The Landscape of Pornography Use by Men in the United States

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Funding
This work was supported by the American Institute for Boys and Men awarded to Bailey M Way and Shane W Kraus.

Acknowledgments
The authors would like to acknowledge Marc Potenza, PhD, MD, and Emily Rothman, ScD, for their expert review and constructive feedback on the landscape scan.

Abstract

Background

Pornography use is common, especially by young men, and ongoing concerns for men's well-being underscore the need for further research and informed policy. To better understand the current landscape of pornography use by men across the United States (US), the American Institute for Boys and Men identified a need to: (1) describe the known prevalence rates, frequency, and duration of pornography use among US men, (2) identify associations of pornography use, including positive, negative, and neutral correlates of pornography use, (3) identify the motivations for initiating and maintaining pornography use, (4) report the known changes in pornography use across the lifespan, and (5) describe current approaches and policies aimed at regulating pornography use.

Methods

An exploratory landscape scan of scholarly and gray literature was conducted to map the targeted pornography areas mentioned (i.e., prevalence, frequency, duration, associations, motivations, changes, and current approaches and policies). A preference was given for recently published studies (past 10 years) that included male US participants.

Results

Pornography use is commonplace among boys and men, with the highest rates observed in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Pornography use is linked to a range of negative, neutral, and positive correlates. Most research has focused on the relationship between pornography use and negative correlates. Specifically, identifying a relationship between pornography use and risky sexual behavior, sexual aggression, less progressive gender views, relationship dissatisfaction, and poor mental health. However, a subset of research has identified positive relationships between pornography and using it for sexual learning, enhanced intimacy, and sexual identity exploration. The motivations for viewing pornography vary widely but often center on sexual reasons, boredom, and coping. Despite its prevalence among US boys and men, research exploring pornography use across the lifespan remains limited. In response to high youth exposure and increasing online accessibility of pornography, numerous US states have enacted age verification laws that place compliance burdens on pornography platforms, often without clear guidance on best practices for safeguarding sensitive personal information. Current verification systems include identification-, biometric-, and attribute-based methods, as well as age-verified devices. Emerging evidence suggests that attribute-based and age-verified devices may best balance regulatory goals with user privacy.

Conclusions

There is a critical need for longitudinal research examining changes in pornography use across the lifespan and its potential long-term effects. Similarly, research is needed to explore neutral and positive correlates of pornography. Given recent age verification laws, additional research is needed to better understand the implications of age-verification. Moving forward, efforts should prioritize privacy-preserving verification approaches (i.e., attribute-based and age-verified devices) alongside pornography literacy programs and public health campaigns that equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate pornography in healthier, more informed ways.

Keywords

Pornography; U.S.; Men; Boys

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Introduction

Pornography use is one of the most common sexual behaviors, especially among men, yet it is one of the least systematically studied sexual behaviors. Despite its prevalence, research and policy discourse surrounding pornography has long been polarized, often framed as either a moral issue or as a behavioral addiction. These narratives obscure the reality that pornography use is a complex behavior influenced by social, psychological, and technological factors.

The need for longitudinal and representative samples exploring pornography use is pressing in 2026, as pornography use has become increasingly entangled with broader shifts in digital life, mental health, and regulation. Pornography use is also relevant to public health and well-being, particularly for men. For many individuals, pornography serves normative functions related to sexual curiosity, pleasure, or fantasy. However, for others, it may be related to mental health concerns, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder ([ADHD]; Bőthe et al., 2019a), mood disorders (e.g., major depressive disorder (Shirk et al., 2021; Willoughby et al., 2019), insomnia (Shirk et al., 2021), impulsivity, anxiety (Hermand et al., 2020; Shirk et al., 2021), gambling disorder (Way, Jennings, et al., 2025), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), online gaming problems, substance use disorders (e.g., alcohol), suicidality (McGraw et al., 2024), borderline personality disorder, and eating disorders (Hermand et al., 2020).

United States (US) policy responses to pornography have accelerated in the absence of evidence. Age-verification laws are expanding rapidly across the US, yet there is limited empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness, unintended consequences, or differential impacts across groups. At the same time, pornography literacy and educational programs exist, but these initiatives remain largely unevaluated at scale. Meanwhile, the pornography industry itself has transformed through the dis-intermediation of creator-driven platforms and the increasing ability of AI, challenging older models of exposure and pornography use that continue to dominate research frameworks.

Despite these developments, pornography research remains underfunded and fragmented, in part due to the stigmatized nature of the topic and the limited funding available to support high-quality pornography research (Grubbs & Kraus, 2021). The American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM) seeks to address this gap by mapping the current landscape of the field of pornography research and identifying future research directions and policy opportunities.

Methods

This report provides an exploratory landscape scan using peer-reviewed articles and gray literature (e.g., policy briefs, organization reports, NGO (non-governmental organization) data) related to pornography.

Specifically, AIBM commissioned this landscape scan to:

1. describe the known prevalence rates, frequency, and duration of pornography use by men in the US,
2. identify associations of pornography use, including positive, negative, and neutral correlates of pornography use,
3. identify the reasons (i.e., motivation) for initiating and maintaining pornography use,
4. report the known changes in pornography use across an individual's lifespan, and
5. describe current approaches and policies aimed at regulating pornography use.

The purpose of the scan was to map key themes, trends, and gaps in the field rather than to conduct a formal systematic or scoping review. For articles and literature to be included in the landscape scan, they must first include information on the targeted pornography areas (i.e., prevalence, frequency, duration, associations, motivations, changes, and current approaches and policies), male participants (when applicable), and contain US participants (when applicable/available). Preference was given to research and articles published within the last 10 years. Of importance, several reviews have underscored methodological limitations in pornography research (Grubbs & Kraus, 2021; Kohut et al., 2020; Marshall & Miller, 2019). Specifically, researchers have pointed to inconsistent operational definitions and measurements strategies, along with a predominant use of cross-sectional designs and convenience samples, which collectively constrain the interpretability and generalizability of findings.

Prevalence, Frequency, and Duration of Pornography Use by Boys and Men

In 2020, a literature review of prevalence, frequency, and duration of pornography use by men was conducted (Miller et al., 2020). The studies included in the review were nonclinical samples of men, and all studies were published between 2010 and 2017. The review noted that most adult men (over 80%) have accessed pornography at least once in their life, with more than 40 – 70% indicating viewing within the past year. The authors highlight the difficulty in providing accurate estimates of frequency of pornography use, as many studies use different time scales to measure frequency. Sixteen studies indicated that over 90% of men have viewed pornography in their life. Among men 25 years of age and younger, about half report viewing pornography weekly, whereas use tends to decline with increasing age. Of note, not all studies included in the review used US samples. According to the US samples included in the review 70% of men reported past-year use (Willoughby et al., 2016), 75.25 – 78.8% reported past 6-month viewing, and 15.30 – 58.1% of men reported viewing at least weekly (Cooper & Klein, 2018; Marshall et al., 2021; Morgan, 2011). A US study that examined those who viewed pornography in the last 6 months found that 95% of male university students reported pornography viewing at least weekly and 62% reported viewing at least several times a week (Rosenberg & Kraus, 2014). Miller and colleagues (2020) also identified studies providing insights into duration of pornography use. They found that on average men reported 1.25 to 3 hours of pornography viewing per week. In a study of US university men who viewed pornography in the last 6 months, most (77%) reported a typical pornography viewing session lasting less than 30 minutes and only 7% reported a typical viewing session being over an hour (Rosenberg & Kraus, 2014).

A review identified four US studies that included large datasets (Miller et al., 2020): Herbenick et al., 2017; Price et al., 2016; Regnerus et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2018. Among these, one of the most highly cited and influential studies on pornography use among US men, Regnerus et al., 2016, used four nationally representative US samples, found that 46% of men aged 18 – 39 viewed pornography in a given week, 56% in a month, and 69% in a year. Notably, Miller and colleagues (2020) identified 15 studies published between 2010 and 2017 that indicated 18.4% to 95% of men reported viewing pornography weekly. The authors pooled the identified studies and found that nearly 45% of men report viewing pornography weekly. This pooled estimate coincides with Regnerus and colleague's findings.

Researchers have asked 1075 men about viewing and use of sexually explicit videos/DVDs, magazines, and erotic stories (Herbenick et al., 2017). Regarding sexually explicit videos/DVDs, 82.3% of men indicated viewing in their lifetime, 53.4% reported viewing in the past year, and 35.3% reported viewing in the past month. In terms of magazines, 79% reported lifetime use, 22.1% reported use in the past year, and 7.5% reported use in the past month. Lastly, 57.2% reported reading erotic stories in their lifetime, 23% reported reading in the past year, and 8.6% indicated reading in the past month.

Other researchers have asked about pornography use in terms of X-rated movies using General Social Survey (GSS) data. In 1973 – 1980, nearly 45% of men aged 18 – 26 years and almost 14% of men aged 54 – 62 years reported seeing an X-rated movie in the past year (Price et al., 2016). In comparison, in 2008 – 2012, almost 62% of men aged 18 – 26 years and over 22% of older men (54-62) reported viewing an X-rated movie in the past year. Using the GSS data for 2014, 2016, and 2018, 34.2% (n=767 men), 40.0% (n=881 men), and 38.9% (n=728 men), respectively reported viewing an X-rated movie in the past year (Miller et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2018). Of note, prevalence rates were significantly higher for younger individuals across each year. Since the publication of the systematic literature review, Wright and Tokunaga (2025) used the 2022 GSS data and compared the prevalence of X-rated movie (*"Have you seen an X-rated movie in the last year?"*) to an experimental pornography use question (*"The next question is about pornography – Internet materials or websites, books, movies, magazines, or photographs that explicitly show sex activities. About how often did you look at pornography in the last year?"*). In 2022, 43% of men reported viewing an X-rated movie, whereas 65% reported viewing pornography, thus suggesting the X-rated movie question may be perceived differently than pornography viewing by participants.

