. A very reclusive hermit lifestyle. I can assure definitely competent to say that I have no friends, no sort of social lifestyle always stayed home late”* – Gavin

Whereas for Adam spoke of having no friends and that he would watch pornography as a way to avoid those feelings of loneliness.

> *“Like I didn't go to either of my proms I was a bit of a loner in school, so. I kind of started using it. Uh, subconsciously. To numb myself out in periods of stress, I guess, or just when I had too much time on my hands.... It it was more of a way to just fill the time like it on a let's say a Sunday instead of worrying about not being out, hanging out with friends. I, you know, I could do that and kind of numb myself out. It would give me something to do for half an hour, an hour and then.”* -Adam

For Leo the loneliness was two-fold; he was at boarding school and reported not having friends there but also because he was at boarding school, he didn't really know anyone who lived near him, so he would watch pornography when he was at home to feel less lonely, and would think about it while at school as something to look forward to.

> *“I didn't really have that many friends that I was at boarding school for a while, so I didn't know that many people that lived around me so.”* – Leo

Peter reported a more general sense of loneliness, and that pornography would help with that feeling.

> *"I mean, it wasn't on my mind 24/7, but it it would come up and I'd feel, yeah, pretty lonely and pretty sad." - Peter*

For other participants a specific period of loneliness and rejection, would lead to them engaging with their problematic pornography use. For Andrew there were two specific stories, the first he experienced a romantic rejection which he found difficult to cope with especially as he was unable to find another date.

> *"But it didn't work out, which is no problem. But then I had trouble finding another date which is kind of triggers that loneliness or that sadness. I think that drove me back towards it." – Andrew*

And the second was a recent period of loneliness where he had recently moved and had not yet made new friends.

> *"And then now the last month and a half, trying to stumbled back in it. I think mostly because of loneliness." – Andrew*

Leo described a similar sense of loneliness when he was in a new environment at university.

> *"When I got to a new environment. Like university and I was just finding it really difficult to interact with people. Uh. Without like the use of alcohol or something. Just very nervous, didn't like talking and then would always end up going like. Alright, well I'm just gonna go back up to my room, lock myself away do this. So, it's yeah. Like I say, I keep using the metaphor for like I was using it as a crutch a lot." – Leo*

As well as following a romantic rejection.

> *"And then when it got to the point where like I was starting to sort of speak to girls, will see girls or anything anytime or something went wrong, I would just go like Oh well, give up. I don't really need it anyway." - Leo*

There was a shared idea that pornography could be at times be used as a way to manage loneliness. This was expressed as long periods of general loneliness as well as the result of particular changes or events. This is another example of pornography not being isolated in the lives of participants but rather interacting with other facets of their lives.

When talking about how pornography worked as a coping strategy one way in which participants spoke was of it having the ability to numb feelings and other participants spoke of it as being a way to escape. Andrew talked about how it had numbed him from his feelings and that that was different to other ways that he has learnt to cope with his feelings since.

> *"I would say that was a worse period, like for example I also had. A lot of anxiety or fear of failure for my exams in uni. That then you just use the addiction to kind of*

numb those feelings, I would say.... Well, for example, soo. Yeah, I think numb is a good word when you use it as an addiction. You just kind of numb those painful feelings... Numbing or making me out of touch with my feelings. The meditation makes me feel in touch with my feelings and makes me more likely to" - Andrew

For Adam this sense of numbing himself was never satisfying the feelings he would have which would lead to him seeking more from the pornography.

"I I really started to become conscious that I was using it to numb myself out and I wouldn't be. Satisfied." - Adam

Some of the participants described it more as a general escape from those feelings, that they were able to feel something else, or be somewhere else.

"Yeah, it's very. It's rare that I'll it's rare that I'll watch it. I wouldn't ever voluntarily seek it out. Maybe I'm. I've been hit by something that's, you know, depressed me a lot or maybe something incredibly sad has happened. Almost like using it as an escape."
– Peter

"About myself, well, I sort of used it as an escape." - Leo

For Stacey she spoke about how she had come to rely on this feeling of escapism as a way to cope, but that she has been trying to find new ways to distract herself when things are difficult.

"It is conditioning like all those years and stuff of and then relying on it as a option to. Escape and stuff. So, we've been working on other ways to distract or or." - Stacey

Pornography for some of the participants had become a way in which they coped with some of the feelings that they were struggling to manage. They described it as numbing themselves or escaping from these feelings. This could be seen as an adaption or a response to what is difficult in their lives.

Participants also spoke about how while pornography did play a role in coping with areas in their lives that were difficult that it was never quite fulfilling the role. For Chris he recognised that pornography as a coping mechanism was never fully up to the job, he wanted it to do, because there were downsides to pornography, and he was struggling to understand why he hadn't chosen other mechanisms he had available to him.

"Super over or the overwhelmingness of it, but still, I still felt guilty for using it. It was a coping mechanism of sorts. When I have had like, easier or like much better ones for me like video games." -Chris

Whereas for other participants they spoke about how the pornography was only a short-term relief. For Stacey, it was a recognition that while the pornography did allow her to escape her problems while she was watching, but as soon as she stopped all her problems would come back.

"It's also a way to like turn off my mind. And because you you lose hours or lose minutes or however you want when you watch it cause you just you, you turn off your mind and then once you stop and then like, everything comes back" - Stacey

For Andrew this was a recognition that it was a short-term fix that created longer term problems and that he needed to find something that was actually dealing with the problems.

"Yeah, yeah. Or that's what I meant with, like understanding the addiction as well. You kinda start to see that in the short term it might give you some release for stress, but in the long term like it's not a good solution. You need to find the healthy options to deal with those problems." – Andrew

Similarly, Leo felt as though as a coping mechanism the pornography had led to some longer-term problems. He felt that he was needing to find a way to cope that would also address these longer-term problems he felt had developed.

"Exacerbating a lot of this stuff like, I don't think many other. Bad coping mechanism just would have given me more body issues or made me more nervous talking to people or... I used it a lot as a coping mechanism or more of a sort of crutch, I would say. And it was always just to like. There. But I realize that it was preventing me from sort of like sorting out a lot of the issues that I was having." - Leo

Participants have acknowledged that their pornography use had played a role in managing the difficulties of their lives but felt that it was not quite fit for what they were needing it to do. Pornography was providing them with some short-term resolution but potentially causing longer term difficulties, either by creating new problems, or through the problems that were already there re-emerging.

When considering the model for problematic pornography use suggested by Binnie and Reavey (2019) and the theme of porn as coping it does partially fit. The model allows for loneliness to be a precipitating factor for problematic use as well as experiential avoidance (discussed more fully later) as a result of the pornography use. However, this does not allow for the nuance and other stressful events that the participants reported to be using pornography to cope.

It is clear through these stories of the participants experiences that problematic pornography use is not an isolated problem. It is connected to the wider contexts of their lives, and therefore it needs to be seen and understood in the wider context of people's lives. These problems can and should be understood as existing withing a wider socio-political and relational context, and therefore our responses as counselling psychologists should also be addressing the problem with the wider context in mind.

ACT would describe this as experiential avoidance. Experiential avoidance is the process that somebody attempts to control their experiences, such as thoughts and feelings, and the events that give rise to them through behaviours of avoidance, which we do to avoid pain or discomfort (Hayes , 2019). It could be understood that the numbing or escape the participants described is a sense of avoidance of the stress or loneliness. ACT would recommend that people who are engaging with experiential avoidance would be better off instead learning strategies of acceptance for these difficult experiences (Hayes , 2019).

Alternatively, narrative therapy may view this as a response and an act of agency (White, 2007). Even though the participants don't like this as a way of coping that there is something that is of value to them that has one: resulted in them taking action, and two: resulted in them as feeling distress about this. A narrative therapist may explore with the person how they have tried to manage their difficulties alone, acknowledging the accessibility of pornography and therefore the availability of it as a strategy. The therapist would then hope to open up conversations of more preferred ways of reaching the value that has been named.

Theme 3: The Shame/Guilt Associated with Watching Pornography.

The theme "The shame/guilt associated with watching pornography" explores ideas around the sense of guilt and shame the participants spoke about in their interviews. One aspect of this shame and guilt was associated with getting caught by either parents or loved ones and their reaction to this. Another aspect was a cultural shame, that there was a knowing that pornography was not accepted by their culture or religion but felt this desire to continue. And finally, there was an aspect of shame and guilt that was associated with the porn industry. The participants spoke of the ethics of pornography production and that there was a sense of guilt associated with the consumption of pornography even with the knowledge of what the pornography industry was like.

The participants spoke about shame and guilt they experienced in relation to getting caught watching pornography. Participants shared memories of their parents finding out that they had been watching pornography from their childhoods and that the reactions they had had felt as though they were telling them that there was something wrong with watching pornography. Either implicitly or explicitly. One example of this is Leo's mum's reaction of yelling at him.

"Uhm? They, so it was my mum... I'm I'm struggling to remember exactly what she said…. It was just along the lines of you shouldn't be watching this like and. Don't let me catch you doing this again… but just yeah, like a very angry shouting like dressing down type of thing... I think it was literally the first time I've ever watched it and I was caught by one of my parents like ah the day after, you know still on the computer or something and so I was very well aware. From the get-go, that it wasn't something you were supposed to be watching. Uh, I'd like I didn't know that this was because I was so young, I shouldn't be watching it. I thought this was just like a blanket, no." – *Leo*

Harry also spoke of a memory of getting caught, and how his mum's reaction was different but still alluded to the fact that pornography was something to be embarrassed of.

"Yeah, so I speak to her about it. She well mainly because she walked in on me when I was like 14. Watching some animated stuff and I feel. Well, yeah, it was kind of. Uhm? Weird, weird experience and we've kind of had like playful back and forward about it like. She's been like, oh, you watch it. Well, she'll make jokes about it. Every once in a while, and I see it's all fine banter and. Uhm? Yeah, that's why I kind of thought to ask her when it came to putting the ad block on or not, ad block I always say ad block." - *Harry*

Andrew however was never directly caught by his parents but rather his brother was, and he in turn was asked about it.

"And my mom found out she confronted my brother, and then she also asked me, like, are you doing this stuff like" – *Andrew*

Participants spoke about the shame and guilt that they have experienced as a result of being caught by their family members. You have to wonder given the reactions of their family members what kind of relationship with pornography that would establish for the participants. There is a possibility that the negative reaction from family members could have established a problematic and shameful relationship with pornography at this early stage.

The participants also spoke about this with the next aspect of guilt and shame. The participants described a sense of cultural shame. Some participants spoke about their shame in relation to other people, knowing that others watch it but also this idea that there is an unsaid reason that we don't speak about it. That maybe other people can tell that they have a problem with it as described by Peter.

"And I guess the reason why I feel kind of awkward and embarrassed is because it's weird and it's embarrassing to say, even though everyone does watch. It's not like you openly walk around, and you tell people... It's almost like subconsciously I just feel like people are judging me or people can just tell. People, treat me differently, and even when it's not even on my mind. You know, let's say I watched, and I think whatever you know, it was only once. I've not really slipped up here. This isn't too

much of a loss. Even then, people still seem to treat me a bit. Differently. I suppose it's a bit of a strange one. A little bit curious." – Peter

And shared by Leo in the feelings he would feel if people found out about his pornography viewing.

"If anyone found out that I was doing that I would be absolutely mortified so." Leo

For Harry it was identified as the shame he experiences if he is to speak with his friends after he has been watching pornography. There was an idea that they would know and that it was something that he shouldn't be doing.

