Thinking About Sex: Pornography and the Intuitive Mind

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Abstract

Most feminist discourse on the negative impacts of pornography focuses on how pornography impacts the behaviours and views of men. This paper offers an account of pornography that considers its impact on female viewers. Specifically, I discuss how pornography impacts the ways female consumers intuitively think about sex and their sexual roles. I argue that feminists should distance themselves from belief–desire models of action when accounting for certain sexual interactions since belief–desire explanations can be stigmatising. I deploy Elisabeth Camp's work on 'characterisations' and consequently call for investigations into how women characterise sex. I contend that pornographic material deploys certain representations which can construct patriarchal characterisations of sex in consumers. These characterisations then affect how women evaluatively, emotionally, judgmentally, and behaviourally respond to sex. I use Camp's concept of 'perspectivalism' to demonstrate how people adopt pornographic perspectives which come to construct their characterisations of sex.

1. Introduction

Most philosophical accounts that are critical of pornography describe the harm of pornography with reference to its impacts on the behaviours and views of male consumers. The typical argument is as follows: pornography is bad because it makes men act like X and women act like Y; men acting like X and women acting like Y is bad for women. Thus, pornography's 'badness' is that it entices men, and coerces

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women, into bad sexual scenarios. Often prominent feminist philosophers discuss this phenomenon in terms of beliefs and desires.[1] To these philosophers, pornography shapes the sexual desires and beliefs of the viewer, socialising them to act in certain ways during sex: men are socialised to act dominantly during sex and women are socialised to act submissively during sex. The assumption made by the socialisation argument is that women come to desire and believe in their sexual submission. My paper resists this argument, contending that sexual actions may have more to do with cognitive structures rather than beliefs and desires.

My work critiques traditional feminist belief–desire models of action as limiting feminists in their capacity to fully understand the extent to which pornography cognitively impacts consumers. I argue that feminists ought to look beyond how pornography alters the *conscious* beliefs and desires of women and look towards how pornography impacts how women *intuitively* think about sex, sexual relations, and their sexual role in a gendered society. Using the work of Elisabeth Camp, I contend that pornography deploys representations of sex that encourage consumers to view sex through certain 'characterisations',[2] thus impacting consumers' evaluative, emotional, judgmental, and behavioural responses towards sex, irrespective of their beliefs and desires. By adopting pornographic 'perspectives' of sex,[3] consumers adopt open-ended dispositions to interpret and form intuitive (and often associative) thoughts of sex that are pornographic. This paper, therefore, contends that sexuality may have less to do with the performance of sexual desire or engendering sexual beliefs and more to do with gendered construction and cognitive representation.

2. Pornography: What is it? Who Watches it?

The discussion on pornography and its social legitimacy has been a hot topic in feminist literature since the 1980s.[4] Feminists including Naomi Wolf, Germaine Greer, and Catherine MacKinnon have discussed pornography's role in women's understandings of sex by arguing that pornography shapes women's sexual desires through socialisation.[5] Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin notably argued against the distribution of pornography, contending that pornography subordinates

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[1] Dworkin, Andrea and Catharine A MacKinnon (1988) *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*, Organizing Against Pornography, 28–109.

[2] Camp, Elisabeth (2015) 'Logical Concepts and Associative Characterizations', in Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, eds, *The Conceptual Mind: New Directions in the Study of Concepts*, MIT Press.

[3] Camp, Elisabeth (2019) 'Perspectives and Frames in Pursuit of Ultimate Understanding', in Stephen R Grimm, ed, *Varieties of Understanding: New Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology and Theology*, 24–26.

[4] Fraiman, Susan (1995) 'Catharine MacKinnon and the Feminist Porn Debates', *American Quarterly* **47**, 743–46.