Solano and colleagues (2020) explored consumption rates in a sample of 1392 US adults (556=men) aged 18 – 73. Participants were asked about lifetime use of pornography, yearly viewing, monthly viewing, and percentage of time spent using specific modality of pornographic material (videos, pictures, and erotic writing/prose). Results indicated 98.9% of men reported lifetime use of pornography, 92.3% reported past-year viewing, and 91.5% reported past-month viewing. Men reported nearly 75% of time spent viewing pornography was done so by video, about 17% by picture, and almost 6% of time spent by reading written pornography. Results also indicated that men reported a mean of almost 68 minutes of pornography viewing per week. A 2022 study of a nationally representative sample of men in the US found that over 56% of non-veteran men and almost 50% of veteran men viewed pornography at least monthly in the past year (Borgogna et al., 2022).

Youth Prevalence, Frequency, and Duration

Given the accessibility and affordability (free) of online pornography, many youths (<18 years old) view pornography. Internationally, the median age of onset of pornography viewing is about 13 years old (Turvey et al., 2024). Notably, unintentional exposure to pornography is relatively common and rates for unintentional viewing are younger. As described in scientific literature, unintentional exposure occurs by accident, design of the pornography industry, or through other means (e.g., peers, predators). Interviews with 1500 youths (aged 8 – 19 years old) and 900 parents indicated many young people unintentionally searched the Internet and were presented with pornography (Livingstone & Bober, 2004, 2005). Relatedly, according to a review article exploring the effects of pornography viewing on young people, the pornography industry intentionally creates ways for "people who are not searching for pornography to be exposed to it" (Massey et al., 2021). Also, a young person may be exposed to pornography by someone else, such as a peer or a partner, or as an act of grooming by a sexual predator (Langevin & Curnoe, 2004; Massey et al., 2021).

Among a sample of 1358 US adolescents (13 – 17 years of age), 73% reported having viewed pornography (Robb & Mann, 2023). Of these, 44% reported intentional exposure, 58% reported accidental exposure, and 29% reported intentional and accidental exposure to pornography. Notably, 41% reported viewing pornography during the school day and 31% reported viewing pornography while physically attending school. Of those who viewed pornography during the school day, 44% reported viewing pornography on school-owned devices. Consistent with the international median onset, 54% of the adolescents in this study first saw pornography when they were 13 years of age or younger, with a mean age of first exposure of 12. In this sample, 75% of boys reported viewing pornography and 52% of boys reported intentionally viewing pornography.

Many studies use varying definitions of pornography, which may influence differences in reported prevalence estimates (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Relatedly, a recent systematic review on the impact of online pornography on minors highlighted that the prevalence estimates vary depending on the method used to gather pornography use data, as well as country and age group of the sample, and focus on intentional versus unintentional exposure of pornography (Paulus et al., 2024). Current rates of pornography viewing may be higher with children having smartphones at younger ages and cultural shifts in social acceptance of pornography use rather than considering pornography as shameful and morally unacceptable (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Rideout, 2015). Lim and colleagues (2017) found that those who were younger at data collection tended to view pornography at younger ages; this finding may reflect the increased accessibility of digital technologies to younger individuals over time.

A nationally representative US sample of 1500 youth found that 42% had been exposed to pornography in the past year (Wolak et al., 2007). Among those exposed, two-thirds (66%) indicated that their exposure was exclusively unwanted exposure, whereas about one-third (34%) reported either wanted exposure or a combination of wanted and unwanted exposure. Rates of wanted exposure appeared to increase steadily with age. Only 1% of boys aged 10–11 years reported wanting exposure in the past year, compared with 11% of boys aged 12–13 years, 26% of those aged 14–15 years, and 38% of those aged 16–17 years. Unwanted exposure followed a similar age-related pattern: 17% of boys aged 10–11 years reported unwanted exposure, as did 22% of those aged 12–13 years, 26% of those aged 14–15 years, and 30% of those aged 16–17 years. A more recent nationally representative US study analyzed data from 614 adolescents aged 14 to 18 years, who participated in the National Survey of Porn Use, Relationships, and Sexual Socialization. Results indicated that nearly 70% of youth reported that they had viewed pornography in their lifetime (Wright et al., 2020).

A more recent study on adolescent pornography use included 457 high school students (aged 13-18 years), with results indicating that 41% reported viewing pornography in the past year (Galper et al., 2024). Data for this study were collected in 2019. Among boys (n=183) in the study, 61.2% (n=112) reported viewing pornography in the past year.

Gay and Bisexual Prevalence, Frequency, and Duration

Few studies have been conducted to understand pornography use among those who self-identify as part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer+ (LGBQ+) community. In 2017, Lim and colleagues examined the potential risk factors associated with pornography-related characteristics (i.e., age of first viewing of pornography and frequency of pornography viewing) in 941 participants aged 15 to 29 years. Results indicated that characteristics of those who viewed pornography for the first time at a younger age were more likely to be male, have a higher education, have sexual intercourse at a younger age, and have mental health concerns. Replicating past research, they noted that individuals who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, queer, or other (LGBQQ+) were more likely to view pornography earlier (Luder et al., 2011; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). The review by Miller and colleagues (2020) indicated consistency in pornography use by gay and bisexual men. Specifically, they indicated that several studies found that over 90% of gay/bisexual men reported lifetime pornography use, over 98% of gay/bisexual men reported past 3-month use, and 57 – 81.6% of gay/bisexual men reported weekly use. In a more recent study of 258 US LGBTQ+ adolescents (13 – 17 years of age), 66% reported intentional viewing of pornography (Robb & Mann, 2023).

Associations of Pornography Use

In 2021, Grubbs and Kraus published a review article on the spectrum of effects from pornography, ranging from potentially negative, to neutral, and to positive. They organized the spectrum of impacts into relational, developmental, and those related to clinical science and mental health. Widely examined domains within pornography research include relationships with sexual behaviors and romantic relationships. A considerable body of work indicates that pornography use is related to the acquisition, activation, and application of sexual scripts (3AM), shaping expectations and behaviors within sexual contexts (Wright, 2011). The following paragraphs will review a broad range of research examining the relationship between pornography use and outcomes at the individual, relational, and societal levels.

Individual Level

Wright (2013b) explored the relationship between pornography use and number of sexual partners as well as condom use during sexual intercourse in a sample of 14,193 US men. Data for the study were gathered through a US national database (GSS) between 1973 and 2010. Results from the study indicated that pornography use was positively related to the number of sexual partners. Similar results have been found in adolescents, young adults, and women. Specifically, two US studies found that those who viewed pornography were 1.8 to 2 times more likely to have multiple sexual partners compared to those who did not use pornography (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Wingood et al., 2001). Interestingly, results from the 1973 to 2010 GSS indicated that unmarried men who used pornography were slightly more likely to use condoms than unmarried men who did not use pornography (Wright, 2013b).

More recent reports associate more consumption of pornography with decreased condom use among US adults engaging in penile-vaginal intercourse with casual partners (Wright, Herbenick, & Paul, 2021). Wright (2021) has also explored condom use patterns among 800 unmarried US adults between the ages of 18 – 24 years in more recent samples from the GSS (2008 – 2018). Participants were asked if they had viewed a pornographic movie in the past year and if they had used condoms during their last sexual encounter. Results from this study indicated that individuals who viewed pornography were more likely to engage in condomless sex than those who reported not using pornography, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or sensation-seeking characteristics. Similarly, a recent study of US college students found that men were more likely to be critical of condoms in pornography than women (Way, Gunawan, et al., 2025). Those who were more critical of condom use in pornography were more likely to engage in condomless casual ("hookup") sex and have more sexual partners. Relatedly, a Croatian study of adults (N=1005) found that the age of first exposure to pornography was related to sexual intercourse prior to age 16, condomless sex in most recent sexual intercourse, consistency of using condoms, sexual intercourse with someone other than your romantic partner, and sexual intercourse with a stranger (Sinković et al., 2013). Similarly, a longitudinal study found that viewing pornography at a younger age was associated with an increased number of sexual partners (Brown & L'Engle, 2009).

Another study that examined US college students found that viewing pornography more often was associated with more hookup partners (Braithwaite et al., 2015).A Swedish study that examined the data of 300 males (aged 16-24 years) who went to an outpatient clinic for family planning and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing found that nearly all participants (99%) reported having viewed pornography and 53% having felt pornography viewing impacted their sexual behavior (Tydén & Rogala, 2004). Of the 300 participants, 64% reported using some type of contraceptive, only 17% reported always using a condom, and 25% of participants had at least one STI.

Adolescent studies have also associated increased exposure to pornography with perceived realism of pornography, recreational attitudes toward sex, and sexual permissiveness (Lo & Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). A US longitudinal study of middle-school adolescents indicated that early exposure to pornography longitudinally related to having oral sex and sexual intercourse (Brown & L'Engle, 2009). In a cross-sectional study of 7548 Swiss adolescents between the ages of 16 – 20 years, males who viewed pornography were more likely to have engaged in condomless sex than their non-pornography-viewing counterparts (Luder et al., 2011). One study found that adolescents who viewed pornography were 1.8 times more likely to have multiple lifetime sexual partners and 2.8 times more likely to use alcohol or another substance in their last sexual experience (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009). In two Taiwanese adolescent studies (longitudinal and cross-sectional), researchers found that pornography use was associated with more casual sexual behavior (Cheng et al., 2014; Lo et al., 1999). Researchers have found similar results in Swedish high-school students (Mattebo et al., 2014). Altogether, a systematic review of 20 years (1995-2015) of research on adolescent pornography use associated pornography use with engagement in sexual intercourse, permissive sexual attitudes, and casual sex (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). A recent systematic review of adolescent pornography use associated pornography use with interest in engaging in sexual acts depicted in pornography, STIs, and having sex without a condom (Paulus et al., 2024).