"Well, I I think I don't like speaking to my friends after I feel like I've done something like that, 'cause I feel sort of ashamed."- Harry

Andrew acknowledged this shame and reflected that that was part of why the anonymous space of Reddit was useful but also suggested that perhaps this is further perpetuating the discourse that is feeding into the shame.

"That's the nice thing about Reddit as well, is that it's anonymous, so you can talk about your fetishes, and no one will know it's you. Yeah, but I wouldn't want. Anyone want to know. That I had those. Which definitely adds to the shame. Because. I have talked about. porn addiction or that its problematic for me to people in real life. Uh. But yeah, you like I am careful with what I say and what I don't say for sure." – Andrew

This could potentially be also what is being suggested by Leo and Adam when they speak about how they understand that there is a taboo but also that pornography is being viewed by so many and yet we cannot speak about it.

"It is just a huge bad thing for people because it's yeah because it's so taboo and because it's so hidden yet everywhere." – Leo

"But it was still kind of we understood that it was kind of frowned upon. It's not something you talk about openly, but." – Adam

When thinking about discourses that are feeding the shame associated with pornography use, we can question where people learnt these discourses. Some of the participants spoke about times in which they have clear memories of experiencing an anti-pornography discourse. Adam recalled seeing the disgust on his friends face when he spoke about looking forward to viewing pornography.

"Well, I I guess there's two things I I kind of began to notice that if I mentioned then I would like we were talking with, if I was talking with friends, I would have some friends that might grimace at the idea that I was looking forward to watching porn later on or something along those lines" – Adam

Whereas Peter had a recollection of reading about others feeling of guilt associated with pornography and not identifying with it. However, later when he was watching pornography, he recognised a change in how he spoke to himself about the pornography, and it became more shameful.

> *"I'm just I need to extend my thanks to Reddit actually for a for basically saving me. But someone on Reddit commented saying but yeah, then you feel guilty afterwards and thought what on Earth are you on about? Feel guilty, guilty about what? And then and then I was, and I did. I felt really sort of bad. I thought my God you are so you are disgusting you're just you're greedy you go, and you watch these videos every day and then."* – Peter

Participants were experiencing guilt and shame for their pornography use, which has developed through the social discourses about pornography. For some this was explicit, and they had clear memories of where these feelings had developed, for others there was a more implicit development of this shame and guilt. That it was through subtle social cues and noticing what is and isn't spoken about. Participants also wondered if this is perpetuating the problem, that the inability to speak openly about pornography use is further developing shame and creating further problems.

Another aspect of shame for some there was a link to identity, an idea about the views you are supposed to have if you hold certain identities. For Stacey starting to explore feminism and what it means to be a feminist led her to believe she needed to be anti-porn and therefore feeling shame when she would watch pornography.

> *"Like when I was like 16 or 17, I really got into feminism and stuff and. And so, I was really drawn to radical feminism because if there's a there's strong anti porn thing and I don't know if like that was…So I so I knew from reading and from what I was watching that it was not a good like."* – Stacey

Another common source of shame for participants was a sense that their pornography use was not compatible with their religious beliefs. Gavin spoke about how his pornography use was taboo in his culture because of religious beliefs. He spoke about the conservative environment for interpersonal relationships, and therefore the shame he experiences for being unable to live up to these values.

> *"To me, every point itself is something of a considered a taboo because of deeper my personal beliefs and stuff. The environment that I live in…I would say that that's very simple, sort of religious mindset…. Don't try to like overtly be friendly with women don't go and jump them around. Don't go like hug them too much, you know inappropriately that also about saying be sort of mindful of that you quote adults now. So that's sort of ideas that you have you harbour. So compared to that when you see something in the screen to individuals having lavishly doing activities together and*

sort of creates a drastic comparison, I would say that it's sort of getting the feeling of." – Gavin

Whereas Mark spoke about how he found it difficult and had researched pornography use. That he understood that it was immoral according to his religion but also questioned this as through his research he had learnt that there had always been versions of pornography.

"I don't know how I feel sometimes I contradict myself. But it's like life is too short. It might not be here tomorrow. And the Sunshine's all day every day. And if you Google it, the Romans and porn that that the Egyptians and all that. I mean there. Wow. They've been doing the system again in time and sometime man. Puts his own twist of stuff on it, and like you know, saying like. I mean, it's bad. Like the cover of your body. That's how God made us. I'm, like, some people might think it's taboo, but is it really? You're still saying like, that's my question about it, you know?" – Mark

Participants identity, and what it means to be a part of a particular group played a role in the shame and guilt that participants experienced. There could be incongruence with their behaviour of watching pornography and what it means to be a certain type of person, leading to guilt, shame and confusion.

Another aspect participants also spoke about was understanding the pornography industry is not good for those who work for it. There was discussion about some of the guilt that they experience due to this. One aspect of this industry related guilt was knowing that to some extent that they were getting pleasure from the objectification and exploitation of other people felt uncomfortable for the participants.

"And I always felt guilty while doing it and after doing it not out of like, oh, you shouldn't. Like masturbate, but just because I knew how awful the industry is… So, I knew from reading and from what I was watching that it was not a good like overall, yes, there are women who like it or or are are happy in their jobs. But I knew that there were. A lot of women who are not being treated well." – Stacey

"When I started realizing how much content I might have been watching of people that were being trafficked or were potentially underage, I I don't know if you're aware of this. A few years ago, 2-3 years ago, a lot of sites … had to get rid of substantial portions of their content because it came out that a girl was like a year or two underage and no one had any way of knowing cause one or two years difference, often physically, it's extremely difficult to tell when the video quality isn't that good. I kind of became disgusted in that."-Adam

"Because I I mean, I know now as well that most of the people who are in these videos, they were coerced into it. And there's very few people who are actually willing and happy to be there and have themselves recorded and." – Peter

And there was this idea that if they had known this sooner or been educated about the pornography industry, they would potentially have viewed less pornography earlier.

"That would have been one thing the other thing that probably would have gotten me to watch less or be careful about what I was watching was finding out all the ethics behind it. The fact that how the women are treated, the fact that what may appear consensual in a video might not actually be, it's just being faked, that I've become much more aware of in time. I've heard a lot of other porn addicts talk about this, that would have gotten me to watch less or be more careful about it, but it wouldn't have gotten me to stop out. Right" – Adam

For some this guilt has created a sense of social justice and a desire to make a difference though trying to make others aware of this problem with the industry. For Adam this was in a very individual sense, in what small ways is he able to make a difference.

"I read somewhere I was listening to a documentary over the weekend where they said this issue of human trafficking for let's say prostitution. It's never going to go away unless you get rid of horny men. I started realizing that am I part of this problem? Maybe if I quit and convince other people to quit or watch less or be more aware of the ethics of it or the immorality of it behind the scenes. Some changes could be made, but I became kind of disgusted with myself... I was. I was. It was almost like I was simultaneously the part of the problem and the victim of it." – Adam

Whereas, for Chris this was from a formal and organisational position that he is trying to support changes from a position of policy.

"There's a. Website called Fight the new drug, which is against pornography. It's like how many years ago, cigarette smoking was like there were commercials for it like it was recommended by doctors. But now there's bigger campaigns against cigarette smoking, trying to end it. So, I feel like. Helping the discussion be made well, you know, start with campaigns against it. That won't be like disregarded or like shut down… I mean, I knew like it wasn't super ethical but still like contributed to it by giving it my time and just learning about how. Like a lot of human trafficking and like drug related stuff is in it, it's very. Just violence and. fake and super exploitive." – Chris

Some participants felt that there was no ethical way to create pornography. For some that was from the core of what pornography is, using sex as an industry in any way is exploitative.

"*I don't think there is any ethical way to create porn. I think that..., sex is a natural part of life. And it's how, like other people are or like how our ecosystem is sustained for like humans and animals. But it's not something to be. Exploited. It's a very vulnerable like state. And one you want to feel safe, and you know that being like."* - Chris

Whereas for others it was much more systemic problem based that, while perhaps theoretically there could be in reality there will never be ethical pornography.

"It's all adults, all consensual, no kids watching. It would still have problems, and the main problems I see. Or that, uh, like the racism in it. And… the. Violence and stuff, but I don't know how you would control that or make that better" – Stacey

Whereas others believed why most of the pornography is made unethically it is possible for it to be made in an ethical way.

> *"And the really only ethical porn is when the women run the the actual actresses run their own production companies." – Adam*

The final aspect of guilt and shame associated with the pornography industry was the way in which the industry takes advantage of and manipulates the viewers.

> *"Is it sort of like this on what an addiction addict says like this is inevitable. This is losing. And sort of transpires from that right now content, I would say the general content over the pornography content has become more depraved, more insane, like the production value it is…Sort of get out of it really is defined in such a way so that it's created in such a way to make someone be addicted to. That's the best idea. Explain." – Gavin*

Participants experienced guilt and shame from the knowledge that the pornography industry is potentially exploiting the actors as well as them the viewers. This guilt shows that the experience of guilt associated with their pornography use is not an individual experience but rather a relational experience.

The guilt and shame associated with pornography use was multifaceted for the participants, it was directly relational, perceived relational and distance a theoretical relational. This shows that for the participants the problem isn't just pornography but rather links the problem with a moral framework which they hold as important.

The shame and guilt experienced could be understood within the self-hatred outcome of problematic pornography use from Binnie and Reavey (2019) Model. This however feels as though it is an oversimplification of the experience of the shame and guilt they were experiencing.

Another way in which the shame and guilt could be understood is through discourse. When working with somebody who presents with this experience, it may be useful to explore and develop an understanding of the discourse and where this discourse has been developed following the principles of narrative therapy (White, 2007). This could be further explored through the landscape of identity, which supports the person to think about the type of person they want to be and how they will be able to live a life that is closer to that person.

As the shame and guilt experienced appears to be significant for the participants, as well as narrative therapy there are other ways in which people who present with a similar difficulty could be supported. If you were thinking through an ACT lens it would consider thinking about how to support the person to accept the feelings of guilt as well as what that

shows is important to them and how they can take values-based action towards that (Hayes , 2019). Another area which maybe be useful is compassion focused therapy (CFT) which supports people to develop self-compassion to support the clients to make sense of the shame and guilt they experience (Gilbert, 2010).

Theme 4: The Negative Effect of Problematic Pornography Use on Relationships

The theme "The negative effect of problematic pornography use on relationships" explores the ideas around how the participants have felt their problematic use has affected relationships. One aspect of this is in how the pornography has affected their relationships with those whom they don't have a sexual relationship. Another aspect is how the use has affected them within romantic/ sexual relationships both physically and emotionally. The final aspect is how the participants felt the pornography use has affected their ability to begin a romantic relationship.

In terms of affecting their relationships with people whom they do not have a sexual relationship, participants reported that they had noticed that they would sexualise friends and strangers in their minds. As shown by Chris, explaining that the way he thinks about strangers that he meets is a violation.

> *"It had, like, negatively affected my brain to like being objectifying towards random strangers on the street instead of just thinking of them as random strangers. So, like that. My eyes would be drawn to like. You know their private parts and this. You know like. Being very violative with my eyes" - Chris*

Harry spoke of how his sexualising has affected a friendship as he was no longer able to see her as his friend but rather purely as somebody, he could have sex with. He expressed how this was not the type of person that he wanted to be.