[5] Wolf, Naomi (2012) *Vagina: A New Biography*, Virago, 84–89; Greer, Germaine (2007) *The Whole Woman*, Black Swan; Dworkin and MacKinnon, 61.

women.[6] MacKinnon and Dworkin's work in the 1990s prominently grounded a feminist effort to regulate and scrutinise the pornography industry.[7]

Contemporary debates among feminists are usually concerned with whether pornography could be a useful tool for women's sexual liberation or whether it is an oppressive force, one which keeps women submissive and sexually subservient to men (as contended by, for example, MacKinnon and Dworkin).[8] Catarina Novaes's 'Pornography, Ideology, and Propaganda: Cutting Both Ways',[9] a paper in response to Nancy Bauer's *How to do Things with Pornography*,[10] is an example of feminist arguments from the former camp; Novaes argues that feminists ought to embrace visual pornography[11] and that they ought to advocate for female pornographic directors and producers to encourage sexual discourse to be more female-centred.[12] These philosophical debates usually do not extend beyond how pornography can be used as a shared social resource for good or bad, leaving the discussion of cognitive construction to psychologists. Dworkin and MacKinnon crafted a legal definition of pornography as

> the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women, whether in pictures or in words, that also includes one or more of the following (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities, or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped, or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures of sexual submission, servility or display, or (vi) women's body parts—including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks—are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts, or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature, or (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals, or (ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.[13]

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[6] Dworkin and MacKinnon, 28–109.

[7] Fraiman, 745–46.

[8] Fraiman, 745–46.

[9] Dutilh Novaes, Catarina (2018) 'Pornography, Ideology, and Propaganda: Cutting Both Ways', *European Journal of Philosophy* **26**.

[10] Bauer, Nancy (2015) *How to Do Things With Pornography*, Harvard University Press.

[11] Though erotica exists as an obvious example of non-visual pornography, this paper is solely focused on visual internet pornography that depicts the sexual role of the female participant as being submissive and objectified.

[12] Dutilh Novaes, 1422–24.

[13] MacKinnon, Catharine A (1986) 'Pornography: Not a Moral Issue', *Women's Studies International Forum* **9**, 63.

MacKinnon contends that pornography heavily influences both female and male sexuality; she argues that these sexualities are socially conditioned.[14] Men are socially conditioned to find the subordination of women to be sexy and women are socially conditioned to find aggressive male sexuality erotic: it is erotic to be sexually subordinated.[15] Both male and female sexual desires are constrained by the masculine point of view, or perspective, of sex, which is heavily influenced by pornography.[16] Male sexuality is thus an expression of power that enforces masculine perspectives of sexuality onto women. Female sexuality is, instead, a response to this expression of power, manifested in the eroticisation of their own sexual submission: women's expression of sexuality is thus obscured by pornography.[17]

Notable in MacKinnon and Dworkin's analysis is their emphasis on how pornography shapes the sexual desires of men and women through socialisation.[18] My paper diverges from the traditional radical feminist project as it aims to distinctly provide a conceptual foundation for discussing the cognitive effects of pornography on the thoughts, actions, and mental processes of people who consume it, without involving analyses of the sexual desires of consumers. By transcending belief–desire models, feminists can contend that sexuality is less to do with sexual desire and more to do with gendered construction and cognitive representation of sexuality, thus broadening the critique of pornography and patriarchal representation.

Content analysis of the most watched internet pornography reveals that over 88% of pornographic scenes involve acts of physical aggression, with 87% of the acts being committed against women, and 70% of the perpetrators being men.[19] Most pornographic videos have been found to 'typify patriarchal constructions of masculinity and femininity'.[20] Despite the existence of counterexamples (e.g., subsets of kink videos that depict subservient men and dominant women or homosexual pornography) the most watched pornographic videos depict heterosexual sex between a submissive woman and a dominating man;[21] this trend is congruous with MacKinnon's description.[22]

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[14] MacKinnon, 65–76.

[15] MacKinnon, 74–76.

[16] MacKinnon, 'Pornography: Not a Moral Issue', 74–76.

[17] Dworkin and MacKinnon, 47, 52, 84–87.

[18] Dworkin and MacKinnon, 32–87.

[19] Bridges, Ana J, *et al*, (2010) 'Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update', *Violence Against Women* **16**, 1065, 1076.

[20] Sun, Chyng, *et al*, (2014) 'Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* **45**, 984.

[21] Bridges, *et al*, 1065, 1076; Sun, *et al*, 983–92; Brown, Jane D and Kelly L L'Engle (2009) 'X-Rated', *Communication Research* **36**, 129–35.