Limited research has explored the potential neutral to positive correlates of pornography. Research has found that pornography can be educational in that it may inspire individuals, by suggesting new positions and sex acts (Mattebo et al., 2012). Within LGBTQ+ adolescents, pornography use has been identified as a private and nonjudgemental setting for them to explore their sexuality (Bőthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2019).

Relational Level

Sexually aggressive behavior refers to sexual behavior where one individual engages in sexual activity with someone who does not provide consent to engage in a behavior (Breiding et al., 2015). A meta-analysis of 22 studies found a significant association between pornography use and sexual aggression (Wright et al., 2016). Although the effects were stronger for verbal sexual aggression than physical sexual aggression, both associations were significant. Of note, a systematic review of 21 studies aimed at determining whether there was an association between pornography exposure and sexual offending in males found mixed results (Mellor & Duff, 2019). They noted that the impact of pornography on offending is not always negative but that it is complex, particularly due to issues related to defining pornography. Their results indicated that the non-sexual offending group often reported significantly more exposure to pornography in early life than those who did offend.

A study of US college students found that more frequent pornography exposure was associated with viewing pornography depicting sexual choking, which was associated with increased likelihood of engaging in sexual choking and a belief that sexual choking is safe, pleasurable, and a disbelief that sexual choking requires consent (Wright, Herbenick, et al., 2023). Relatedly, a qualitative study conducted in the United Kingdom, included 130 boys and girls (aged 16-18 years) explored the expectations, experiences, and circumstances of anal sex (Marston & Lewis, 2014). Using iterative thematic analysis, results demonstrated that male partners exhibited a lack of concern for pain experienced during sex by their partners and were more concerned with their pleasure rather than the feelings of the sexual partner. They also found that young men in the study reported a lack of concern for consent, specifically indicating they would ask for anal sex and if consent were not provided, they would engage in anal sex and tell the partner that they "slipped" while trying to engage in vaginal sex. The young men in the study reported pornography as an explanation for engaging in such sexual behaviors. Still, the authors indicate the relationship may be more complicated (e.g., peer pressure and belief that other people are engaging in sexual acts depicted in pornography).

Likewise, a systematic review of young people's sexuality in the age of pornography noted that there are many studies indicating correlations between young men engaging in aggressive sexual behavior and pornography viewing, but it is not possible to determine directionality and causality (Massey et al., 2021). Specifically, they posited it may be possible that individuals may have engaged in this behavior despite viewing pornography. It could be that the individual seeks out this pornography because they enjoy violent sex, rather than pornography impacting their sexual behavior. Recently, a longitudinal (11-month) Croatian study of male adolescents explored whether callousness or pornography use predicted sexual aggression (Štulhofer, 2021). Results indicated that callousness, but not pornography use, significantly predicted sexual aggressiveness. They also found that callousness moderated the association between pornography use and sexual aggression.

Researchers continue to explore the relationship between pornography use and sexual aggression. Recently, Wright and colleagues (2021) examined the relationship between pornography use and sexual aggression in a sample of 614 US adolescents (14 – 18 years of age). They found that youth who had viewed pornography were significantly more likely to engage in sexual aggression than those who had never viewed pornography. A systematic review noted that several studies have found that adolescents who viewed pornography were more likely to engage in and experience sexual aggression, as well as hold more stereotypical beliefs about gender roles (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). In sum, the scientific literature suggests that the relationship between engaging in sexual aggression and pornography viewing is more robust for boys/men than girls/women. In contrast, the relationship between sexual victimization and pornography viewing is more commonplace for girls/women than boys/men.

Given the higher rates of sexual aggression in men who view pornography and higher rates of sexual victimization in women, it is not surprising that several studies have found pornography is related to less progressive gender roles (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007, 2009; To et al., 2012). Bischmann and Richardson (2017) found that the earlier pornography was viewed, the more likely the males were to endorse "want[ing] power over women." Other studies investigating men and pornography use have found similar themes, indicating pornography portrays men as dominant over women and objectifies women (Gorman et al., 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Relatedly, a review of 130 studies found that pornography use is linked to greater sexual objectification (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019). A systematic review noted that pornography feeds into the hyper-sexualization of women and the hyper-masculinization of men (Massey et al., 2021). Other research has indicated that 46.3% of young women, compared to 23.3% of men, view pornography as degrading (Wallmyr & Welin, 2006). In contrast, most males (62.7%) described pornography as positive ("cool" and "exciting").

Considerable research has reported pornography use has important relationships with how heterosexual partnerships function. Specifically, research on male pornography use has indicated that pornography use is related to decreased relationship quality and sexual satisfaction, increased sexist ideologies, greater levels of infidelity, and greater relationship instability, as well as more avoidant and anxious attachment styles from the female partner (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019; Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014). Similarly, other research has noted that in relationships where the female partner perceives her male partner to be viewing pornography at higher rates, she will report decreased relationship satisfaction (Szymanski et al., 2015). Of note, a meta-analysis of 50 studies found that pornography use was related to lower interpersonal satisfaction (Wright et al., 2017). Regarding the impact on sexual relationships, one study found that pornography viewing by college men was associated with increased concern over sexual performance and body image, decreased pleasure in partner sexual experiences, and dependence on pornography to become sexually aroused (Sun et al., 2016).

Studies have found that those who viewed pornography were more likely to have negative communication with their partner and were more likely to engage in infidelity (Maddox et al., 2011). Other research has indicated that pornography use is associated with decreased commitment to romantic relationships (Lambert et al., 2012). Research regarding the relationship between pornography use by adolescents and its impact on sexual and romantic relationships is limited, as most of previous relationship and pornography research has focused on relationships between pornography viewing by heterosexual adult males and their female partners. A recent study by Wright and colleagues (2022), which used a US national dataset, found that youth who viewed pornography were significantly more likely to distance themselves from their partner and to report less sexual satisfaction than youth who had not viewed pornography. Other relevant research has found that boys who report viewing violent pornography are 2 – 3 times more likely to report sexual teen dating violence perpetration and victimization (i.e., being touched, kissed, or forced to have sexual intercourse), as well as physical teen dating violence (i.e., slammed into something, hit, or injured with something), compared to their non-pornography viewing counterparts (Rostad et al., 2019).

To date, most pornography use research has been primarily focused on the negative correlates of pornography. In contrast to previous research demonstrating associations between pornography use and sexual/relationship dissatisfaction, a study of over 3500 men found that pornography use frequency was not positively or negatively associated with men's subjective sexual and relationship satisfaction (Rowland et al., 2023). Additionally, results indicated that pornography use frequency was unrelated to erectile dysfunction. However, the authors note that they do not dismiss the possibility that heavy reliance on pornography, especially when paired with frequent masturbation, may pose a significant risk factor for diminished sexual performance during partnered sex and/or lower relationships satisfaction, particularly among vulnerable men. Other researchers have linked pornography to greater sexual closeness, and pornography may improve a couple's sexual intimacy by increasing sexual knowledge, enjoyment, and openness to sexual experiences (Kohut et al., 2018; Willoughby et al., 2019).

Importantly, a study of couples showed that men's pornography use is related to less frequency in sexual activity in heterosexual relationships but more frequent sexual activity in same-sex relationships, highlighting sexual orientation as a potentially important moderator of pornography effects (Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2017).

Societal Level

Compared to individual- and relationship-level research, studies examining macro-level effects of pornography remain limited, in part due to methodological challenges associated with longitudinal and causal research, including limited representative samples. As a result, societal-level claims about pornography often extend beyond the available evidence.

A central societal concern has been whether the availability of pornography is associated with broader social harms, particularly sexual violence and intimate partner violence (Ferguson & Hartley, 2022). While some have argued that pornography contributes to gender inequality and violence against women, population-level studies have generally not supported a simple causal relationship between increased pornography availability and increases in sexual violence. In several contexts, rates of sexual violence have remained stable or declined during periods of expanded access to pornography, suggesting that macro-level trends do not mirror concerns raised at the individual-level (Ferguson & Hartley, 2022). Importantly, these findings do not imply that pornography prevents violence, nor do they negate individual-level risks associated with certain content or contexts of use; rather, they underscore the importance of distinguishing between individual mechanisms and aggregate social patterns. At the same time, research commissioned by the UK Government Equalities Office reviewed research on the harmful attitudes and behaviors toward women related to pornography use (Upton et al., 2020).

Results from 19 scholarly articles included in the review indicated an association between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviors toward women, including viewing women as sex objects, shaping men's sexual expectations of women, acceptance of sexual aggression toward women, and perpetration of sexual aggression. However, the authors note that a causal link cannot be established.

Beyond violence-related outcomes, societal-level discussions of pornography increasingly intersect with debates about regulation, public health, and digital governance. These include the expansion of age-verification laws, concerns about privacy and surveillance, the place for pornography in sexual education programs, and the implications of platform-based and generative AI (artificial intelligence) content. Pornography is unique as it is a widespread form of media consumption and points to broader social debates about technology, sexuality, and regulation. As previously mentioned, Grubbs and Kraus (2021) noted that pornography use may theoretically have negative, neutral, and positive effects and that future research should explore the spectrum of impacts of pornography. They highlighted a review study of 650 articles that found a near absence of data on pornography and sexual education or positive sexual experiences (Litsou et al., 2021), which limits understanding possible positive correlates of pornography use (Grubbs & Kraus, 2021). Such limitations do not necessarily imply positive effects, only that such potential effects have not been thoroughly investigated. Accordingly, it is unknown whether or not pornography can indeed have consistent positive effects or if its effects simply range from neutral to negative.