> *"Yes, so I have like some friends I talk to, uh, who are female and… one of them, a few months ago actually was single and immediately I feel like I just started turning like more towards the oh do you wanna go out and whatnot? And I. I don't know if that's just 'cause I'm a bad friend or 'cause we've been friends for like 5 years, so it felt really weird for me to just start thinking about only having sex and whatnot with them, which.... I guess so yeah, I did have feelings for her at one point, which was fair enough. I kind of stood off 'cause obviously she was in a relationship and at some point, we made it clear that it was kind of just … a friendship and then once like she turned single, I've started like speaking to her like every day and it just became like my sole focus, …, having quite a. Vivid fantasies … obviously, nothing I would actually follow up on, but I did feel myself wanting to ask her if she would go out with me and what not which I wouldn't do usually, or I wouldn't think of myself the kind of person to do that." - Harry*

Mark however explained it as due to the pornography that they had consumed that they no longer had control of how they responded to women.

> *"Look like women, like they are so powerful. Like they don't understand. And you know, I'm like, I don't understand either. It's like the way their hair smells when I do boys like things they wear like. You know. Looks like. Or the baffle. Bad like. your voice, like an asset, that's like I got goosebumps, you know? And like."* - Mark

That this lack of ability to control how they thought about strangers and friends was leading to them making assumptions about people. This was affecting their ability to develop relationships, even distant relationships such as colleagues as Adam explains that he was only seeing his female colleagues as potential sexual partners but because of his lack of experience in speaking to women he was certain he would be rejected, causing him to have automatic negative feelings towards them.

> *"So, I hadn't one on one spoken with women before, and it was a, it was starting to affect my relationships with my female co-workers. Like I said, this was after I graduated college to the point where I would find myself. Like hating them for being part of a group that would reject me. And I would have to remind myself, it's like she did nothing wrong. She's just asking you if you can look over her code and actually, you're the one asking her for help. It never became strong, but it kind of became a voice in the back of my mind of insecurity, which I hadn't really had before I, but it was something. It was like a it was something defensive. It was a defence mechanism. It was almost like self-sabotaging, like I wanted to reject."* – Adam

Participants spoke about their pornography use as leading to hyper-sexualising thoughts about strangers, friends and colleagues. They felt as though this was creating difficulty in developing and maintaining platonic relationships with these people and were also aware that this was not the type of person that they wanted to be. These thoughts could be considered intrusive thoughts (Bream, Challacombe, Palmer, & Salkovskis, 2017), and therefore treatment with psychoeducation for intrusive thoughts might be considered.

In terms of romantic and/or sexual relationships participants spoke about how their pornography use had affected these relationships. This was in regard to the emotional intimacy, physical ability, and consent. As Chris put it

> *"Yep, pornography kills love and intimacy."* - Chris

When thinking about emotional intimacy, participants spoke about how they would just be seeking sexual pleasure; that because of pornography they had begun to see a sexual connection as the equivalent to an emotional connection. This is described by Harry with regards to an ex-partner.

"I think it kind of got to a point where when I was in that relationship that I just sort of started seeking out more and more just sex like before the whole not watching that new kind of porn we were hanging out and having a lot of fun just being with each other. But after I started watching more and more porn, I started trying to like ask her for sex, which I found kind of, it made me feel quite rude ... 'cause when we would hang out that would kind of be the only thing on my mind. Obviously, I knew that I probably wouldn't get much out of it, but I think it was sort of the emotional connection whilst having sex" - Harry

Harry was seeking more and more sex from his partner which he associated with also watching more and more pornography. He also felt as though the emotional connection was there but that it was unrealistic that he could expect his partner to have more and more sex with him so that he was able to feel that connection.

Participants spoke about how pornography had affected their ability to sustain arousal during sexual intimacy. This was attributed to two main things, how pornography had made them view themselves and sex and a desensitisation to sexual stimulus. Harry spoke about the embarrassment of not being able to maintain an erection while being younger.

"Uhm? Obviously, I do like the intimacy of having sex, but it's. Uhm? It's also kind of embarrassing when. I can't keep it up at the age of 20, so yeah." – Harry

Adam also spoke about not being able to also maintain an erection. He attributed this to pornography desensitizing him to sexual stimuli. He felt that this was not due to the attractiveness of his partner but that he required different stimuli to be able to be aroused.

"The inability to perform sexually consistently has really been messing with me. I think a lot of it is, I'm desensitized. It's really messing with me that sometimes I'll be with my girlfriend and, even though she's beautiful, I'm not finding her physically attractive enough in the moment to turn me on. I need some kind of mental stimulus.... to be involved with my girlfriend, I was thinking about gay or trans porn that I've watched, which was bizarre. Not that I found her unattractive" - Adam

Participants also spoke about how this difficulty to maintain an erection could affect their partners. That most people assume that the person they are with will blame them for not being able to maintain arousal but in reality, often the partner will blame themselves and wonder if they are not enough.

"Before they have much experience with women, they kind of have this idea of if you can't perform the woman's going to yell at you, she's going to tell you how little of a man you are. I found that to be quite the opposite, as a lot of porn addicts have, the women actually take it very personally. It doesn't matter how beautiful they are, they will feel like the ugliest woman because of their inability to attract men or be attractive to the man that that they are in a relationship with or something along those lines." - Adam

This experience could lead to a pressure on partners to feel as though they need to be as arousing as the pornography, and therefore to behave in the ways in which the actors do in pornography.

> *"I don't know. I just feel like there's also a lot of pressure like on girlfriends. That you have to fulfil that your boyfriend's fantasies or desires... And I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong, but I feel like there's more like. Of course, there was always pressure like but there's more. Like in the in society or on Reddit or Twitter and stuff that like. Yeah, you have to be open minded. Why can't you try what he wants you to do? Or if you don't do it with him, he'll find someone who does like. Because I think it kind of places it on a pedestal now and it's like you have to. It's like important. It's more important than it used to be."* - Stacey

When considering consent, participants spoke about the assumptions that were made during a sexual encounter that was based on the behaviours of those within the pornography.

> *"I no not for me, but like a guy went for my neck and I know that a lot of my friends have had that happen to them... and he hadn't asked before he had done it. And he was like, well, they don't ask in there. And you already agreed to have sex with me. So, I thought you would do anything. "- Stacey*

And Leo spoke about a performance anxiety for himself, and therefore not being able to maintain sexual relationships.

> *"So yeah, I think it's impacted my sexual relationships negatively in that way. Uh, it's given me body anxiety, social anxiety, performance anxiety. Uh. And just a lot of the wrong ideas about what sex is and how it should be. Uhm? So yes, would short. Short answer yes."* - Leo

He also spoke about specific example of how it had created an expectation from sexual relationships that was not accurate.

> *"Uh, when I first when I had my first girlfriend at 16, I would look in the mirror and I was not one of the guys on screen by a long shot. Uh, which just further does your anxiety. And then when you have sex for the first time and the girls not reacting like the women on screen, you're like Oh well, I'm shit at this, and I should be embarrassed."* - Leo

Leo explained that he had an unrealistic expectation of what sex would be because of pornography. This meant when it was not what he expected it to be, and his partner was not reacting the way he expected them to, he assumed that this was because of his own in inadequacy.

When considering developing new romantic relationships the participants spoke about an anxiety for pursuing them. This could be because of the discussed ability to maintain arousal, fear of judgement or fear of how the new partner may behaviour. There was also an

idea that perhaps engaging in relationships that were not sexual would be better to prevent the hyper-sexualising or to avoid the feelings of anxiety. Finally, there was an idea that they were not pursuing a relationship because there was no need to as you would never be able to find a partner that is as fulfilling sexually as pornography is.

Harry spoke about feeling as though his pornography use is baggage that he would have to explain to a new partner, and that this might be a barrier to developing a romantic relationship.

> *"But with any new person, I don't think I, could deal with the fact that I have that issue. Because it would be a lot to bring up and also just it, to me it feels like baggage at this point. Like people have baggage from another relationship. I have baggage from porn use, which basically stops me from enjoying certain parts of a relationship, which makes me sometimes not"* – Harry

Adam felt that even though he is more confident in himself physically than he used to be, because he has been going to the gym, why would he pursue a relationship or a sexual encounter if he would not be able to provide the person with the sexual relationship that the partner would be expecting.

> *"I started having this idea in my head. I was becoming comfortable with my body. I was in better shape, but it really started messing with my own confidence that OK, I could have almost every beautiful woman that I wanted, but then I could take them home and I can't do anything. So, there's no point."* - Adam

For Andrew he felt that because he would be unable to interact or perform like the actor in pornography that he is not capable of pursuing the romantic relationship.

> *"Like, I guess you just have a certain belief which would then be I'm not super capable of talking to women or dating women. It's not like that belief is like 100% ingrained in my mind or it's not like I actually think that I would never find a partner or anything. But there's just like, I guess an insecurity, you could call it."* - Andrew

Whereas for Stacey there was a fear of the expectation of how the potential partner might behave during a sexual encounter. That because of what she had seen in the pornography she had watched as well as experience she and her friends had had, that she felt that there was a risk about how the partner might behave. This fear had made pursuing a new romantic relationship difficult.

> *"And I want to date again and that's kind of a thing. To it's like you don't know what they've been watching and what they think they can do without asking. Cause yeah, the choking thing really scares me."* - Stacey

The final idea was that a sexual relationship was not worth pursuing. This was for two reasons, that they were better off in a no sexual relationship as they would be unable to provide the sexual relationship the other would desire. As discussed by Gavin and Harry.

"I'd rather be satisfied with the celibate lifestyle, I'd rather, not go into a relationship it's such a bore. Lots of insecurities and lots of other stuff." - Gavin

"The thing is, I'm kind of looking for relationship where there isn't any sex 'cause I feel a bit self-conscious about the fact that I might not be able to get it up or might not be able to enjoy sex. So, I'm kinda trying to look for look for something which. Doesn't really involve that." - Harry

Or that pursuing a sexual relationship was futile as it was not possible for the relationship to be as sexually fulfilling as pornography had been.

"So, I mean, kind of why would you pursue real people 'cause real people have got imperfections, I mean nobody's perfect. I mean look at me 'cause, all this rubbish there... That I wouldn't bother pursuing people in real life because there was no point you didn't have to because we real people. Sure. Somebody else's recorded them, but they just sat behind it. They sat behind the screen. And you can just look at them there instead." - Peter

"Well, I haven't had romantic relationships during the times that my porn use was bad, but I would say it affected it in the sense that... you have way less motivation to go out there and seek a partner or go dating, which is something that I've noticed a lot in the last year since I've had periods that have? "- Andrew

When considering the difficulties described by participants in relation to relationships there are many things to take into account. As counselling psychologists, it is important that we remember that the people we work with do not exist in isolation. That their current, past and future partners are also present in this problem. When thinking about how we would approach this when somebody presents with these difficulties it is important that we think about what the problem they are describing is. Is it an intrusive thought, is it a physical difficulty or is it a relational difficulty. When working with all these problems there will be some similarities in the approaches and potentially some differences.

One approach could potentially be some psychoeducation. There appears to be two particular aspects in which psychoeducation might be useful. The first is erectile dysfunction, and whether pornography use can result in erectile dysfunction. There is some evidence that 25% of young people experience erectile dysfunction (Capogrosso et al., 2013). It is possible that the erectile dysfunction that they are experiencing is because they are a part of this 25% or that it is the result of a refractory period following masturbation (Ley et al., 2014). The other aspect is intrusive thoughts, particularly those in relation to sexualising people, but also intrusive thoughts about their ability to have a sexual relationship. It may be useful for people

with these difficulties to have some psychoeducation around what an intrusive thought is and how thinking works (Bream, Challacombe, Palmer, & Salkovskis, 2017).