[22] MacKinnon, 63.

As most studies focus on male pornography consumers,[23] with little empirical research done specifically on female viewers,[24] much of the philosophical literature discussing pornography relies on the idea that pornography harms women due to what it does *to* men and their sexual desires. The disproportionately low amount of philosophical work on the impacts of pornography on female consumers is concerning, as pornography has become increasingly more accessible and watched by women and girls.[25] Though there is an increasing number of women and girls accessing online pornographic material,[26] the issue has remained relatively untouched in contemporary philosophy, with few exceptions.[27] Thus, under the current model, the assumption is that pornography impacts women similarly to how it impacts men. That would mean that women sexually desire their own submission and lesser sexual place, just like men desire sexual domination. This assumption, I will demonstrate, stigmatises women's sexuality in ways that encourage patriarchal victim-blaming narratives.

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[23] Meta-analyses indicate that increased exposure to pornography is positively correlated with a higher likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviour (such as sex without the use of contraception, unprepared anal sex, and unprotected penetrative sex), endorsement of a sexual hierarchy featuring dominant men and submissive women, greater acceptance of sexual violence, endorsement of rape myths, and higher perpetration of sexual harassment and sexual violence among males: Sun, *et al*, 988–92; Braun-Courville, Debra K and Mary Rojas (2009) 'Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Sites and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors', *Journal of Adolescent Health* **45**, 160–61; Brown and L'Engle, 144–48; Peter, Jochen and Patti M Valkenburg (2006) 'Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material on the Internet', *Communication Research* **33**, 197–201; Häggström-Nordin, *et al*, (2006) '"It's Everywhere!" Young Swedish People's Thoughts and Reflections About Pornography', *Scandinavian Journal of Caring and Public Health Sciences* **20**, 391–92.

[24] Maas, Megan K and Shannamar Dewey (2018) 'Internet Pornography Use Among Collegiate Women: Gender Attitudes, Body Monitoring, and Sexual Behavior', *SAGE Open* **8**.

[25] Sabina, Chiara, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor (2008) 'The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth', *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **11**, 691, 693.

[26] Specifically for women and girls, pornography consumption is correlated with low self-esteem, increased insecurities related to sexual performance, higher rates of body monitoring, and riskier sexual behaviour: Stewart, Destin N and Dawn M Szymanski (2012) 'Young Adult Women's Reports of Their Male Romantic Partner's Pornography Use as a Correlate of Their Self-Esteem, Relationship Quality, and Sexual Satisfaction', *Sex Roles* **67**, 263–67; Maas and Dewey. The more pornography watched by a person, irrespective of gender, the more likely they are to believe that the pornographic material is reflective of real-world sexual interactions and the more likely they are to recreate what they see in pornography with real-life partners: Tsitsika, Artemis, *et al*, (2009) 'Adolescent Pornographic Internet Site Use: A Multivariate Regression Analysis of the Predictive Factors of Use and Psychosocial Implications', *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **12**, 546–49.

[27] Recent work by Jungyo Lee and Eleonore Neufeld discusses how violent 'gang-rape' pornography impacts beliefs held by female viewers: Lee, Junhyo and Eleanore Neufeld (2022) 'Pornography, Discourse, and Desires', paper under review.

3. Characterising Sex from Pornographic Perspectives: The Cognitive and Behavioural Impacts of Pornography

I will now criticise belief–desire models of action before subsequently discussing how human thoughts are often intuitive, thereby demonstrating that Camp's understanding of characterisations, associative thoughts, and perspectives facilitates a better account of discordant sexual behaviours in women than belief–desire models of action.[28] My aim here is to conceptually ground the following claim: sexuality in gendered societies is not just constituted by sexual beliefs and the performance of sexual desires; rather, there are cognitive thought mechanisms that entice certain sexual behaviours of people, irrespective of that person's held beliefs or desires. Making this claim is an important step in feminist conceptions of sexuality as it will broaden the implications of gendered construction and representation to the realm of cognition and action, demonstrating the interdependent relationship between social and cognitive construction.