Pornography Use, Including Problematic Pornography Use, and Mental Health Correlates

Most research on pornography use and mental health has focused on clinical samples of people with problematic use of pornography. In clinical settings, problematic pornography use (PPU) can fall under the diagnostic criteria of Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder (CSBD). CSBD was officially added to the International Classification of Disease ([ICD-11]; World Health Organization, 2019) in 2019 as an impulse control disorder, which could be adopted in jurisdictions as early as 2022 (Reed et al., 2022). CSBD is defined as a persistent pattern of failure to control intense and repetitive sexual impulses or urges, resulting in repetitive sexual behavior that generates marked distress or social-occupational impairment (Kraus et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2019). Individuals diagnosed with PPU often view pornography excessively, struggle to control their use, experience urges (i.e., cravings), use it for maladaptive coping, and experience social-occupational impairments due to excessive pornography use (Kraus et al., 2016, 2018; Reed et al., 2022; Wordecha et al., 2018). The current prevalence estimate of men above the clinical cutoff for CSBD using the Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder Scale (CSBD-19; Bőthe et al., 2020) is 8.17% across 42 countries (Bőthe et al., 2023). In comparison, the current prevalence estimate of men above the clinical cutoff for PPU using the Brief Pornography Screen (BPS; Kraus et al., 2020) is 28.92% (Bőthe et al., 2024). Regarding prevalence within the US, 17.04% of Americans were above the clinical cutoff for PPU using the BPS, with this estimate including men and women. Importantly, the BPS is a screening measure; therefore, prevalence estimates based on the BPS reflect possible PPU and highlight the percentage of men and Americans who endorse concerns related to their pornography use. Of note, results from the study indicated that across all countries, men scored the highest on measures of PPU, in comparison to gender-diverse individuals and women. Relatedly, a nationally representative US dataset of internet users found that 11% of men reported at least some feelings of addiction to pornography (Grubbs, Kraus, et al., 2019).

Of diagnostic importance, some people may view their pornography use as problematic despite non-problematic use. They may perceive their use as problematic because of personal, religious, or moral reasons or due to social factors/relationships, frequency of viewing, or viewing contexts (Floyd & Grubbs, 2022; Sniewski et al., 2018). Religiosity is a substantial factor in perceived PPU, as often those with greater religious commitment report increased feelings of compulsivity and shame related to their pornography use (De Jong & Cook, 2021; Grubbs & Perry, 2019). Many religious individuals report guilt or distress resulting from their pornography use and, as a result, may be more prone to perceiving their pornography use as problematic or addictive despite clinically non-problematic use (Borgogna et al., 2020). Misalignment of values and sexual behaviors may lead to increased personal pathologizing of sexual behavior (Grubbs et al., 2020), which may elicit anxiety and/or depression. Additionally, PPU should not be diagnosed based on the frequency of pornography viewing (Bőthe, Tóth-Király, et al., 2020). Specifically, researchers have found that many individuals can have high frequency viewing of pornography and not meet diagnostic criteria for PPU.

Regarding mental health comorbidities, PPU frequently co-occurs with many other psychiatric disorders, such as ADHD (Bőthe, Koós, et al., 2019), mood disorders (e.g., major depressive disorder (Shirk et al., 2021; Willoughby et al., 2019), insomnia (Shirk et al., 2021), impulsivity, anxiety (Hermand et al., 2020; Shirk et al., 2021), gambling disorder (Way, Jennings, et al., 2025), PTSD, online gaming problems, substance use disorders (e.g., alcohol), suicidality (McGraw et al., 2024), borderline personality disorder, and eating disorders (Hermand et al., 2020). Few studies have explored the relationship between pornography use and mental health in non-clinical samples (Perry, 2018). Studies that have examined the relationship have primarily focused on convenience samples (i.e., university students and adolescents).

In samples of university students, research has associated greater pornography use with depression (Grubbs et al., 2022; Willoughby et al., 2014), impulsivity (Carroll et al., 2008), decreased self-worth (Willoughby et al., 2014), body monitoring (Maas & Dewey, 2018), problematic alcohol use (Carroll et al., 2008; Harper & Hodgins, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2010; Willoughby et al., 2014), and problematic cannabis use, gambling, and video game use (Harper & Hodgins, 2016).

In a 2014 study of 792 US university students, pornography use by men was linked to risk-taking behaviors, specifically with substance use and binge drinking (Willoughby et al., 2014). Recently, Camilleri and colleagues (2021) examined the data of 1031 US university students. They gathered data on demographics, pornography use (e.g., age first used, last time used, frequency), the modified Compulsive Internet Scale (Downing et al., 2014), the Emotional and Sexual States Questionnaire (Downing et al., 2014), and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 2004). Results indicated that those who had ever viewed pornography had poorer mental health than those who had never viewed pornography (Camilleri et al., 2021). They found that the age of first exposure to pornography related to current anxiety and stress. They also found that the most recent time viewing pornography related to depression and stress, but not anxiety.

In a recent review of problematic use of the internet (PUI; including pornography), PUI was linked to depression, social anxiety, and sleep disorders (Pluhar et al., 2019). The authors also noted a link between PUI, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder. Other studies on pornography use and mental health in adolescents reported that those who viewed pornography were more likely to have lower self-esteem (Kim, 2011; Kim, 2001), lower self-efficacy (Kim, 2011), lower self-control (Holt et al., 2012), depression (Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), rule-breaking (Wolak et al., 2007), delinquency (Holt et al., 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), sensation seeking (Ševčíková et al., 2014), substance use (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005) including smoking and use of illegal drugs and alcohol (Kim, 2011), self-objectification (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013), body surveillance, sexual preoccupancy (To et al., 2012), and sexual dissatisfaction (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009).

Motivation for Pornography Use by Men

A subset of research on pornography use has been focused on why people report using pornography. A systematic review examined sexual and non-sexual factors that relate to use of internet-delivered pornography identified 134 studies (Grubbs, Wright, et al., 2019), ultimately concluding that self-centered, pleasure-seeking motives are a primary driver of pornography use. The authors concluded that personality characteristics and self-reported reasons for using pornography were implicated. Regarding personality characteristics, the authors found erotophilia (i.e., positive attitudes toward impersonal sex; e.g., pornography), sensation seeking, and narcissistic traits were linked to pornography use. Regarding self-reported reasons for pornography use, multiple studies identified sexual arousal, sexual enhancement, education, curiosity, information-seeking, intimacy in a relationship, coping (i.e., avoidance of dysphoric mood, mood management, stress relief, loneliness), and reducing/avoiding boredom.

Since the publication of the systematic review, a few notable studies have been published regarding motivations of using pornography. In a qualitative study of Romanian undergraduate students, researchers found that men and women reported watching pornography to learn about sex, improve sexual performance, enhance mood, and fulfill sexual desire (Burtăverde et al., 2021). In an Israeli sample of 284 men and women, male participants were more motivated to view pornography for anonymous fantasizing and sexual pleasure than female participants (Bolshinsky & Gelkopf, 2019). In contrast, female participants were more likely to be motivated to view pornography to enhance offline sexuality (i.e., sexual performance) than male participants. They also found that those with more symptoms of PPU were more likely to report using pornography to regulate their mood.

Relatedly, in three separate Hungarian samples, researchers found that sexual pleasure, sexual curiosity, emotional distraction/suppression, fantasy, stress reduction, lack of sexual satisfaction, boredom avoidance, and self-exploration were the most common motivations for pornography use (Bőthe et al., 2021). Regarding adolescents, they often report using pornography for sex education, curiosity, sexual arousal, entertainment, and "social intercourse" (i.e., watching pornography because peers are watching it; Massey et al., 2021; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

Research in LGBQ+ samples have similar findings with the addition of viewing pornography for sexual identity exploration and determining their readiness for sex (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Bőthe, Vaillancourt-Morel, et al., 2019). A recent systematic review revealed that LGBT adolescents more frequently engage with pornography compared to their heterosexual counterparts, often utilizing pornography as a means to explore sexual activity and solidify their sexual identity (Paulus et al., 2024). The authors highlighted the absence of adequate sex education for LGBT adolescents both in educational institutions and at home as a contributing factor to the increased prevalence of pornography consumption within this demographic.

Within American samples, similar findings are noted. Specifically, a study using data collected in 2017 from 169 American men (Mage=36.22, SD=10.07) found that frequency of pornography use by men was motivated by being sexually motivated, having time, and experiencing feelings of sadness (Esplin et al., 2021). The same study found that duration of pornography use was motivated by sexual motivation, having the opportunity to view pornography, being tired, getting back at their partner, and feeling sad. Lastly, results also indicated men were motivated to seek out pornography when sexually aroused, having the opportunity, and feeling tired, sad, or curious.

Similar findings were noted in a study of 556 adult men, who reported viewing pornography for the following reasons: sexual arousal (69.5%), sexual excitement for masturbation (81.6%), sexual relief (55.3%), entertainment (44.5%), curiosity about different sexual acts (31.6%), use with a partner in a sexual context (30.7%), sexual technique/information/ideas (28.2%), partner unwilling/unable (32.0%), and sexual education (15.5%) (Solano et al., 2020). Despite many studies indicating pornography use as a source of education, a recent study using a nationally representative US sample of 1266 individuals between the ages of 14 to 24 years found that only 8.4% of adolescents (14-17 years of age) and 24.5% of young adults (18-24 years of age) indicated pornography was helpful for sex education (Rothman et al., 2021). More recently, a study using data from the International Sex Survey assessed the Pornography Use Motivations Scale among 75,117 participants in 42 countries (Koós et al., 2025). Results indicated the most frequent motivation for pornography use was sexual pleasure, followed by sexual exploration.