Another approach could be in relation to the difficulties within existing relationships. It could be useful to start with an understanding that the problems are relational and not problems that lie within people. There is also some evidence that pornography use does affect the sexual competence in men and less sexual satisfaction for female partners (Sommet & Berent, 2022). It could be useful to explore the dominant ideas around what relationships are supposed to be, one way to do this would be aligned with narrative therapy and discourse (White, 2007). Working with the relationship rather than the individual there could be work to create a shared understanding of pornography within the relationship (Denborough, 2008).

Finally, we can consider the development of a relationship. Both ACT and Narrative therapy would value exploring with the individual why a relationship is important to them (Hayes , 2019; White, 2007). With an understanding of why a relationship is important to them could lead to a further understanding of what type of relationship they would like to have. This would likely involve the previously discussed dominant ideas of what relationships are supposed to be.

Theme 5: Things Can Get Better

The theme *"things can get better"* explores the ideas of what it means to be doing better and how that might be or has been achieved. One aspect explores the ideas of what "better" is; does it have to mean total abstinence from pornography or is there an alternative "better". Another aspect explores what support has looked like for the participants, and whether this has been family, friends, professionals and strangers. And finally, it explores what has helped? What have the participants done/changed that has made them feel as though they are or are heading towards "better". Throughout the interviews, although there was an identifying of 'I have/had a problem with pornography' there was also a sense of hope, for themselves and for others. That there was an alternative to their problematic pornography use. This was seen through the stories they told of others having successfully moved on past their own problematic use.

When considering what it meant to be "better" and no longer have problematic use there was two considerations. There was no longer using pornography at all and total abstinence being the way to know that things are better. As explained by Andrew.

"Yeah. Well, there's also like two different philosophies, I guess around quitting. One of them is that. You can masturbate. Just don't watch any visual stuff. Just masturbate your imagination. The other one is like, don't masturbate at all." - Andrew

Leo describes his abstinence from pornography as changing not only this behaviour but also him feeling better in general.

"So, I was like alright. I personally believe that this is something that's very bad for me and I'm going stopped doing it to see if that makes me feel better. And there would be periods where I stopped for. Two weeks a month up to maybe like 3 months and I'd be like oh I feel a lot better when I don't do this" - Leo

Adam also spoke about his abstinence and how being able to stop in the short term was giving him hope about what his life could look like.

"Umm, but I'm almost two months in I'm going strong. I'm you know, I think I'll be able to quit this long term." - Adam

And Peter spoke about how by no longer viewing pornography, while he was still masturbating, it was less frequent and giving him more time for other things.

"And I mean now I suppose. I mean, I do masturbate, but it is without porn and it's not anywhere near the frequency that it used to be at". - Peter

Whereas, for other participants there was an idea that total abstinence from pornography was not the goal, that to be able to manage and reduce amount would be enough. This management could be through reduction or through control of the type of pornography for example only watching and looking at animated pornography. Gavin felt that it would be impossible for him to just decide to never watch pornography again but that he would reduce his daily consumption so that it was not taking up as much of his time.

"The yeah, I do. I mean, I do not have much to do, but the only things that I can do is just self-help try to reduce consumptions of the daily. One thing that I take is just not to go full[cold] turkey, not to like completely ban it to control myself maybe." – Gavin

Harry explained that when he had been in a relationship, he had tried to quit all pornography but that had been too difficult so instead he allowed himself only the animated pornography. This related to the sexual difficulties that he experienced within the relationship. When the pornography he was watching was made with human actors he felt that he experienced more of the sexual difficulties described in the previous theme. Whereas, when that pornography was clearly not real, he found that it had less of an effect.

"Yes, and I wanted to kind of get my brain a bit more used to seeing. Like UM. Seeing like actual women, obviously I wanted to umm well. I tried to do the quitting of just straight up quitting all of the porn um of the animator kind. When I was in that relationship, but I found it way too difficult, so I kind of chosen alternative "- Harry

There was also a sense that problematic pornography use will always be there. Andrew described it as something that he would learn to live with and cope with because sexuality will always be a part of his life.

> *"I just wanted to feel like I'm learning to live with it. Like, of course, sexual thoughts and desires are always going to be a part of life, especially as a young guy". -* Andrew

When considering what it means for things to be better, it needs to be understood how the participants thought this was possible, or how they had managed it. Participants spoke of social support playing a crucial role in this, whether this social support was online and anonymous or in the real world and with people they know. Chris had found this support via an organised 12 step program that was facilitated online.

> *"Hearing people's stories and how they overcome their struggles is motivating in a sense, and the more I attend, the more I like want to participate and you know I've done, like a lot of participating in discussions and like sharing every week and like now I've more recently got the books that they read from, so I'll be able to read along and like read out loud. When the time is right"* – Chris

He explained that hearing other people's stories was both motivating and provided hope that it was possible for him to experience life without pornography as well. Similarly, Leo described using sub-Reddits as a support platform. He found comfort in seeing how many other people were or had experienced a similar difficulty to what he was experiencing.

> *"For me, I know that it's not that way because I've seen what there's 100,000 people on the Reddit sub all saying, like I really don't want to be doing this. But they're still there week after week, and like I keep doing it, I keep doing it. I don't want to be doing it so. You can see that these guys aren't choosing to do it."* - Leo

Peter also found sub-Reddits to be helpful in him finding hope. He particularly found stories of what people have shared that have become possible for them to be helpful in creating hope that it might also be possible for him, even if he was initially sceptical of the possibility, however he felt it was impossible to ignore the sheer number of success stories. For him it created a sense that there was at least no harm in trying to do something about his pornography use.

> *"And seeing that some of these people that they have seen online having success in managing their pornography use has given some hope…, I found the sub-Reddit. I started browsing through it and I started seeing all these success stories and all these people saying, gosh, you know, I'm happy and hey, I can go out and talk to people now and ohh I've, you know, I've noticed interest from women. I thought that's ridiculous. It just. I thought this sounds like nonsense to me. And but I mean, I scrolled further and further and further. And when you've seen 300 posts saying the*

same thing. And then you say, OK, fine, I'll add it so that that way next time I open the app, it's not just gonna be the stuff that I normally see, but it'll also be these posts as well. And then I'll see. Ohh, I hit 90 days. I feel like a new man, and I think. I suppose there's nothing really stopping me from at least giving it a go if it doesn't work, I can always go back to. Go back to watching and then I mean like I say, I made two days and then it became three days and then. And then perhaps a week." – Peter

Adam has also found the sub-Reddits to be helpful, for him he found being active and either asking for support or providing support to be the benefit of this.

"I have been using Reddit for some help I've been part of one of the… I specifically, I've been part of porn free now. I've been pretty active on there, spending maybe an hour a day on there, depending on how much support I need or even just helping other people out". -Adam

Other participants spoke about seeing celebrities speak about their difficulties with pornography had been helpful and made them feel less alone. For example, Andrew speaking about Terry Crews.

"No, OK, like a famous actor, and he's probably one of the only like, famous people to openly talk about porn addiction. he has a wife and kids, and he actually came open about his porn addiction and talked about it. And he also mentions it like when you he mentions that when he told his wife, like, the shame just fell off his shoulders and his wife was supportive about it. And I do kind of feel the same." - Andrew

Or Stacey speaking about Billie Eilish.

"It's kind of like what Billie Eilish said. If you read her interview a while ago, did you read her interview like a few months ago?... You should because she talks about her porn use, and it was it. Her story was kind of like exactly like my I was like." - Stacey

For some participants they described receiving social support from people who they knew in real life. Andrew had found support in sharing with some friends. He had found the experience e of sharing with particular friends as helpful and supportive.

"In general, positive experience with sharing with friends. Uh like I shared it with two female friends. They were both supportive." – Andrew

For Leo he described feeling supported by a friend that he confided in who shared that he had a similar experience. He then felt able to share and discuss some of the challenges he was experiencing with this friend.

"So, there's I only have one other friend who I've been friends with him since we were 15 and we spoke about this, and he's been trying to stop watching for longer than I have. Uh, he's quite helpful in helping me to stop. So, I've spoken quite extensively about it with him, which." - Leo

Some of the participants had described finding support from professionals, or people who they considered experts. Chris had sought support from a therapist, he did however feel that for a therapist to understand and be helpful that they would be required to have their own experience to relate to.

"I've been seeing the same one for since about February, I believe… And he's been very helpful. He's, you know, he has been six years sober from doing pornography and, you know, has a wife and children and this. So, it's like motivating to see that side of it too." – Chris

And Peter had felt that the experts were the people that participated in the sub-Reddits who had been around for a long time, and that they had found a way to manage their own pornography use for particularly long periods.

"So, I guess I would consider my professional help the veterans in this sub-Reddit to have been there for 1000 days. They've been there and done that. And there's a couple of forums. I guess that opened up as early as 2008 and if, if I really wanted professional help, I would go to them and I would ask them" – Peter

Participants also described a form of social support from being able to support other people who are experiencing similar difficulties. For Leo he recognised that often it was easier to help and support others than it was to help yourself.

"And when I am on Reddit, talking to other people, I find it so much easier to offer advice to other people. Then I do to look at myself and look at how I can solve what I'm doing. Like yeah, it's so much easier to do it for other people than it is to do it for yourself." – Leo

And it gives him a sense achievement and keeps him motivated knowing that there might be people who are doing better because of a conversation that he had with them.

"I thought there might very well be a few people out there who are doing a lot better now, like I am because of me, and that was only possible because others helped me to at the start because I feel I feel without that forum, I would still be, I would still be watching. I wouldn't have seen your post, for example." - Leo

For Chris there is a sense of duty to spread awareness to try to prevent others from experiencing, not just for them but for their loved ones as well.

"I do want to like spread awareness and stop it as or just like spread awareness so like and not have people be in the same boat or like guide them out of it because of like how devastating it can be for you know your partner, your family, your friends yourself." - Chris

Along with the support, the participants spoke about what else has helped or what they believe may help them. This included the addressing the shame they experience related

to their pornography, and some of the practical interventions they had tried. Adam felt as though it was important to let go of the shame.

> *"So, I think letting go of that shame and trying to move on is very important if you want to, you know, move on from the addiction." – Adam*

And Andrew explained that the sharing and talking was one way in which it was possible to reduce that shame.

> *"Bringing down the shame or removing the shame if you talk to someone about it, of course not in full detail. Like I said, I'm careful about what I say, but it does remove part of the shame." - Andrew*

The first of the practical interventions focussed on how to prevent yourself from viewing pornography in the first place. Harry explained that there was an app that could be downloaded on to your phone which prevented you from accessing any of the pornography sites, he had found that this was partially successful.

> *"I got an ad block or not on ad blocker, but a blocker put on my phone so I couldn't actually access any of it and that kind of stopped me and I did stop thinking about it for a while" – Harry*

Peter also had a similar blocker app that he had on his phone and his laptop. He had found that this had helped however he had also found that he would just go around this app so he would also create physical blocks such as keeping his computer away from him, disconnecting it from the internet. Peter was creating delays in his access to pornography, this could be understood as creating away for it to be an active decision rather than as the result of habit.