3.1 Standard Belief–Desire Models of Intentional Action

In the standard Davidsonian model, action is explained by the combination of belief and desire.[29] This model asserts that action—as opposed to mere behaviour—is intentional, as there is a conceptual connection between the actions, desiderative profile, and beliefs of an agent.[30] Hence, given knowledge of two of those elements, one can infer the third. Consider the following cases of sexual interactions between women and their sexual partners, based on emerging data highlighting the impacts of pornography on the sexual experiences of women: [31]

1. A woman and her partner are having sex. During the act, her partner begins to pull her hair; she knows that this sexually excites her partner. She neither likes nor desires this act, to the point where it turns her off sexually. Irrespective of her personal feelings of desire towards hair pulling, she does not protest, resist, or vocalise any discomfort, she lets them pull her hair.

2. A woman and her husband are beginning to sexually experiment. Her husband expresses that he wants to try anal sex. She does not feel particularly excited by

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[28] Davidson, Donald (2001) *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford University Press, 3–20.

[29] Davidson, 6, 83–102.

[30] Davidson, 14–19, 83–102, 189–204.

[31] This data demonstrated that pornography consumption in women correlates with increased expectations of being hit, choked, and ejaculated on: Maas and Dewey, 'Internet Pornography'. Coerced and unwanted anal and performative oral sex are also common experiences for many women: Marston, C and R Lewis (2014) 'Anal Heterosex Among Young People and Implications for Health Promotion: A Qualitative Study in the UK', *BMJ Open* **4**. Most reported incidents of these kinds of coerced and unwanted sex are described as consensual by the women involved: Peterson, Zoe D and Charlene L Muehlenhard (2007) 'Conceptualizing the "Wantedness" of Women's Consensual and Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences: Implications for How Women Label Their Experiences With Rape', *Journal of Sex Research* **44**, 72–84.

the prospect yet does not want to deprive her husband sexually, so they try it. She doesn't like it and finds it uncomfortable, yet she continues because she believes her husband is enjoying the act.

3. A young woman and her boyfriend are beginning to be sexually active. During their sexual encounters, she allows her boyfriend to do whatever acts he wants and desires, as she enjoys his pleasure. Her desire for him to perform oral sex remains unspoken. She acts unbothered by her lack of orgasm and satisfaction.

These interactions can be described as *unwanted consensual sex* or *unacknowledged non-consensual sex*.[32] These are sexual acts that occur between parties who purport the acts are consensual, even if one or more participant(s) claim they neither wanted nor desired the act. In the first scenario, the woman's actions (not vocalising her dislike for hair-pulling) and her desires (not wanting her hair to be pulled) are known. In the second case, the woman's actions (continuing with uncomfortable anal sex) and her beliefs (that her husband is enjoying the sexual act) are known. In the third case, the young woman's actions (performing sexual acts to please her boyfriend) and her desires (wanting to receive oral sex) are known. According to the Davidsonian belief–desire model, the women in the cases above either (i) hold beliefs regarding the relatively lesser significance of their sexual pleasure and the prospective fulfilment of their desires, thus prioritising their partner's sexual pleasure over their own, or (ii) hold distorted desires and care more about their partner's pleasure than their own.

The belief–desire model available to philosophers would propose those two options as explanations for the sexual experiences described above. Thus, the assumption made by this model is that *bad sex* (that is, sex that emerges from gendered norms in which 'women cannot be equal agents of sexual pursuit, and in which men are entitled to gratification at all costs'),[33] is a function of the explicit beliefs and desires men and women come to hold living under patriarchy. The action of having bad sex is attributed to a combination of the desires and/or beliefs held by the individuals involved. The responsibility for the bad heterosexual sex thus belongs to both the man and the woman, even though she is disenfranchised by the interaction. Her actions become indicative of her desires or purported beliefs. In instances such as these, contending that the actions of women are conceptually connected to their beliefs and desires can facilitate stigmatisation, as the claim 'she acted like X and thus must have desired to act like X or believed that she wanted to act like X' would be justified even when she was disenfranchised by X.

Belief–desire theorists may hope to avoid stigmatisation in accounting for these behaviours and actions by arguing that the actions exhibited by these women are irrational, insofar as they do not promote the desired outcomes that each of these

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[32] Peterson and Muehlenhard, 'Consensual and Nonconsensual Sexual Experiences', 72–75.