Changes in Pornography Use Across the Lifespan of Boys and Men

We aimed to identify studies exploring changes in pornography throughout an individual's lifespan. However, as mentioned, there is limited longitudinal pornography research, and much research has focused on adolescents, likely due to public health concern of the potential impact of pornography on children/adolescents (Grubbs & Kraus, 2021), thus significantly limiting our understanding of changes in pornography across an individual's lifespan. Given the limited longitudinal studies and research specific to changes in pornography use over time, we have summarized findings from longitudinal research and relevant cross-sectional research that has explored pornography changes across the lifespan, as well as studies providing typologies of pornography users. Not all longitudinal studies are related to changes in pornography use, rather most focus on the potential impact of changes in pornography use frequency.

Longitudinal Studies

Recently, a systematic review was conducted to identify longitudinal studies that examined pornography use in adolescents (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2025). The review identified 44 longitudinal studies that were primarily conducted in Europe, only 4 of the 44 studies having been conducted in the US (Hennessy et al., 2009; Mubasshera, 2024; Waterman et al., 2022; Ybarra et al., 2011). The systematic review identified several themes in the longitudinal adolescent pornography literature including sexual behaviors, risky sexual behaviors, sexual satisfaction, permissiveness, sexual aggressiveness, academic achievement, COVID-19, religiosity, and mental health/well-being (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2025).

The US studies fell into the sexual behavior (Hennessy et al., 2009), sexual aggressiveness (Waterman et al., 2022; Ybarra et al., 2011), and risky sexual behavior (Mubasshera, 2024) themes. The study by Hennessy and colleagues (2009) examined 506 adolescents between the ages of 14 to 16 years. They found that sexual behaviors followed a linear trajectory, but sexual media did not follow the same linear course.Rather than increasing uniformly, exposure shifted differently across racial and ethnic groups. Results indicated that for Hispanic and Black adolescents, their exposure to sexual media decreased with age. Interestingly, increases in exposure were closely tied to increases in sexual behavior for White adolescents, whereas this linkage was minimal or absent among Black adolescents.

Regarding sexual aggressiveness, a longitudinal study of 2,539 adolescents between the grades of 7 to 10 with a mean age of 13.7 years at Wave 1 examined the relationship between pornography viewing and sexual harassment and sexual assault perpetration (Waterman et al., 2022). Results indicated that adolescents who viewed pornography in the past 6 months had 2-3 times greater odds of subsequently perpetrating sexual harassment compared to those who had not viewed pornography. Relatedly, adolescents who had perpetrated sexual harassment had over 3 times greater odds of subsequently viewing pornography than adolescents who had not engaged in harassment. Regarding sexual assault perpetration, adolescents who had viewed pornography in the past 6 months had 4.2 to 14.4 times greater odds of subsequently perpetrating sexual assault than those who had not viewed pornography. Conversely, there was no significant pathway from sexual assault perpetration to later pornography viewing. Of note, the current study collected 5 waves of data over 3 years (Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019, and Fall 2019). The percentages of students viewing pornography were 15.7, 17.6, 21.0, 24.8, and 29.0, respectively, across data collection points. This demonstrates a steady increase in the number of students viewing pornography. The other longitudinal study identified in the review found that repeated intentional exposure to violent X-rated material was associated with a nearly 6-fold increase in odds of self-reported sexually aggressive behavior, whereas non-violent material was not associated with sexually aggressive behavior (Ybarra et al., 2011).

Lastly, a recent nationally representative longitudinal US study published in 2024 examined the relationship between pornography viewing and risky sexual behavior among 3,290 participants aged 13 to 23 years (Mubasshera, 2024). Results indicated that moderate and frequent pornography use increased the likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex and having multiple sexual partners. Of note, data from this study were from 2002 to 2008.

Again, longitudinal pornography research is rare. While there are a few US adult longitudinal studies, similar to the adolescent longitudinal studies, they primarily focus on negative correlates of pornography use. Results from US longitudinal studies have indicated that pornography use was associated with a nearly sevenfold increase in the odds of having engaged in casual sex in individuals who were unhappy, but pornography use was unrelated to casual sexual behavior in happy individuals (Wright, 2012). Other research has indicated a positive relationship between pornography use and sexual permissiveness in liberal individuals, but not in conservative ones (Wright, 2013a, 2022). Lastly, another longitudinal study found that using pornography approximately doubled the likelihood of divorce in couples (Perry & Schleifer, 2018). It is worth noting all four longitudinal studies used nationally representative data from the GSS; however, the variable to assess pornography use asked if participants had viewed an X-rated movie in the past year. The most recent US nationally representative longitudinal study of pornography was published in 2022 in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (Grubbs et al., 2022). The researchers gathered data in 2019 and at several points in 2020. Despite popular pornography websites making premium content free during the pandemic, results indicated that in general pornography use and PPU decreased or remained consistent throughout the pandemic.

Relevant Cross-sectional Studies

Few studies have explored pornography use across the lifespan. However, studies that are cross-sectional, have limited generalizability, and may be biased by limitations in accurate recall. Researchers have generally found that pornography use decreases with age. Specifically, a study that used US nationally representative data collected annually from 1973 to 2012 found that young adults (18-26 years old) were more than two times as likely to report using pornography than older adults (45-54 years old; Price et al., 2016). Their findings suggest that changes in pornography use over time may be smaller than expected. Notably, they found that an increase in pornography use is primarily driven by more recent cohorts, beginning in the 1980s. They suggest that a likely explanation for the increase is the internet, as children born after 1980 were the first generation to grow up with access to the internet in adolescence. However, other more recent non-US research has suggested that older adults use the internet for pornography at comparably or at higher rates than younger individuals (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2021; Ševčíková, Blinka, et al., 2021; Ševčíková, Vašek, et al., 2021). One US study noted that the prevalence of PPU tends to decrease with age (Grubbs, Kraus, et al., 2019); however, non-US studies have noted that the prevalence of PPU may increase, especially because of potential risk factors associated with aging (e.g., boredom; Ševčíková, Blinka, et al., 2021). Relatedly, research has suggested that motives for pornography use change across the lifespan. Specifically, a review found that early pornography use is typically driven by social and educational motives, whereas pleasure seeking and sexuality enhancement become increasingly more prominent from adolescence onward, with anonymity and accessibility remaining influential across the lifespan (Castro-Calvo et al., 2018).

Typologies of People who Use Pornography

Given limited longitudinal research, we also summarize relevant papers that have examined cross-sectionally the typologies of people who use pornography in manners that provide information into pornography use over time. A study by Willoughby and colleagues (2018) highlighted that current pornography research is often static (assessing one point in time) and does not consider changes in pornography use across the lifespan. Therefore, they aimed to fill this gap by exploring pornography trajectories in 908 US adults (61.8% women; Mage=32.08, SD=10.29, Range=18-72) by employing retrospective questions assessing pornography use. Participants were asked two questions to assess their current frequency of viewing pornography ("Have you viewed pornography in the last 12 months?" and "How often do you typically view pornography?"). To determine pornography usage over time, researchers asked the participants if they had viewed pornography during each year of their life (yes/no) beginning at age 7 until their current age. Additional questions were asked about sexual intercourse in the past 12 months, number of committed relationships in the past four years, depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; Radloff, 1977), life satisfaction (Satisfaction with Life; Diener et al., 1985), and dysfunctional pornography use (Sexual Compulsivity Scale; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995). Willoughby and colleagues (2018) conducted two latent class analyses (LCAs) to examine the data from: 1) childhood through adolescence (7 to 20 years of age) and 2) childhood through emerging adulthood (7 to 30 years of age). They explored two separate models because adolescence is a distinct developmental period, where sexual behavior is a key determinant of health, and some participants were in their 20s when data collection occurred.

In the childhood through adolescence (7 to 20 years of age) LCA, they found a four-class solution best fit the data (Willoughby et al., 2018). The first group, labeled Early Engagers, began viewing pornography before 10 years of age and reported consistent yearly pornography use. The second group, labeled Pubescent Engagers, began viewing pornography by 14 years of age and continued to view pornography. The third group, labeled Late Engagers, began viewing pornography by 16 years of age and continued to view pornography. The last group, labeled Abstainers, had low engagement in viewing pornography (10-20% likelihood of using pornography in any given year). The demographics were compared between each group. Specifically, results indicated men were more likely to be in the Early Engager and Pubescent Engager class, whereas women were more likely to be in the Abstainer class. Regarding relationship status, those who were currently married were more likely to be in the Late Engager or Abstainer classes. In terms of religiosity, those who were more religious were more likely to be in the Abstainer rather than the Pubescent Engager class. Lastly, there were significant differences in age between the classes. Specifically, those in the Abstainer class (*M*=35.35 years, *SD*=11.57) were older than those in the Early Engager (*M*=32.30 years, *SD*=10.52), Pubescent Engager (*M*=30.03 years, *SD*=8.53), and Late Engager (*M*=30.10 years, *SD*=9.19) classes. Notably, Early Engagers were also significantly older than the Pubescent Engager and Late Engager classes. Regarding current pornography use frequency, the Abstainer class had the lowest pornography use and the Early Engager class had the highest pornography use. Additionally, the Abstainer class reported significantly less dysfunctional pornography use than the Early Engager and the Pubescent Engager classes. There were no differences between groups in ratings of depression. Notably, once multiple measures (age, gender, race, relationship status, parent's marital status, impulsivity, and religiosity) were entered as controls, there were no longer significant differences for dysfunctional pornography use, but significant differences remained for pornography use frequency.