> *"Yeah, how to help myself. My laptop... I have a blocker on it. I suppose I won't get all technical with like networking.... I mean, I'm sure there'll be more sites out there, but they're so unbelievably obscure. I would never find them. Not even with 10 hours of searching. …. And on my phone, I have an app called detoxify. And that does exactly the same thing, because the problem with what's on my laptop is that I've got the know how to basically go in there and switch it all off. And so, I'll make sure to have my laptop switched off other end of the room at a kind of out of sight, because if I have to get up out of bed across the room, open a box, get the machine out, turn it on it. I suppose if I'm really desperate, I would do that, but it's supposed to be a deterrent. I'm kind of like with my computer, if I'm feeling urges, I'll switch it off at the wall, then I'll switch it off at the back, then I'll unplug the power cable, then I'll take the Ethernet cable out and do all of these steps. And on the phone now… detoxifies right on my home screen, but I can I can sort of lock the phone out…. And so, if I think. You know, I want to go and watch something... Because I can't get into the phone to use it. But I mean, luckily these days I suppose all of that has worked it, I mean it was never fool proof cause there have been a few times where I would cross the bedroom and pick this machine up and skulk back to my bed and make sure not to*

look in the mirror because I didn't want to see that. I didn't want to see, didn't wanna look myself in the eye. So, I knew it was just. horrendous but these days I don't." - Peter

Adam spoke of ways in which he would keep track of how he was doing, as well as remind himself of why it was that he wanted to get control of his pornography use. And what he would hope would happen if he was able to achieve this.

"I needed to continually remind myself and have it in my face of why I was quitting. And for me, it was two things. One, while I was depressed, I had kept a journal, so I started that up. I I started marking down like I'm 3 hours. I'm three days and two hours and I'm really struggling. This is like a seven out of 10. I'm feeling antsy. I think it's because I'm bored. I'm going to see what is going on... that was good for me. Just keeping myself, it was like it was. It was a way that I could almost tell somebody or just write down how I was feeling so that I didn't have to keep it bottled up. Umm, the other strategy was that. In my bedroom ... on one side of the wall, I would have sticky notes saying - What would continue to happen if I didn't quit? And then on the other walls saying what will improve if I quit as well as? Umm. What will stay the same or continue to get worse if I don't? And as time went on, once certain issues resolved about, like, certain anxieties, I would start taking those relevant ones off. I would have like 12 on one side, 10 on another or something. I still have some up now, but certain stresses about". - Adam

There was also this acknowledgment from many of the participants that "getting better" was a journey and that there might be times that were harder or easier than others. Andrew explained that there were hard times in trying to manage this, that at time it was easier and other times it was more difficult.

"Because in the beginning, like I would say the first week, the first two weeks like there's definitely different stages of having streaks, I guess like the first week. Is it going to be hard and you're going to have more urges, you're going to be reminded" - Andrew

Many of the participants found that they required support on their journeys to things getting better. This support came in many forms, however, what it does indicate is that as with the problem not being an individual problem perhaps the solutions are also not individual. It would be important when supporting somebody who is experiencing problematic pornography use establishing with them who their support network is. It might not be necessary for them to share all the details to get support but rather just know who is capable of giving them support. It could also be useful to consider the narrative idea of populated identity (White, 2007) and consider with clients who it is that they are wanting to be populating their identities.

When thinking about the strategies that the participants have inserted into their own live many could be understood with regard to the ACT model. They are acknowledging that that what they do in the short term is having a long-term effect on them (Hayes , 2019). That they are finding strategies to delay themselves to support themselves with whether they actually want to watch pornography. When thinking about the strategies that Adam had developed for himself it could be understood as values-based action, reminding himself of what it is that is important to him. It could be useful to develop with individuals their own ways of reminding themselves what is important to them and why it is they are choosing to do this.

A final consideration is all the participants spoke about times in which they were able to successfully not watch pornography. There are two ways in which I would consider working with this. Both would be understanding that there are exceptions to the problem. With Narrative therapy you could use statement of position map two and explore the exception, what made it possible, and what does that mean is important to them (White, 2007). The other way I would consider is solution focussed therapy, exploring the exception to the problem and exploring what a preferred future may look like given this exception (Shennan, 2019).

Theme 6: People Minimising the Problem

The theme of "people minimising the problem" explores the experience participants reported that when they had shared their problem with others that they felt as though people had felt the need to minimise the problem. This was expressed through stories of their own experience of telling friends or professionals or through the worry they had with sharing because of stories they had heard of the problem being minimised. Not the most prevalent theme but as it is about how the participants have found sharing their difficulties including with professionals it felt as though this was important to include. This theme can help professionals, and particularly counselling psychologists consider how what they do is going to be received by the person they are trying to help and hopefully find an approach that does not lead the person not feeling understood.

When participants had shared their problem with a loved one, they experience a denial and dismissal of their perception of the problem. Leo describes this as a refusal to being believed or experiencing people brushing him off.

"So, when someone has a problem and everyone is like, what do you mean you have a problem? No, you don't. You can't have a problem." – Leo

"People brush off people like me. They say like no I have a problem with it, and they go like no you don't." – Leo

There was also an attempt to understand the other person's reactions. The participants described an empathy that it was not possible for their loved ones to understand as they do not have the same experience with pornography as they do. That because they perceived the friend as having appropriate use that it was not possible for them to understand the experience of problematic use. Andrew described on friend who couldn't believe that Andrew has a problem because his own use was not problematic so he could not understand that for other people pornography use could be problematic.

"One male friend. But he kinda has a different view on porn so the conversation isn't that useful. Like he thinks it's OK, but he has very moderate consumption and I do realize that while porn may have very negative effects for me. Like if there are people like, there are definitely people that use it very moderately and can just live their life happily. And that friend is one of those people. So that conversation wasn't that useful because we're not. We don't have the same mindset, I guess"– Andrew

When speaking about their experience of discussing their difficulty with professionals the participants expressed that they had an experience of the professionals minimising their experience. Chris described an experience of having a therapist downplay his difficulty in a way that he felt would not happen if he was describing a difficulty with substance misuse.

"I tried to get in contact with one and like schedule it and I only had one visit with them because like one of the first things they said… they had kind of downplayed my issue. They're like 'ohh, everybody watches pornography' and that wasn't very helpful at all. Like you wouldn't say? So like ohh everybody like drinks beer to like an alcoholic just trying to minimize the issue at hand. At the end of that when they had asked if I wanted to reschedule, I'm like 'ohh I'm not really sure. I'll let you know'. And then I went home and like called back another therapist and I've been seeing the same one for since about February" – Chris

Participants shared that one of the reasons that the that they had not spoken to professionals because they believed that the professional would not take their difficulty seriously. That there is a belief from the participants that many professionals hold the idea that pornography is good and therefore they would not be understanding their difficulty. Peter described being sceptical if a professional could even be helpful because they would be pro-pornography.

"a professional? No, well I feel like a lot of them wouldn't really be able to find the help. Maybe I'm sceptical, but I get the feeling that they too are swallowed by the porn is good bullet and if I would say to them, I'm feeling ashamed or I'm feeling unhappy doing this I would say oh, there's nothing to be ashamed about and it's healthy and it's just a blip. You're just depressed, or you are just sad." – Peter

Participants also shared the experiences they have heard of others reaching out to professionals and that some of these people had also experienced this minimisation of the difficulty that they are experiencing. They also suggest that the therapists need to be more empathetic and listen to what the person is asking for before they try to minimise the problem.

"It's quite a sad, but I think that's true because I've seen people on Reddit who have said exactly that. They said ohh. I tried to talk to a therapist, and they said there's nothing wrong. You know what? You don't need to fret and worry yourself. I mean, the idea of a therapist is I supposed to listen and work through your problems with you're not tell you. Ohh you're just wrong, because I think I think in most other cases they would. They would sit down and help and talk to you if you said ohh my relationships are falling apart and I'm unhappy they would say Oh well have you tried to fix? Have you tried this? Have you tried that?" - Peter

There was also a sense that when they did share with a professional, such as a doctor that the doctor had not taken the time to truly understand their difficulty and to simplify it but also not explain what they believed the problem was. In this example Mark appeared to have not understood why the doctor was giving him lubricant. The doctor also laughed at him when he did not understand how to use it

", I went to the doctors. So, like, I cried. And like, I had a rash for, like, a close. Sorry. Just like, it's OK. It's normal, just like I'm sitting there in front of her, and she is so blunt. I respect he well, it's like about overreacting. But like. I was just like she gave us the stuff caales Kai, or key Is this bottle like? I mean. I don't know how to explain it like You know, like a bottle of stuff with like. People to help you out. you know… There's another bottle it's called like keel, or KY or something When, like I'm trying to drink it like she laughed at me." – Mark

When considering this in context for counselling psychology it is important to consider the theoretical underpinnings of counselling psychology. When I think about Rogers's principles of therapeutic work, particularly congruence and empathetic approach (Hall, 2020), it is clear from the participants comments that this is not the experience they had from these people. While I have very little to go off based on participant experience, in thinking about this theme and what can be learnt from it I have been considering what these people may have been attempting to do. It is likely that the friends and family are trying at

reassure their loved one. When thinking about what the professionals have been hoping to achieve it is likely that this is normalisation, the technique from CBT in which the distressing thing is understood as within a normal range especially considering the context. However, this is not the experience of the participants.

Normalisation as a technique in CBT is often used by therapists in an attempt to assure the client that their experience is understandable and normal given the circumstances, it is in fact one that I have used in my own practice. When, considering the intention of normalisation, it is to allow the client to see their difficulty in the realm of normality (Bream, Challacombe, Palmer, & Salkovskis, 2017). Which comes into the problem is there normal and therefore abnormal pornography use? Instead, an approach that could be considered by professionals when a person comes to them stating that they have problematic pornography use is to think about what it is about their use they find to be problematic and to think about what it is that is important to them that their pornography use is getting in the way of. One way that this could be achieved is using statement of position map 1 from narrative therapy (White, 2007). This would explore the clients understanding and perception of their problem, understand the effects of the problem, getting the client to justify and take a position of these effects and then give all this explore what this shows is important to them. This has allowed the therapist to understand the problem without themselves having to take a stance on the problem. It allows for the therapist to be decentred, in that their position or world view on pornography does not factor, while influential, supporting the client to think about the why it is a problem. With this them the conversation can be less problem centred and more value based.

There are many reasons friends and family may have reacted in a way that has led to the participant feeling minimised. This includes normalisation as discussed previously, they want their loved one to feel as though what is going on for them is normal. It could also be out of fear, they don't want to talk about it because they may not want to acknowledge their own use. Or potentially out of discomfort. Talking about pornography is still taboo and as such people do not want to talk about it. By denying the problem they could be hoping the conversation is over quicker. This is all important for counselling psychologists to hold in mind. It is possible that by the time they have come to talk to a therapist they have already experienced minimisation, understanding this is important when thinking about how we would address this with the individuals.

Theme 7: A Lacking in Education

The theme "a lacking in education" explores the idea that pornography use was both filling a void which education, both formal and informal, failed to teach and that pornography was not included in the education that was formally delivered. One aspect of this was that sexual education didn't prepare you for what was witnessed through pornography, that formal (school based) and informal (parental and peers) education did not prepare them for the details in which were included in pornography. Another aspect of this was that pornography was taking the place of sexual education, that the pornography was acting as some sort of script for how people are expected to act within a sexual relationship. The final aspect of this was that because of the already mentioned that pornography needs to explicitly be included in sexual education. That the participants interviewed felt that if they had had more information about what pornography was that they would have had more understanding that what they were watching doesn't necessarily mimic real life.