[33] Angel, Katherine (2021) *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent*, Verso, 27.

women hold.[34] If the actions of these women are irrational, then we can see these actions as not being the product of women's strongest desires, given their beliefs. That is, the charge of irrationality blocks the inference from actions to one's strongest desire or assumed belief. A problem with arguing that the behaviours exhibited are irrational is that one could reasonably claim that a person is capable of desiring their partner's sexual satisfaction, even more so than their own. Thus, the fulfilment of their partner's sexual satisfaction would be the fulfilment of their desires.[35] In non-sexual contexts, this claim is uncontroversial. For example, person A may desire to do activity X, however, A's child, B, may desire to do activity Y. A and B then do Y, not because A prioritises B's desires over their own, but because A prioritises their own desire to see B happy over their desire to do X. As such, the claim of irrationality would only hold in contexts where one desires their sexual fulfilment more than their partner's sexual fulfilment but acts in a way that preferences their partner's sexual fulfilment over their own.

In the alternative to this failed defence, one could hold, as I do, that the Davidsonian model is incomplete or limited because there are more operative mechanisms to the human mind than just desires and beliefs. Desire has a mind-to-world direction of fit: the mind projects its desires towards the world.[36] Belief, on the other hand, has a world-to-mind direction of fit: the world is conceived and interpreted by the mind.[37] Belief–desire models conceptually divide the available space to account for human action. By accounting for other cognitive processes, we can frame sexual behaviours as complex processes that are not simply indicative of one's beliefs or desires. I will now explore this second option and focus on the effect associative/intuitive thoughts have on the sexual actions of these women and female pornography consumers in general.

3.2 Characterising Sex: Pornography and Thinking about Sex

One of the main underlying questions in this paper is how pornography encourages viewers to think about sex. That is, how does the interdependent relationship between

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[34] Bratman, Michael (1984) 'Two Faces of Intention', *Philosophical Review* **93**, 380–93.

[35] The fulfilment of sexual desire in some instances could be problematic and not indicative that the agent is having good and respectful sex. Amia Srinivasan discusses the conditioning of one's sexual desires, drawing on the case of a woman who desires to have sex with her father who began raping her as a child. As Srinivasan describes, 'her father made her into a creature who wanted it, and now, as an adult, can't stop wanting it—can't, that is, be free of him': Srinivasan, Amia (2021) 'What Does Fluffy Think?', *London Review of Books* **43**. The fulfilment of this woman's desire to have sex with her abusive father would not be an act that promoted the sexual agency of the woman; she is still not sexually free from his abuse. Thus, fulfilment of sexual desire cannot be the only factor determining whether one has sexual agency. The nuances of this however remain outside the scope of this paper.

[36] Davidson, 207–60.

[37] I would contend that MacKinnon's analysis of pornography, discussed earlier, fits the Davidsonian model, insofar as MacKinnon speculates that pornography operates in a world-to-mind direction of fit: pornography socially conditions sexual desire.

cognitive and social construction manifest sexually? Camp contends that human thought is not just logical but often employs representational structures that are intuitive, holistic, and contextually malleable: 'characterisations'.[38] Thus, when one thinks about sex, one cognitively employs a representation that is informed by their operative characterisation of sex.[39] Characterisations attribute a set of features to a particular subject or event and embed those features in a 'multidimensional structure of prominence and centrality'.[40] 'Prominence', here,[41] is similar to what Tversky calls 'salience':[42] a feature's intensity and diagnosticity. A feature is intense to the extent that it has a high 'signal-to-noise ratio';[43] it stands out from the background and is a significant attribute of the subject.[44] A feature is diagnostic to the extent that it is useful for classifying objects as belonging to some shared kind.[45] Thus, salience selects which features matter in a characterisation. On the other hand, centrality determines *how* features matter by connecting features into 'explanatory networks',[46] creating a paradigmatic basis for explaining causal connections between features in a characterisation. Both prominence and centrality are structural ways for a feature to matter to a characterisation.