In the LCA examining childhood through emerging adulthood (7 to 30 years of age), the authors found that a three-class solution best fit the data (Willoughby et al., 2018). The first group, labelled Engager, demonstrated early engagement (~8-11 years old) with pornography that continued throughout adulthood. The second group, labelled Experimenter, often began viewing pornography between 8-11 years old and continued to use it throughout emerging adulthood, but then began to decrease use in their mid to late 20s. The third group, labelled Abstainers, had low engagement with pornography (~15-20% likelihood of engagement with pornography in any year through their 20s). Regarding demographic differences, men were more likely to be in the Engager class and women were more likely to be in the Abstainer or Experimenter class. In terms of relationship status, those who were dating were more likely to be in the Experimenter class. Regarding age, those in the Abstainer (M=35.60 years, SD=11.95) and Engager (M=36.71 years, SD=7.91) classes were significantly older than those in Experimenter (M=24.39 years, SD=10.94) class. Similar to the four-class solution, those who were more religious were more likely to be in the Abstainer class. Likewise, the Abstainer class currently used significantly less pornography than the Engager and Experimenter classes. There were no significant differences in depression ratings. To determine if recalling behavior from longer duration (those older) might have created inconsistencies, the researchers split the sample into two age groups: 1) those between the ages of 20-40 and 2) those who were older than 40. Using latent class modeling with the two separate groups they found the same four and three class solution for both groups, respectively, thus providing further support for the results.

Other profile analyses have been conducted, such as a study by Bőthe, Tóth-Király, et al. (2020). Using latent profile analysis (LPA) they identified three different profiles of people who use pornography with the indicators of frequency of pornography use and PPU using three different Hungarian community datasets collected in 2017 and 2018. Participants were at least 18 years of age and reported viewing pornography at least once in the past 6 months. All three samples identified three profiles: 1) Nonproblematic Low-Frequency Pornography Use, 2) Nonproblematic High-Frequency Pornography Use, and 3) Problematic High-Frequency Use.

The Nonproblematic Low-Frequency Pornography Use (~68-73% of the three samples) included individuals who did not view pornography regularly and did not experience PPU. The Nonproblematic High-Frequency Pornography Use (~19-29% of the three samples) included individuals who viewed pornography frequently, but this group did not experience PPU. The Problematic High-Frequency Use (~3-8% of the three samples) included individuals who viewed pornography similarly to the second group, but this group did experience PPU. In contrast to past research, the current study did not find that LGBTQ individuals, younger individuals, single individuals, and those who were employed or a student used more pornography than others. Results indicated significantly higher symptoms of depression in the Problematic High-Frequency Use group compared to the Nonproblematic High-Frequency group.

Another study that identified clusters of people using pornography explored the role of impaired control in a help-seeking for PPU male sample in China (Chen et al., 2021). Results indicated a three-model class best fit the data: 1) Self-Perceived PPU (lowest level of impaired control and PPU, but highest moral incongruence levels), 2) Impaired Control (higher impaired control, average PPU levels, and lowest moral incongruence), and 3) PPU (highest levels of impaired control and PPU, as well as higher moral incongruence levels).

A recent LPA explored the Moral Incongruence Model of Pornography Use in a large international study (Bőthe et al., 2025). Bőthe and colleagues (2025) identified six profiles of people who use pornography. Specifically, P1 included those with minimal risk of PPU and without moral disapproval, P2 included those with minimal risk of PPU and some moral disapproval, P3 included those with low risk of PPU and no moral disapproval, P4 included those with low risk of PPU and some moral disapproval, P5 included those with increased risk of PPU without moral disapproval, and P6 included those with increased risk of PPU with some moral disapproval. The researchers compared the increased risk of PPU profiles (P5 and P6) to the minimal/low risk of PPU profiles (P1 – 4) and found that those in the increased risk profiles viewed pornography for the first time at a younger age than those in minimal/low risk profile.

Most recently, an LPA explored the indicators of age at first pornography use and age when beginning regular viewing of pornography among a sample of over 1300 US adults (Way et al., 2026). Results identified three profiles: 1) Early Engagers, 2) Casual Engagers, and 3) Late Engagers. The Early Engager profile was the youngest profile, saw pornography for the first time and began regularly viewing pornography the earliest in life, and had the highest frequency and longest duration of pornography use. The Casual Engagers had a moderate pornography use onset, low frequency and duration of pornography use, and high religiosity, possibly representative of a moral incongruence profile. The Late Engagers were the oldest profile, began regularly viewing pornography the latest in life, had a high duration and frequency of pornography use. Interestingly, the Early Engager and Late Engager profiles did not differ significantly in their age of first seeing pornography but did differ significantly in their age of regular viewing pornography. The Early Engagers also endorsed significantly more PPU, depression, anxiety, suicidality, alcohol use disorder, cannabis use disorder, and gambling use disorder symptoms than the Late Engagers. These results may suggest that the age of first seeing pornography is not as critical as the age when individuals intentionally begin regularly viewing pornography.

Current Approaches and Policies to Regulate Pornography Use

As discussed, many youths (<18 years old) living in the US view pornography intentionally or unintentionally (Massey et al., 2021), and pornography viewing has been related to implications for sexual behavior (i.e., risky sexual behavior (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Wingood et al., 2001; Wright, 2013b, 2021; Wright, Paul, et al., 2021), sexual aggression (Foubert et al., 2011; Maas & Dewey, 2018; Marston & Lewis, 2014; Massey et al., 2021; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Wright, Herbenick, Paul, et al., 2021), romantic relationships (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Gorman et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2012; Massey et al., 2021; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Sun et al., 2016; Szymanski et al., 2015; Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014; To et al., 2012; Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2020; Willoughby & Leonhardt, 2018), and mental health (Borgogna et al., 2020; De Jong & Cook, 2021; Grubbs et al., 2020; Grubbs & Perry, 2019; Sniewski et al., 2018), especially in adolescents (Paulus et al., 2024). Given the potential negative implications and easy access to pornography, there is motivation to find solutions to regulate online pornography. As daily activities continue to move more towards a digital space, new solutions have had to be created, such as age verification (Sharpe & Mead, 2021). Age verification is widely used for purchasing products such as alcohol, tobacco, and weapons, as well as engaging in gambling and accessing specific content on social media. Within social media, age-gating and content-filtering features have been put in place to comply with child safety regulations and advertising standards (Marsden, 2023). In theory, these shifts in online age verification are comparable to those applied in the physical world.

Two relevant and recent bills in the US are the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) and the Shielding Children's Retina from Egregious Exposure on the Net Act (SCREEN). KOSA is broader than the SCREEN Act.

KOSA is pending before Congress and would require online platforms "likely to be used by minors" to design their services in ways that mitigate risks to children's well-being, including mental health concerns (i.e., eating disorder, substance use disorders, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and suicidal behaviors), compulsive use, physical violence, online harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse of minors, distribution of substances, use for gambling, and financial harms (KOSA, 2025). It establishes a "duty of care" requiring platforms to act in minors' best interests. It mandates default high-privacy settings for individuals under 17 years of age and requires tools that allow minors and parents to manage recommendations, interactions, and safety features. KOSA also introduces transparency and auditing requirements so that regulators and families can better understand how platforms may impact youth.

SCREEN is narrower than KOSA, as it is a pornography-specific bill focused on implementing age verification to prevent minors from accessing pornographic content (SCREEN Act, 2025). The acceptable methods for age verification proposed in SCREEN are government-issued IDs, third party verification, and biometric or digital ID verification. This bill was introduced to the U.S. Senate in February 2025. Although the bills differ, KOSA is focused on regulating how platforms operate to protect minors from online harms broadly, while the SCREEN Act regulates who can access pornography by requiring strict age verification. Together these bills reflect a broader regulatory shift toward online child protection.

Given the lack of passed US national legislation surrounding access to pornography use, many states have begun passing age verification legislation at the state level (Way & Kraus, 2024). Notably, Louisiana was the first state to pass legislation, which occurred in January 2023 (Louisiana State Legislature, 2022). The law in Louisiana requires that sites including at least 1/3 pornographic content require age verification. This law was a major shift in the US, as most states were still using the easily circumvented honor system of an individual providing a birthdate or checking a box to indicate they are 18 or older (Marsden, 2023). As of December 2025, 25 states have passed age verification laws and eight states have bills pending (Free Speech Coalition, 2025).

Although the laws are different in each state, in general, most laws require commercial platforms hosting adult content (i.e., pornography websites) to apply “reasonable” age verification measures (Murray et al., 2025). These measures include government-issued ID checks, third-party verification services, or biometric scans. The legal rationale centers on protecting children, paralleling existing restrictions on age-restricted activities such as gambling and alcohol.

As a result of age verification legislation, many reputable pornographic websites have stopped providing access in these states citing a concern over user privacy, legal liability, and data security. As of August 2025, Pornhub, one of the most widely used pornography websites, has blocked access to users in 22 states (Pornhub, 2025). Pornhub states that age verification creates a substantial risk for identity theft, data breaches, and opportunities for exploitation and extortion through phishing attempts or fake age verification processes. Pornhub indicates they are in favor of age verification, as it “can make the internet a safer space for everyone, when it is done right.” However, they indicate the current laws put user privacy at risk. Pornhub and other pornography websites report taking extensive steps to protect creators and content users to ensure they are not engaging with potentially dangerous content (e.g., underage, rape, etc.) (Pornhub, n.d.). Despite age verification legislation leading to some pornography websites, such as Pornhub, to remove access in states, this has not resulted in a decrease in pornography use in these states; rather, it has driven traffic toward VPNs or accessing content from sites that fall outside the US legislation that may not undergo the safety measures that sites such as Pornhub do (Pornhub, 2025).

Pornhub creators report that they do not want children accessing their content (SWCEO, 2024). They indicate morally, but also financially, there is no benefit from having individuals under 18 accessing their content. However, Pornhub further states that they want to protect the safety and privacy of their users (Pornhub, 2025). Pornhub suggests that a device-based solution would protect minors and adults. Specifically, device-based age verification would involve a one-time process confirming that a device is used by an individual over the age of 18.