The participants spoke of prior to watching pornography that they did not have any education to prepare them for what they would see in the pornography. There was a real sense from those interviewed that when they began watching pornography that they didn't understand what they were watching were watching and that led to confusion. This confusion could be with regards to what was happening in the pornography as shown by this quote from Gavin

> *"So, the first I always knew that people used to do stuff together. Back then I will only know like people just kissed. So, the first moment I saw something was two, man, and a woman. I unusually they're naked. It was very pixelated so I could not see anything. And the moment, I believe was shocking to me. Was the time when she, I guess, sat down on her knees and basically came over for the first time, so oral sex for the first time it goes off and everything, and that was the most shocking part to me." -Gavin*

Lack of education of what might happen in pornography and in this case sexual relationships had left Gavin confused and unsure of what it was he was seeing. This was similar for Harry; he was watching pornography prior to understanding the mechanics of sexuality and therefore was confused by what was happening in the videos

> *"So, I didn't actually understand what semen was actually at the time, 'cause obviously when I did end up masturbating to it, which this guy told me about, it just umm it obviously it didn't happen because I was eight and. When I was looking at the videos, I was kinda confused about it and just thought it was a bunch of drool. If that was the case. "- Harry*

Whereas for Stacey it was the confusion around what the pornography was telling her she was supposed to find enjoyable

> *"It kind of warped my views of what woman are supposed to do and want. And what men would expect, or what men think or is pleasurable, I think." - Stacey*

Pornography was also taking the place of sexual education for some of the participants, teaching the participants about the opposite genders body as well as explaining how a sexual relationship happens. That prior to watching pornography they did not have a meaningful understanding of these things. This is shown by Harry and him explaining how it had all been a mystery to him.

> *"Well, I didn't actually know anything about the female anatomy, so that was a bit of a where I got most of my information which. Obviously, I got taught about a bit more in school, but. Yeah, it was quite. Uhm? I don't really know the word for it….[A lot of] knowledge on that came from pornography"- Harry*

And also, Gavin not understanding prior to viewing pornography that men and women have different bodies.

> *"I did not even know like, do woman men body at the same types of how that's why I discovered. But my first introduction to it would be due to something that I found of the computer one day. I mean back then." -Gavin*

The participants were also concerned about what it was that people were seeing and what that meant that people were thinking a sexual relationship should be like. Leo explains that as especially early in people's sexual experiences that if people are imitating pornography that it could be a negative experience.

> *"And I mentioned earlier people using pornography as a sex education tool, which it shouldn't be. I'm sure you've seen some pornography. I don't think that you would like that to happen to you when you were losing your virginity, but you've got these boys that have grown up on this stuff from the age of 11. That goes like, oh, this is how you have"* - Leo

Which is supported by Stacey talking of a personal experience in regard to a sexual partner assuming she would enjoy something that he had seen in pornography, and not understanding that for her consent needed to be for each sexual experience and not just sex in general.

> *"And I thought that's what women liked, cause that's what's in all the videos and then he hadn't asked before he had done it. And he was like, well, they don't ask in there. And you already agreed to have sex with me. So, I thought you would do anything."* - Stacey

Leo also explained that because of the lack in sexual education that most of what he learnt about sexual relationships had come from pornography.

"I yeah, that was my whole basis for sex from age 11 till I actually had sex. I mean there was also sex education, but that focus pretty heavily on just the science behind reproduction and the diseases that you might get. So, when you're severely lacking in something that you consider so important at that age, then you just focus on the one thing that you think is like the playbook, which for me and for I think a lot of other people was porn." - Leo

Leo was not alone as this was also seen with Stacey who explained that pornography had become a main source of education for some young people and that they didn't understand that it should primarily be for entertainment.

"It was one of the only resources to learn stuff from. I think it's more seen as education from the kids' point of view instead of entertainment. It's more of I need to watch this to learn what I should do with my girlfriend or my boyfriend. You kind of think like even though we know it's acting you you're it's one of the options to see what people do or what people would expect."- Stacey

Participants also spoke about what they felt was missing from sexual education both informal and formal. Some of the participants expressed that young people needed to be told explicitly about pornography and what could be expected from it. Stacey explained that she feels as though pornography needs to be explicitly included in formal sexual education and that not just what it is but how it is made.

"But I feel like there should be something that goes like 'you might be watching it, or you might want to watch it, but these are some things you need to know. There are breaks, there are takes, they talk beforehand, there's consent beforehand'... Minute by minute, you know. And but like you said, this conversation before they sometimes, like, have checklists of what is allowed and stuff. And so, I think that's the big thing that the kids is that." - Stacey

Harry explained that just generally his sexual education was lacking and that there was a need for more in regard to sexuality and relationships in general.

"Or even like, well, disregarding the porn like it's, it's just, uh, not a lot of stuff gets told to you. It's more like you speak about it with your partner, uh, because they kind of just tell you what sex is and just leave it at that, which to be honest is kind of dangerous because it leaves people to actually, go and look it up for themselves and obviously" - Harry

Whereas Peter spoke more about how explaining the potential dangers of pornography was required.

"That's the really should be more talks about the fact that. In excess, it really isn't healthy. And I don't think pornography use in general should sort of be…They do indeed, so I suppose young people should really be a bit more educated that doing

this stuff in excess is harmful, like maybe one time a week isn't really gonna, hurt you. And I mean we are young kind of men and women at the end of the day but doing it in excess without break for years on end. It's not really a wonder that I was unhappy and. Not able to talk to people and definitely not women. Not at all." - Peter

Participants also spoke about what they needed or wanted when they first discovered pornography and also what potentially parents need to know to help their children who might be watching pornography. As well as the challenges of this, what can realistically be expected of parents. Andrew spoke about how his parents couldn't possibly have known any different.

"Uh, phenomenon is like a very new thing. We don't know how to deal with it, and we don't have any research about it. There's no guidelines for parents, etcetera. So, I definitely understand that my parents like wouldn't know how to deal with it, because one day we're young. It wasn't a thing. And of course, I yeah, they just never experienced it. So how can they? Guess or know that it could have very harmful effects". - Andrew

And Stacey spoke more specifically about how her parents couldn't be expected to know what she was doing and therefore what actions to take

"So, my parents wouldn't have known to block social media like and I don't, so I don't think." - Stacey

She, however, recognised that what she needed was an adult to speak to and if her mother had known that that was what she needed that her mother would have been open to that.

"*Yeah, I definitely think because my mom is a very progressive and well-spoken woman and I think if she had known at that time she would have probably. Uh opened herself up for conversations with me and I might have been made it out at first, but I think I would have gone to her over the years, and it would have helped, I think. Yeah, even just having someone to tell me that there are takes and stuff because I didn't really think or learn about that until I was an older teenager."* - Stacey

And Gavin put it very simply

"Hello, I need some adult help"- Gavin

Chris went further into needing the conversation and the support to resist the peer pressure for a thing he didn't even know existed.

"Why pornography use was bad? Because I can't recall if, like, that was ever a conversation. Like I think what could have helped was like. Like the reflecting back on it, just like not giving into peer pressure or?" - Chris

Participants have spoken about in several ways how their education was lacking in regard to pornography, they have also indicated that their parents' education was lacking in

this field as how to support them. While there has been nuanced and individual thought this quote from Leo says a lot.

> *"I don't think that anyone that uses it necessary for as a tool is necessarily in the same boat as me. I just I think there's a lot that needs to be sort of discussed and ironed out and figured out about porn and then talk to people 'cause when I was growing up, I had sex education, but it was the reproductive cycle. And that was it. What you should or shouldn't use to prevent pregnancy, but there's nothing about porn and nothing about relationships. Uh, so all of this stuff that I'm saying now is self-taught or like figured out from stuff on the Internet or from people. Uh, discussing it with other people, so none of this was taught to me. By educators, none of this was taught to me by parents or authority figures. And like the biggest thing is, none of this was towards me. Way, way back when I was a young teenager or preteen when I was developing this relationship with porn, and I think something that a lot of the people like me who be might have seen. Some of the stuff that I've been saying, ah. Is that they will sort of think they will. All the people that start at around my age go like I just wish that someone would have warned me or there's some sort. It's just wish someone had said something." - Leo*

When considering the "lacking of education" that I have interpreted in the current research in the context of existing literature there are several studies to consider. Arrington-Sanders (2015) found that same sex attracted males were using pornography as sexual education, it was proposed that this is due to a lacking in non-heterosexual education. However, of my participants one identified as bisexual the rest identified as straight. This means that, for these participants at least, that sexual education was generally lacking and not just for particularly sexually oriented groups, at least in the context of what they felt they needed to get of sexual education, such as how to have enjoyable sex. This is supported by Löfgren-Mårtenson, & Månsson (2010) and Mattebo and colleagues (2014) who found that young people were using pornography as a source of information.

If "education is lacking" what does that mean and how can we use this information to help. The obvious answer is to include pornography in sexual education. The Department for Education has already explicitly recommended the inclusion of pornography in its sex and relationships education curriculum (Department for Education & DfE, 2019). When considering the outcomes of this theme and as a counselling psychologist thinking about the formal education of the individual young people seems limiting. The participants spoke about needing more from their parents and society as a whole, this is supported by the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thinking about how as a society we can talk about sex, relationships and specifically pornography more is something that needs to be

considered. When working with family systems, thinking about and considering the access that young people have to the internet and encouraging conversations that might feel uncomfortable or taboo.

Conclusion

Throughout the themes explored in the analysis there was a thread of similarity. This was that the experience of problematic pornography use was not a standalone issue. When considering what this means when working with people there are several things that need to be held and thought about as possibilities. First there is the idea that people might want support with this but are unsure of the reaction they will get from a professional based on how the experience societies relationship with pornography, they might seek support for another area in which they are struggling, therefore it might be useful for psychologist to hold this in mind. When they do decide to discuss the difficulty, they experience associated with pornography use it is also possible that they have experienced some form of minimisation of their problem, therefore it is important that we are curious of their experience and take it at face value, especially at first. Exploring what exactly they mean by the problem would be a useful first step. It is then the consideration of what else is going on in their lives, if they are seeking support purely for their problematic use it is important to understand what effect this is having on their lives and whether there are other aspects of their lives that relate to this difficulty. The final consideration is to remember that this difficulty is not just an individual experience, it is likely that there is a relational aspect of this, holding this while working with people with problematic use is key.

There are many clinical implications of this research, some of which have been discussed throughout the analysis and the discussion. These primarily focus on how to support somebody if they were to tell you that they are experiencing problematic pornography use. Based on this research it is clear that it is important to remember that problematic pornography use is unlikely to be a stand-alone difficulty. That there is likely to be other things happening in the person's life, that they are in relationships (even if not in a relationship) and that there is likely to be a related affect, and that it is possible that they have already taken steps to try to help themselves. Another clinical implication is considering the response that we give when people speak about their difficulties, participants spoke about feeling as though people were minimising their problems. It could be possible that this is not unique to problematic pornography use, it would be useful for therapists (and non-therapists) to take the time to consider how their responses to many problems may be perceived by the person with the problem. A final implication to consider is how we as psychologists speak about pornography in general, participants spoke about the taboo, and how it is this big open

secret. As psychologists we should consider how we can lead the way as a part of society to speak about pornography more generally, openly and not just as the punchline of a joke. We should also think about how we can play a role in education, when are we talking to our children about pornography, how are we suggesting our friends, family, colleagues speak to their children about pornography?