Characterisations share three additional important features: they are 'informationally, affectively, and experientially rich',[47] they are context-dependent, and agents need not explicitly nor implicitly endorse a characterisation of a subject to hold that characterisation.[48] Characterisations integrate 'as much data as possible into an intuitive' and associative whole.[49] For example, my characterisation of a school nerd includes how they dress, walk, talk, and perform in school, what extracurricular activities they are involved in, their personal life (including their relationships), and my emotional and evaluative responses to those details and the nerd more generally. This is an informationally, experientially, and affectively rich integration of as much data as possible, which in turn forms an intuitive and holistic characterisation of a school nerd: you know a nerd when you see one.

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[38] Camp, 'Logical Concepts', 591.

[39] Camp, 'Logical Concepts', 594–98; Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 27–29.

[40] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 24.

[41] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 37.

[42] Tversky, Amos (1977) 'Features of Similarity', *Psychological Review* **84**, 332–44.

[43] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 20.

[44] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–24.

[45] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19.

[46] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 20.

[47] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 20.

[48] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–20.

[49] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 20.

Characterisations are context-dependent. Literature on intuitive thinking[50] and framing[51] demonstrates that one's intuitive thinking is largely contextually dependent. For example, it may be fitting that school nerds are smart and socially awkward, and these features may play an organising role in my characterisation of nerds. However, I do not use these features as a means of categorising someone as a school nerd; someone can be smart and socially awkward and yet not be categorised as a school nerd. There can be a person who displays features that I take to be 'nerdy' but who does not operate under the same context that would make me characterise them as being a nerd (e.g., a smart person who is not a school student or a smart school student who is also an athlete). Context, here, is constituted by the relevant background features that explain my characterisation of some subjects as belonging to a certain kind.[52]

The characterisation an agent brings to a subject may not be under their voluntary control; said characterisation may be dictated by uncontrolled internal or external factors without an agent willing (or even noticing) the characterisation occurring.[53] An agent can reject a sexist stereotype (such as women being homemakers) yet still consider women to be prominent and central to homemaking. Some philosophers suggest otherwise and argue that an agent only endorses certain features being ascribed to a subject if they believe that the ascription is correct.[54] However, psychological data challenges this argument. For example, people who sincerely believe in anti-racist sentiments may nonetheless implicitly hold negative racial biases.[55] This challenge is congruous with Camp's understanding of characterisations,[56] thereby indicating that agents can hold characterisations of subjects even if they explicitly believe those characterisations are false. What is most important for my purposes is understanding that the emotional, judgmental, and evaluative responses towards some subject or domain (including judgements about that subject or domain's causal structures) influence (and are influenced by) the operative characterisations held by an agent towards that subject or domain.[57]

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[50] Camp, 'Logical Concepts'.

[51] Tversky, Amos and Daniel Kahneman (1981) 'The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice', *Science* **211**, 453, 457–58.

[52] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–23.

[53] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 23.

[54] Ginsborg, Hannah (2011) 'Primitive Normativity and Skepticism About Rules', *Journal of Philosophy* **108**, 239–47.

[55] Jost, John T, *et al,* (2009) 'The Existence of Implicit Bias is Beyond Reasonable Doubt: A Refutation of Ideological and Methodological Objections and Executive Summary of Ten Studies That No Manager Should Ignore', *Research in Organizational Behavior* **29**, 39–42, 63–64; Wilson, Timothy D, Samuel Lindsey, and Tonya Y Schooler (2000) 'A Model of Dual Attitudes', *Psychological Review* **107**, 101–2, 118–21.

[56] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–24.

[57] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 22.

In pornography, sex can occur in a bedroom, a car, a classroom, a basement, a couch, at work, at a hospital, in a jail cell, or in an office. During sex, women can be screaming, crying, laughing, giggling, enjoying themselves, disassociating, or hating. They may be having their hair pulled. They may be hit, punched, slapped, kissed, or groped. As inferred from content analysis, these constituent features of sex are connected in a multidimensional structure that identifies different features as being prominent or central to sex: the submissiveness of women and the dominance of men are highly prominent and central features of sex in pornography,[58] this centrality is why female submission and male domination are paradigmatic bases for explaining causal connections between men's and women's behaviours in pornography. For example, sex occurring on a couch or in a car is neither central nor prominent to how an agent characterises sex. However, sex occurring between a man and a woman—with the women's sexual agency remaining unacknowledged—may be highly salient and central to how an agent characterises sex. I argue that this demonstrates, simply, that pornography deploys certain representations of sex that come to create certain characterisations of sex in its viewers.