Age verification would occur at the operating system level (e.g., via an Apple ID, Google, or Microsoft account), rather than through age-restricted websites. As a result, websites or third-party vendors would not collect sensitive data. Age-verified devices would take the responsibility away from the sites and would not require the collection of personally identifiable information (PII) through the site or a third party.

Aligned with the concerns raised by Pornhub, Murray and colleagues (2025) published an article exploring the cyber risk, privacy, and legal complexities of US age verification, underscoring the security liabilities and technical weaknesses in current verification systems. Similar to Pornhub, Murray and colleagues report that age verification may generate cyber risks for the sites and the consumers that submit PII. They further explain that state laws provide "vague or insufficient guidance regarding data storage, retention, disposal, and breach notification, leaving open significant questions about who is responsible for protecting this sensitive information." Also discussed in the article is the lack of uniformity in definitions in what constitutes adult content across states and the vague as well as broad definitions that exist in some states, such as Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act (Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act, 2024). Georgia's Act could encompass a large variety of digital content beyond pornography, including sex education materials. In this way, some of the legislation may reach beyond child safety measures and potentially generate harm by misclassifying educational or artistic content. In June 2025, a federal judge ruled the law infringed on free speech and granted a preliminary injunction, thus blocking the law (Amy, 2025).

Other critics have argued that age verification may violate First Amendment rights by restricting lawful access to protected content, cause increased risk, as well as cause privacy concerns, especially related to the collection and storage of PII (Murray et al., 2025).

Similarly, as highlighted by Pornhub, Murray and colleagues indicate that pornography viewers may avoid age verification and shift to “obscure or overseas-hosted sites that use insecure HTTP protocols or evade regulatory scrutiny,” thus increasing risk to adults and minors to being exposed to malware, malvertising, or dark web content. Regarding privacy concerns, many state laws do not provide guidance into the length of retaining PII, as well as if it could be monetized before deletion. Regarding the use of third-party age verification vendors, critics highlight the lack of cybersecurity and the potential for cybercriminals to target these vendors for extortion, especially given the stigma with use of pornography. The stigma and risk of storing PII has been highlighted by the Ashley Madison data breach in 2015 (Hern, 2015). Given the stigma of sex, and further pornography use in society, the data breach resulted in divorce, blackmail, job loss, and at least two suspected suicides (Lamont, 2016; Sharp, 2021). Although over 10 years ago, this data breach highlights the potential risks of pornography websites managing and collecting highly sensitive and potentially stigmatizing data on its users.

Murray and colleagues also evaluated emerging identification-, biometric-, and attribute-based verification approaches and outlined policy recommendations designed to protect user privacy amid increasing regulatory pressures. Identification-based verification verifies age through financial instruments, such as credit card data, or government-issued IDs, such as a driver’s license or military ID. Some states, such as Louisiana have created digital identification (Marsden, 2023); however, for most states, this approach requires that individuals upload a scanned ID. Critics of identification-based verification indicate uploading an ID is much more invasive than traditional in-person ID verification and the resulting PII data may be stored, providing opportunities for data breaches (Murray et al., 2025). Other critics indicate this form of age verification is likely to motivate people to use VPNs or unsecured and unregulated sites to avoid identification verification. Murray and colleagues indicate identification-based verification “carries the highest risk due to the sensitivity of the data collected, the involvement of external vendors, and the complexity of securing API (application programming interfaces)-based systems.”

Biometric verification often uses AI and facial recognition to estimate a user's age (Murray et al., 2025). Specifically, it analyzes facial proportions, skin texture, and face shape to determine an approximate age. The benefit of biometric verification is that it's designed not to retain PII; however, there is limited information regarding the storage, transmission, and deletion of the data. Additionally, drawbacks of this technology are the ethical concerns, regulatory compliance challenges, and the effectiveness. Specifically, biometric verification would result in children's faces being processed without parental consent, thus violating children protection regulation (van der Hof & Ouburg, 2022). Regarding the effectiveness, algorithmic inaccuracies have been noted, specifically difficulty estimating age based on race and gender, as well as differentiation between 17- and 18-year-olds (Murray et al., 2025). A study of over 10,000 facial images was processed through a commonly used biometric verification (Stardust et al., 2024). Results indicated racial, gender, and age bias. Specifically, White images had the highest accuracy, and Black images had the lowest accuracy. They found that Asian and "Other" racial categories demonstrated less accuracy than White images, but better than images of Black individuals. Within images of Black individuals, participants 26 years and older were generally misclassified as younger. Regarding age, generally younger individuals were estimated as older, at times 45 years older than their actual age. The results also demonstrated a gender and age bias, with lower accuracy for young males compared to young females. Specifically, results were more accurate for women in the 0-25 year age range. For men, the images received better accuracy in the 26–100-year age range. Murray and colleagues (2025) do not recommend biometric verification given the liability concerns, data classification risks, and error.

Lastly, attribute-based verification has individuals verify their age through a passcode-protected mobile application, such as Yivi (Van der Maelen, 2019). A benefit to this verification is that the data remain stored on the individual's personal device (Murray et al., 2025). Notably, this method of verification is supported by privacy advocates and major tech platforms (e.g., Meta, Pinterest), indicating this method meets legislative goals of preventing minors from accessing content, while maintaining privacy and user data.

Although data breach is still possible with this verification, the risk is lower. Specifically, the data breach would be limited to a single device and would only be possible in the case of device theft or social engineering attack. Attribute-based verification is already widely used, such as with ID.me. In contrast to the device verification recommended by Pornhub, Murray and colleagues recommend attribute-based verification, as it maintains privacy and legal regulations.

As mentioned, there is limited research into the effectiveness and impact of pornography age verification. A study from the UK found that over 45% of 16 and 17 year olds used a VPN or Tor browser to access pornography; additionally, nearly 23% knew of VPNs and Tor browsers, but had not used them (Thurman & Obster, 2021). Other research using Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey between June 2023 and September 2024 associated age verification with an 8.8% increase in anxiety among men, especially younger men (under 45 years of age) and racial/ethnic minorities (Guo & Peng, 2025). A recent qualitative study of 8 parents (aged 32-53) and 4 adolescents (aged 15 -17) explored the feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness of age verification (Turvey et al., 2024). Results indicated that generally participants were in favor of age verification but did not buy into the utility and effectiveness of preventing intentional viewing by minors, as well as expressed concern for user privacy and data security. One adolescent stated, "It'd be pretty easy to get around the face IDs if you really wanted to see something." Instead of age verification, participants reported preferring parenting to mitigate the harmful impacts of pornography on minors. Parents in the study highlighted a desire to have educational resources to aid in navigating pornography-related discussions. This view from parents is strengthened by a recent scoping review that underscored the support from parents to have sexually explicit material (SEM) literacy education (Zen et al., 2025). The review also examined resources available for parents to aid in providing SEM literacy and found several resources, but limited research conducted to provide evidence for their utility and a variety of depth in the information available, which may generate confusion for educators and parents. One program with evidence identified in the review was the Media Aware Parent (Scull et al., 2019; https://mediaawareparent.com/).

Researchers have recommended that SEM literacy initiatives offer coordinated resources for both educators and parents, ensuring consistent messaging between school-based instruction and learning at home.

A suggested method of pornography education involves developing and implementing programs that promote pornography literacy. These programs may be conceptualized as forms of harm reduction rooted in media literacy (Rothman et al., 2018). Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, create, and critically evaluate media; it is not a program to regulate amounts of media consumed. The overarching goal of media literacy is to provide individuals with the skills to critically evaluate media and to inform individuals of the potential risks of consuming media. Pornography literacy provides individuals with the skills to critically analyze the messages in pornography, understand the production context and limitations, and integrate the analysis into one's own sexual values, boundaries, and behavior.

In 2016, the pornography literacy curriculum was created by Rothman, Daley, and Alder (Rothman et al., 2020). The five-session curriculum was developed to provide youth access to evidence-based, non-judgmental information about sexuality, regardless of their prior exposure to pornography (Rothman et al., 2018, 2020). The program emphasized that traditional gender norms can be restrictive and may contribute to double standards that disproportionally affect girls and women and that consent is always essential. It also reinforced that healthy relationships never involve coercion or violence. Consistent with media-literacy principles, the goals were not to regulate pornography use or judge an individual's choices, but to equip them with critical-thinking tools to allow them to make informed decisions about sexual media that align with their own values. Results from 27 youths in the pilot program indicated that it was feasible, participants' pornography-related knowledge improved, and participants' pornography-related attitudes and behavioral intentions changed.

Specifically, at the end of the curriculum, participants were less likely to agree with "pornography is good way for young people to learn about sex, that pornography is harmless, that calling a girl "nasty" or "slut" during sex is something that everyone does, that most people like to be slapped, spanked, or have their hair pulled during sex, that a lot people think it is sexy when a girl cries, chokes, gags, or vomits during sex, and that watching pornography makes me want to try what I see."

Since 2016, Rothman and colleagues have created a nine-session curriculum titled, The Truth About Pornography: A Pornography Literacy Curriculum for High School Students Designed to Reduce Sexual and Dating Violence (Rothman et al., 2020). This program emphasizes improving understanding of pornography and sexual behavior, enhancing attitudes consistent with consent and nonaggression in relationships, and increasing awareness of the impact of the media on social norms. Specifically, the curriculum included: 1) a rationale for the course, 2) a history of obscenity regulations, 3) norms related to gender/sex/violence, 4) a pornography addiction debate and compulsive pornography use information, 5) forms of intimacy, 6) healthy flirting and boundary setting, 7) commercial sexual exploitation, 8) nonconsensual image sharing and sexting laws, and 9) tools to communicate with peers about pornography. Similar findings were also found for this program. Specifically, results indicated that participants improved their knowledge related to pornography and had changes in their attitudes and behavioral intentions related to pornography. Additionally, results indicated no adverse impacts; specifically, youth who had not viewed pornography prior to the program were not seeking out pornography during/after the program. Also, no youth reported distress related to the program content, and no youth disclosed any abuse/neglect throughout the program.