The current thesis is a reflexive thematic analysis understanding the experience of young people with self-perceived problematic pornography use, this means that it was looking for shared meaning across the participant data. While themes do not need to be present in all data sets there does need to be some sense of shared meaning. Throughout this research one thing that was clear, even within the themes reported, is that there were such individual experiences for the participants, many of the themes have had to acknowledge a difference in experience. Reflexive TA has a limited scope in exploring these differences, examples of what individual experiences that were smoothed out in the analysis for this thesis. One example of this are the experiences of Stacey, she had the experience that her pornography use had in some respect strengthened her friendships as she had been able to be a confidant and a resource for friends. Another example is Gavin, he is from a Muslim background, and while the aspects of his religion were explored in the shame and guilt not all the experiences of the interaction of pornography use and religion were explored. A final example is Mark, his experience of problematic use was primarily in relation to creating pornography, as the only participant creating pornography this experience was not fully explored. There could be further research in which a narrative analysis is used to explore the individuals' experiences in greater depth.

Reflexivity is central to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), this requires self-awareness of own positioning and how this informed the way in which I conducted the research. This involved me noticing my own reactions to all aspects of the research process, but in particular the interviewing and the analysis of the data. Being aware that while I am positioning myself within social constructionism, that this does not mean that I am able to bracket myself off from the discourses that have influenced me, in fact quite the opposite it would be impossible for me to attempt to do this. This is in part why the thesis was written fully in first person, to make it clear that this research is one person's interpretation of the data to make it clear to the reader that the research will have been completed through the lens that is shaped by my socio-political historical context. I am a trainee counselling psychologist; this means that the research was conducted through the lens of a new professional. There was also limited previous theory for me to draw on. This is in

relation to both theories of problematic use and interventions for problematic use. It would be interesting for future research to include practice-based research to develop the literature in interventions for problematic pornography use.

The current research has a very broad scope, the participants were purposefully not from a homogenous group, and the research questions were very open. Future research could be conducted with more homogenous groups. It may be interesting to conduct research with a gendered positioning, of different religious backgrounds, and of ethnic groups.

The current research only focussed on young people, all the participants were coincidently over 18 and in a particular period of their lives. Future research might consider opening up the research, either in one large study or other smaller studies. There could be interest in speaking to people who were younger than the current participants and it could be of interest to conduct research with conversations with people who were older.

It was considered whether making suggestions to the current model proposed by Binnie and Reavey (2021). However, there are limitations to all models of distress one of which being the linearity of distress that they suggest. When looking at the model of problematic pornography use it could be read as a flow diagram suggesting that each part follows on from the previous section. The current research has shown that to suggest problematic pornography use fits this idea would be an oversimplification. For example, if we are to think about problematic use and relationships, while it was evident that the participants problematic use was affecting their relationships it was also evident that the relationships were affecting the pornography use. If we are wanting to develop a model it would be important to consider the complexity of the problem and the inter-related nature of all aspects of the problem. Another consideration of this model is that while challenging the concept of what constitutes problematic pornography use, the authors have continued to pathologise some pornography use, by suggesting that there is a truth in what is "normal use" and what is "problematic use".

Further research that could also be considered is further quantitative research. Based on the themes proposed in the current thesis is could possibly be interesting researching at a large scale the understanding young people have of how pornography is made, whether they believe they have had enough sexual education both formal and informal. Research could include whether there was a difference in these factors between people who have self-perceived problematic pornography use and those that do not.

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Appendix A

Ethical approval and amendments

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION LETTER

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

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Reviewer: Please complete sections in **blue | Student:** Please complete/read sections in **orange**

Details	
Reviewer:	**Jeremy Lemoine**
Supervisor:	**Luis Jimenez**
Student:	**Laura Richards**
Course:	**Prof Doc Counselling**
Title of proposed study:	**A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people**

Checklist (Optional)	YES	NO	N/A
Concerns regarding study aims (e.g., ethically/morally questionable, unsuitable topic area for level of study, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding participants/target sample	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐

All relevant study materials attached (e.g., freely available questionnaires, interview schedules, tests, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Study materials (e.g., questionnaires, tests, etc.) are appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
Clear and detailed outline of data collection	☐	☐	☐
Data collection appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
If deception being used, rationale provided, and appropriate steps followed to communicate study aims at a later point	☐	☐	☐
If data collection is not anonymous, appropriate steps taken at later stages to ensure participant anonymity (e.g., data analysis, dissemination, etc.) – anonymisation, pseudonymisation	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data storage (e.g., location, type of data, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data sharing (e.g., who will have access and how)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data retention (e.g., unspecified length of time, unclear why data will be retained/who will have access/where stored)	☐	☐	☐
If required, General Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks/burdens to participants have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks to the researcher have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
If required, Country-Specific Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
If required, a DBS or equivalent certificate number/information provided	☐	☐	☐
If required, permissions from recruiting organisations attached (e.g., school, charity organisation, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
All relevant information included in the participant information sheet (PIS)	☐	☐	☐
Information in the PIS is study specific	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the PIS is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All issues specific to the study are covered in the consent form	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the consent form is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All necessary information included in the participant debrief sheet	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the debrief sheet is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
Study advertisement included	☐	☐	☐
Content of study advertisement is appropriate (e.g., researcher's personal contact details are not shared, appropriate language/visual material used, etc.)	☐	☐	☐

Decision options	
APPROVED	Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice), to the date it is submitted for assessment.

APPROVED - BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES	In this circumstance, the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made **before** the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box at the end of this form once all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to the supervisor. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the school for its records. **Minor amendments guidance:** typically involve clarifying/amending information presented to participants (e.g., in the PIS, instructions), further detailing of how data will be securely handled/stored, and/or ensuring consistency in information presented across materials.
NOT APPROVED - MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED	In this circumstance, a revised ethics application **must** be submitted and approved **before** any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application. **Major amendments guidance:** typically, insufficient information has been provided, insufficient consideration given to several key aspects, there are serious concerns regarding any aspect of the project, and/or serious concerns in the candidate's ability to ethically, safely and sensitively execute the study.

Decision on the above-named proposed research study

Please indicate the decision:	**APPROVED**

Minor amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

Major amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

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Assessment of risk to researcher

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<td style="text-align:center">NO
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Reviewer's signature

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<td>Jérémy Lemoine</td>
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Date:	04/01/2022

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE

For the researcher and participants involved in the above-named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard.

Confirmation of minor amendments
(Student to complete)

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data	
Student name: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Laura Richards**
Student number:	**U1823586**
Date:	**12/01/2022**

Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed if minor amendments to your ethics application are required

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impact on ethical protocol. If you are not sure as to whether your proposed amendment warrants approval, consult your supervisor or contact Dr Trishna Patel (Chair of School Ethics Committee).

	How to complete and submit the request
1	Complete the request form electronically.
2	Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3	When submitting this request form, ensure that all necessary documents are attached (see below).
4	Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to Dr Trishna Patel: t.patel@uel.ac.uk
5	Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.
6	Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

Required documents

A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendment(s) added with track changes.	**YES** ☐
Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example, an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information sheet, updated consent form, etc.	**YES** ☒
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES** ☒

Details

Name of applicant:	**Laura Richards**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate Counselling Psychology**
Title of research:	A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people
Name of supervisor:	**Professor John Turner**

Proposed amendment(s)

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
Recruit participants from Sixth form colleges through the support services within the college	Students at sixth form colleges meet the inclusion criteria. Involvement will be voluntary.
Recruit participants from UEL and London Metropolitan University	Students of both universities meet the inclusion criteria
Location of recording to include sixth form colleges	Safeguarding policies of the colleges require that to recruit via their services that the interviews take place onsite. The interviews will be conducted in private rooms to ensure anonymity of content.
Change of supervisor information on all documents	There has been a change of DoS

Confirmation

	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and have they agreed to these changes?	☒	☐

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Laura Richards**
Date:	**16/03/2022**

Reviewer's decision		
Amendment(s) approved:	YES ☒	NO ☐
Comments:		
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Trishna Patel**	
Date:	**18/03/2022**	

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impact on ethical protocol. If you are not sure as to whether your proposed amendment warrants approval, consult your supervisor or contact Dr Trishna Patel (Chair of School Ethics Committee).

How to complete and submit the request

1	Complete the request form electronically.
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6	Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

Required documents

	YES
A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendment(s) added with track changes.	☒

Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example, an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information sheet, updated consent form, etc.	**YES** ☒
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES** ☒

Details	
Name of applicant:	**Laura Richards**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate Counselling Psychology**
Title of research:	A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people
Name of supervisor:	**Professor John Turner**

Proposed amendment(s)	
Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below	
Proposed amendment	**Rationale**
To include forum posts in data to be analysed	There has been difficulty recruiting participants to interview. Thematic analysis allows for mixed data analysis. The forums are public access and consent from either moderators or posters will be sought.
Proposed amendment	Rationale for proposed amendment
Proposed amendment	Rationale for proposed amendment
Proposed amendment	Rationale for proposed amendment

Confirmation		
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and have they agreed to these changes?	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Laura Richards**

Date:	11/04/2022

Reviewer's decision		
Amendment(s) approved:	YES ☒	NO ☐
Comments:	It is very important that consent is sought where appropriate and this is evidenced in the thesis.	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	Trishna Patel	
Date:	25/04/2022	

Research Participants Wanted

My name is Laura Richards. I am a trainee counselling psychologist and as a part of my Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology I would like to speak to young people who currently experience, have experienced or a close to somebody who has experienced problematic pornography use.

Are you eligible?

Are you 16 -24?

Do you reside in the United Kingdom?

Do you or somebody you are close to experience or have experienced problematic use of pornography?

If yes, I am interested in speaking to you about your experience. I want to emphasize that whether you have sought support or not for your difficulty I am interested in speaking to you.

What will participation consist of?

You will participate in an interview either online or in person, depending on what you are more comfortable with. This interview will be several open questions which will allow you to talk about your experience.

What to do now?

If you are interested in participating or would just like more information, please email me at u1823586@uel.ac.uk

Appendix C

Participant Invitation

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a doctorate in Counselling psychology. As part of my studies, I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research: A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people.

Self-perceived problematic pornography use refers to anyone who believes that their consumption of pornography is a cause of distress or difficulty in their life.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who fits the kind of people, I am looking for to interview for my research. I am looking to involve young people who are aged between 16–25-year-olds of any gender, sexuality ethnicity or education background who are experiencing difficulty or distress related to their pornography use. It is not necessary that you have spoken to anyone about this difficulty before or received any form of diagnosis, or formal therapy in relation to your problematic pornography use.

I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in anyway and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate you will be asked to participate in an online interview or in person interview that is expected to last about one hour. This interview will feel like an informal conversation where you are given the opportunity to discuss your experience with pornography. These interviews will be audio recorded to help with the analysis of research data.

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. This study has been carefully designed to ensure you anonymity and it is not expected that you will be adversely affected from participating. Talking about areas of our life that we usually keep private can be difficult, and if at any time you wish to stop the interview you are able to do this.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

All data will be stored on UEL's secure electronic storage facility (UEL OneDrive for Business and SharePoint site) which has an encryption facility for sensitive data. All email correspondence will be through UEL's secure server and will be deleted once I have extracted and stored the relevant information.

Your interview will be recorded and stored in a password secured file in a UEL terminal/server. The audio recording will be transcribed verbatim into a word document after which the recording will be deleted. In the transcription your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. Similarly, names of other persons, places, organisations, and other potentially identifying information will also be removed from the transcript. From recording to deletion only I and my research supervisor will have access to the recordings.

The verbatim transcription of audio recorded interviews will be available to me, my supervisor and the examiners. Analysis of all data collected along with anonymised interview extracts from the transcripts will be included in the research write up, this includes my final dissertation and any potential publication of the research. On completion of the research, my dissertation and your anonymised data will be archived on UEL's Research Repository which is publicly accessible.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated data, provided that this request is made within three weeks of

the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Laura Richards

u1823586@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact the research supervisor Professor John Turner. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: J.J.D.Turner@uel.ac.uk

or

Deputy Research Director/Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study within three weeks of the interview without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……………………………………………………………………………….

Participant's Signature

…………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…………………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Signature

…………………………………………………………………………..

Date: ………………………….

Appendix E

Participant Debrief Letter

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER

Thank you for participating in my research study: **A qualitative exploration of self-perceived problematic pornography use amongst young people**. This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided.

All data will be stored on UEL's secure electronic storage facility (UEL server) which has an encryption facility for sensitive data. All email correspondence will be through UEL's secure server and will be deleted once I have extracted and stored the relevant information. I will anonymise our data by allocating a pseudonym at the receipt of your consent form.

Your interview recording will be stored in a password secured file in UEL server. The recording will be transcribed verbatim into a word document. In the transcription your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. Similarly, names of other persons, places, organisations, and other potentially identifying information will also be removed from the transcript. From recording to deletion only I and my research supervisor will have access to the recordings.

The verbatim transcription will be available to me, my supervisor and the examiners. Analysis of all data collected, along with excerpts from the anonymised transcripts, will be included in the research write up, this includes my final dissertation and any potential publication of the research.

You are free to withdraw from the research study without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. If you wish to withdraw from this research, you are able to do so, provided that this request is made within three weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

Sources of support:

0300 123 3393

www.mind.org.uk

Mind provides advice and support on all aspects

of mental health and offers local counselling

services in many areas.

0300 304 7000

www.sane.org.uk/support

Saneline provides a national out-of-hours mental health helpline offering specialist emotional support, guidance and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers open every day of the year from 4.30pm to 10.30pm

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Laura Richards

u1823586@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Professor John Turner. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: J.J.D.Turner@uel.ac.uk

or

Deputy Research Director/Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix F

Semi – Structured interview Schedule

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about your personal experience of pornography use with me. I will be asking you some exploratory questions on the topic, the are no right or wrong answers, my interest is in your subjective experience in whatever form that takes. Talking about pornography might feel unusual or even uncomfortable at times but rest assured that you will not be judged or personally analysed in any way. There will be an opportunity to debrief at the end of the interview if you would like to, you can decide this afterwards. I expect that the interview will last about 60 minutes, you are welcome to request a break at any time.

(If online) Please be aware of your physical and confidentiality comfort during this interview e.g. posture support and screen brightness.

Q 1. Could you tell me a bit about your experience with pornography?

Q 2. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience that you feel has not yet been covered?

Prompt questions

P1. When did you first use/view pornography?

P2. Could you please explain what is your own understanding of lived experience of "problematic use" in relation to pornographic material?

P.3. Is there anything that you do or have done to address your pornography use?

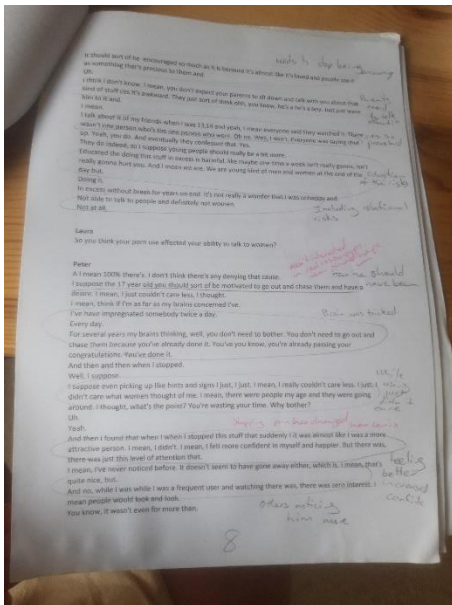P. 4. Has pornography had any influence on your relationships? Romantic, sexual, platonic, familial.
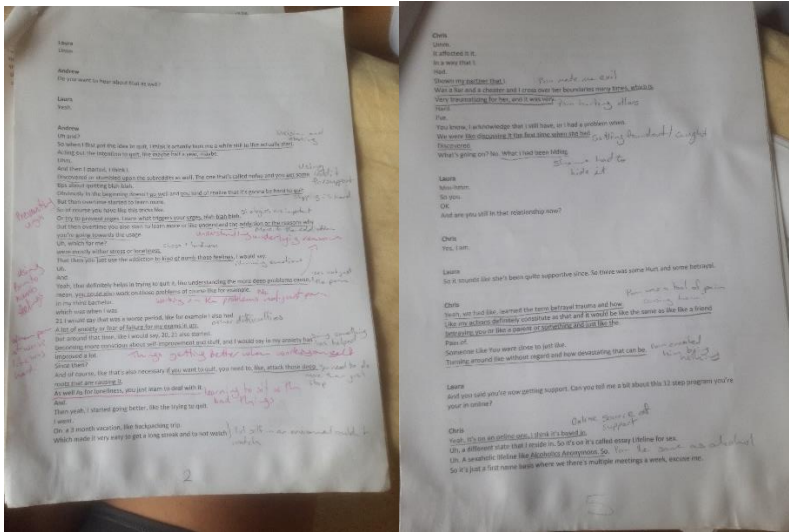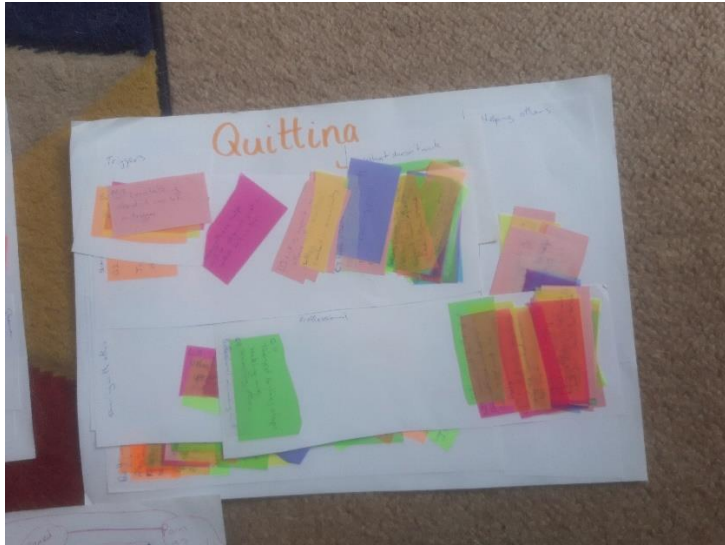
Appendix G

Familiarisation Maps

Appendix H

Example of Coding

Appendix I

Examples of Clustering

Appendix J

Screen Shot of final spreadsheet with Themes

	B	C	D	E
0	Neuroscience explanation	H10	Well, I was on a set sertraline for awhile, which I well when I asked my frie	Explantation of problem
1	Neuroscience explanation	H14	I, I believe that to be one of my issues because of all the things I've heard a	Explantation of problem
2	heavily addicted	H14	Obviously, like I, I would say I'm heavily addicted to it and.	Explantation of problem
3	Taken over brain	H14	I would like to not be because I feel like it's kind of making my brain a bit	Explantation of problem
4	Started so young he had no control	H21	But it was. It started from 8, so I feel like I didn't have much say in what hap	Explantation of problem
5	Slippery slope	H3	I started watching BDSM which has sort of, I guess, ramped up into that or s	Explantation of problem
6	Biological explanation	H4	Yes, and I wanted to kind of get my brain a bit more used to seeing	Explantation of problem
7	Why can't I watch just what I actually like	L10	I've I've yeah, I've done a million million times or I've got like no this time I	Explantation of problem
8	If everyone used like I do nobdy would do anything	L11	Yeah, I don't think any. I don't think anything would have got done. I don't t	Explantation of problem
9	Problem when it became too much	L2	Yeah, but then it became the point where I was using it as an escape too mu	Explantation of problem
0	Biological explanation	L2	Obviously I was going through puberty as I'm sort of hormones going on. I d	Explantation of problem
1	L2 Changing of understanding at puberty meant an i	L2	New set of understanding in stuff going through my mind when I was watch	Explantation of problem
2	When you want to stop but can't it's a problem	L22	And I, I would say that if you're doing something that's causing you grief an	Explantation of problem
3	Others denying addiction because of lack of tangibl	L23	There's no specific negative effects I think, so people just go like. oh How is	Explantation of problem
4	The addiction is different to other addictions (less	L23	When when someone says oh you're addicted to something, you get the im	Explantation of problem
5	Having a problem is unusual	L24	It's yeah, it's just ripe for people to have problems with it and the but then	Explantation of problem
6	Porn isn't the problem how I use it is	L24	Like porns, not inherently evil, it's just the way that I've used it. Every time	Explantation of problem
7	Neuroscience explanation	L33	The effect on their brain or like why? Why it is specifically they keep doing	Explantation of problem
8	Biological explanation	L33	Which when I was first starting out trying to quit, I found very, very useful.	Explantation of problem
9	Neuroscience explanation	L34	And there's the whole school of thought that thinks that it's something that	Explantation of problem
0	You don't want to your brain does	L34	uh, to get you to keep repeating something that you don't want to do, but y	Explantation of problem
1	Neuroscience explanation	L35	Like for me, finding out that that was a thing. Was like a miracle for me 'cau	Explantation of problem
2	Not the worst addiction	L5	I'm sure there's also there's a lot worse things that you could claim to be ad	Explantation of problem
3	If no porn life would have been better	L5	But for me, when I look back on all that stuff, I just think if I didn't have that	Explantation of problem
4	Finding it younger made it worse	L6	If I didn't find it so young, and if I didn't come become so desensitized to it	Explantation of problem
5	Affected development	L6	I don't think I had a particularly good effect on me as I was developing.	Explantation of problem
6	Porn isn't problem how I use it is	L7	The crux of the is the amount. The way that I use…. The way that I was watc	Explantation of problem
7	If I hadnt started so young I would be ok	L7	And the biggest thing would be the age that I started.	Explantation of problem
8	Always been very sexual	M16	Also hump my pillow, you know? And like, all kinds of things and just like.	Explantation of problem
9	Addiction	P16	Is lots of happiness and I don't know. I mean, if I I don't really say I had lots	Explantation of problem
0	Watching is not a choice	P19	Yeah, it's very. It's rare that I'll it's rare that I'll watch it. I wouldn't ever volu	Explantation of problem
1	people don't want to acknowledge they have a prol	P23		Explantation of problem
2	Never used to believe porn could be a problem	P4	I wouldn't have agreed to sit down and do this interview. I wouldn't have th	Explantation of problem
3	Neuroscience explanation	P5	I don't know. I I felt I felt just terrible. I felt really sad and angry all the time	Explantation of problem
4	Was received with anger and violence when sugges	P6	But now, I mean, always, always shot down and people physically. They got	Explantation of problem

Tabs: What is ppu | Relationships | Shame guilt | Porn as coping | Education | It can get better | Minimising the Problem | +