Since then, other programs have been created, such as PopPorn and Navigating Realities. PopPorn is provided to adults working with youth. The program has been demonstrated to increase staff knowledge and confidence in responding to pornography-related concerns and reduce sexual double standard attitudes linked to victim blaming (Maas et al., 2022).

Navigating Realities has three goals: 1) foster healthy relationships, 2) encourage critical thinking and media literacy, and 3) support responsible digital behavior (Balliet & Ford, 2025). Approaches beyond age verification and programs promoting pornography literacy have also been recommended, such as public health campaigns and health warnings for people who use pornography (Sharpe & Mead, 2021).

Gaps and Future Research Recommendations

Table 1 (p. 48) provides a list of gaps in the current pornography research in the five areas explored in this landscape scan: (1) prevalence rates, frequency, and duration of pornography use by US men, (2) associations of pornography use, including positive, negative, and neutral correlates of pornography use, (3) motivations for initiating and maintaining pornography use, (4) changes in pornography use across the lifespan, and (5) current approaches and policies aimed at regulating pornography use. The Table also provides recommendations for future research to aid in filling these gaps in the literature.

As previously discussed, many studies use different definitions and methods used to gather pornography use data, which may lead to significant differences in prevalence estimates (Paulus et al., 2024; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Therefore, we recommend that future research explore the meaning that participants attribute to terms and phrases used in pornography research to aid in having consistent and meaningful definitions and questions asked in future research. Additionally, as demonstrated above, researchers have noted that historically pornography has been assessed through self-report measures, which may promote biases, particularly underreporting due to social stigma. Therefore, one recent study used web-tracking data to examine pornography use (Martinez-Serra & Cardenal, 2025). Results from their study demonstrated that there are commonly used and popular pornography sites. Most users continue using their known site, rather than exploring unknown sites. Similar to previous research, this study also identified men as the primary users of pornography, but women are currently using more pornography than historically noted. Notably, researchers in this study found that web-tracking may have impacted participants' behaviors.

Future research should explore subjective (i.e., self-report) and objective (i.e., web-tracking) measures of pornography use across nationally representative and longitudinal datasets to obtain accurate measures of prevalence rates, frequencies, and durations of pornography use.

In terms of motivations, future research should further explore the reasons for viewing, continuing to view, and discontinuing pornography use. Additionally, it is recommended that research explore changes in motivations for viewing pornography across the lifespan of individuals. Relatedly, longitudinal research is needed to determine changes in pornography use prevalence, frequency, duration, content, and ways pornography is accessed across the lifespan. Additionally, qualitative research is recommended to explore the ways individuals view their pornography use changing over time and the impact (positive, negative, and neutral) of pornography throughout their lives. Relatedly, future research is recommended to understand differences between young people who view pornography and develop healthy sexualities and those who do not, specifically identifying protective factors that support healthy sexual development. Also, as recommended by Grubbs and Kraus (2021), research is needed to examine the positive, negative, and neutral impacts of pornography within developmental, relationship, and mental health contexts.

Given recent age verification legislation and enactments, research is needed to understand the impact of age verification on consumers across all ages (children to elderly) and creators. Relatedly, research is needed to explore the effectiveness and drawbacks of the various types of age verification as well as to compare age verification to pornography literacy programs and differences in areas with and without age verification. Additional research is needed to explore the effectiveness of pornography literacy programs, especially in terms of sexual health knowledge, consent, perceived realism of pornography, and potential impacts of pornography. Regarding pornography literacy programs, research is needed to determine the barriers to implementing such programs into educational systems.

Given the barriers to implementing pornography literacy in the formal education system, research should also identify alternative avenues for pornography literacy dissemination (e.g., community settings, media, etc.).

Conclusion

Recent evidence indicates that pornography websites are among the most heavily trafficked sites on the internet, exceeding or matching visits to other widely used platforms, such as TikTok, ChatGPT, and Netflix (Wright, Tokunaga, et al., 2023). Pornography use is especially common among boys and men, with higher rates in younger age groups. Pornography use has negative, neutral, and positive correlates. Although past research has largely emphasized risk, such as associations between pornography use and risky sexual behavior, sexual aggression, less progressive gender roles, decreased relationship satisfaction and stability, and poorer mental health, emerging work highlights potential neutral to positive correlates, including sex education, enhanced sexual intimacy, and a place to explore sexuality. Motivations for viewing pornography are varied but often center on sexual motivation and coping. Although there is limited research on pornography use across the lifespan, existing evidence suggests use peaks in adolescence and early adulthood and declines thereafter. Given the high prevalence of use among young males (including boys) and the accessibility of internet pornography, numerous states have enacted age-verification laws that place compliance burdens on pornography platforms despite limited guidance on protecting PII. Current verification tools include identification-based, biometric-based, and attribute-based approaches. Based on research and literature, attribute-based and age-verified devices meet legal requirements, while carrying less risk than other verification methods. Moving forward, efforts should prioritize privacy-preserving verification approaches (i.e., attribute-based recognition and age-verified devices) alongside programs promoting pornography literacy and public health campaigns that equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate the pornography environment in healthier and more informed ways.

Table 1

Current gaps in pornography research in the five areas discussed in this landscape scan and suggestions for addressing gaps.

Current gaps	Future recommendations
Prevalence rates, frequencies, and durations of pornography use by US males.	
Definitions and terminology.	To aid in accurate identification, qualitative research determines the meaning that participants attribute to pornography phrases used in research to identify and create precise, consistent and accurate terms and phrases for use across pornography research.
Prevalence, frequency, and duration as determined by objective measures.	Quantitative research utilizing subjective (i.e., self-reports) and objective measures (i.e., web-tracking data, third-party applications, device-level) to aid in accurately identifying prevalence rates, frequencies, and durations of pornography use, utilizing diverse samples in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation.
Accurate nationally representative pornography-related measures regarding prevalence, frequency, duration, content, and ways accessed.	Cross-sectional and longitudinal research utilizing nationally representative samples to identify prevalence of pornography use, ways pornography is accessed (e.g., phone, tablet, VPN), types of pornography used (i.e., content), and sites used to access (e.g., Pornhub, Onlyfans, AI).
Prevalence, frequency, and duration of pornography use in marginalized groups of men and boys in the US.	As noted by past researchers (Griffin et al., 2021), there is a need for diverse and inclusive research in the sexual health field. Specifically, research determining the prevalence, frequency, and duration of pornography use across racial groups, religious and non-religious groups, rural populations, socioeconomic status, disability status, and sexualities.
Associations of pornography use, including positive, negative, and neutral correlates of pornography use	
Positive and neutral correlates of pornography use.	Explore the positive and neutral outcomes of pornography use as suggested by Grubbs and Kraus (2021), within developmental, relationship, and mental health contexts.
Negative correlates of pornography use.	Research should also continue exploring the negative correlates of pornography use as suggested by Grubbs and Kraus (2021), within developmental, relationship, and mental health contexts. Additionally, research exploring the impact of advertisements on pornography websites or on other forms of media (e.g., gaming, social media) that may promote unhealthy or problematic consumption patterns. Also, research exploring the way algorithms on pornography platforms shape content exposure trajectories and whether algorithmic nudges contribute to compulsive use. Relatedly, research exploring design elements of pornography websites impact on duration, frequency, and intensity of consumption.
Motivations for initiating and maintaining pornography use.	
Reasons for beginning viewing, continuing, and discontinuing pornography use.	Qualitative research exploring the reasons and the ways people first began viewing pornography and reasons they continued viewing or discontinued viewing.
Reasons for changes in motivation for viewing pornography.	Research exploring changes in motivations for viewing pornography over time (e.g., relationship status, access to partner, older age, disability status, technology, etc.).

Table 1 (cont.)

Changes in pornography use across the lifespan.	
Longitudinal research identifying changes in pornography use throughout the lifespan.	Longitudinal research using qualitative and/or quantitative measures that are both subjective (i.e., self-report) and objective (e.g., web-tracking data) exploring changes in pornography use, utilizing diverse samples (e.g., age, gender, race, religion, relationship status, access to partner, disability status, etc.).
Beliefs around why pornography use changed across lifespan.	Qualitative research identifying the way a person believes pornography use has changed, including frequency, duration, content, and ways accessed, throughout their life and if/what impact it has had on their lives.
Changes in sexual arousal/preference.	Examine mechanisms underlying tolerance-like processes (e.g., novelty seeking, desensitization, reward sensitivity) and explore the relationship to distress and impairment, as well as the impact on sexual behavior.
Differences in sexual development across the lifespan.	Research using qualitative and/or quantitative methods to determine differences between young people who view pornography and develop healthy sexualities and those who do not, specifically, identifying protective factors that support healthy sexual development.
Current approaches and policies aimed at regulating pornography use	
Impact of age verification on consumers.	Qualitative and quantitative research exploring the impacts (positive, negative, and neutral) of age verification in US states that have enacted such laws on viewers of pornography.
Impact of age verification on creators.	Research exploring the impacts of age verification on content creators.
Effectiveness of age verification.	Research exploring the effectiveness of the various age-verification options and comparing each to no age verification and programs promoting pornography literacy.
Effectiveness of programs promoting pornography literacy.	Research exploring the effectiveness of programs promoting pornography literacy, especially in terms of knowledge regarding sexual health, consent, perceived realism of pornography, potential impacts of pornography.
Barriers to implementing pornography literacy programs.	Research exploring the barriers to integrating programs promoting pornography literacy into educational systems.
Alternative avenues for pornography literacy programs.	Given the barriers to implementing in the formal education system, research should also identify alternative avenues for pornography literacy dissemination.

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