Importantly, judgements about these causal connections are context-dependent. They depend on factors such as the individual consumer's experience, their current operative characterisations, and the genre of pornography being consumed.[59] However, the scaffolding supporting pornography's representations of sex is patriarchal, providing the foundation for masculine conceptions of sex in which women are considered sexually subservient to men.[60] Thus, the representations of sex and gendered relations depicted prominently in pornography centrally endorse patriarchal ideals and imagery. An individual consumer of pornographic content need not endorse the specific representations of sex presented to them by the material. Agents can outright reject, be disgusted, or be turned off by pornography yet still carry patriarchal characterisations of sex caused by viewing pornographic and patriarchal material.[61]

3.3 Characterisations, Associative Thoughts, and Behaviour

The thought patterns underpinning characterisations are fundamentally *associative*. Characterisations cluster features and dispositions and embed them in structures of prominence and centrality, which in turn associate those features and dispositions as

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[58] Bridges, *et al*, 1074–81; Sun, *et al*, 988–92.

[59] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–24.

[60] Bridges, *et al*, 1074–81; Sun, *et al*, 988–92.

[61] It is worth noting that the advent of pornography coincides with increased female sexual agency. Women today have comparatively more sexual agency than women five decades ago, even though there is much more pornography today than five decades ago. The question I am considering is not so much 'Are women today more likely to speak up and ensure that their sexual agency is respected than in the past?' but rather 'Are women today in pornography-saturated societies less likely to speak up and ensure that their sexual agency is respected, compared to women today if there was no such pornography-saturation?'

fitting of a represented subject. Associative thought consists of a variety of dispositions,[62] thus functioning similarly to what psychologists call stereotypes or 'prototypes'.[63] Associative thinking facilitates how one acts given their characterisation of certain subjects, as their behavioural responses become implicated in their overall intuitive responses to those characterisations.[64] Characterisation is a way of conceptualising a particular reference, a way that actively primes certain ways of reasoning, emotionally responding, and acting in relation to that reference.[65] Therefore, if one's characterisations of sex are partially formed by pornographic representations, their dispositions and actions towards sex also become partially impacted, as the way one intuitively thinks about a subject affects how one behaves towards that subject in a certain context.[66]

In most pornographic scenes, the sexual role of the woman is represented as being sexually subservient and submissive, a person whose desires are not acknowledged by the dominant man.[67] The woman's submissiveness and sexual objectification are both central and prominent in the interaction, generating a concrete image of sex deployed in most pornographic material. These concrete images play an important role in associative thinking: they facilitate the rapid recognition of a subject's fittingness as belonging to a certain kind.[68] The feminine sexual role becomes associatively linked with sexual submission and subservience, as women fit the submissive role; submissiveness and subservience to men become central and prominent to female sexuality. Thus, consumer characterisations of sexual interactions are primed by pornography and how pornography associates the sexual purposes of both female and male sexuality. Female consumers may thus involuntarily or unknowingly create and hold patriarchal characterisations of sex that associate their sexual role as being submissive, subservient, and objectified, even if they consciously endorse egalitarian views of sex. Considering the examples presented in §3.1, these associative and intuitive characterisations may then facilitate desire-harming and belief-discordant actions in some women when primed in sexual contexts.

As discussed earlier, belief–desire models of action cannot properly account for the phenomenon of unwanted consensual sex, as such models assume that women's actions are intentional and indicative of their conscious beliefs and desires. However, many women report, despite knowing their desires and believing that their sexual pleasure is just as important as their partners, that they still participate in unwanted

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[62] Evans, Jonathan St B T Evans (2008) 'Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment, and Social Cognition', *Annual Review of Psychology* **59**, 255–58, 270–71.

[63] Rosch, Eleanor (1978) 'Principles of Categorization', in Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B Lloyd, eds, *Cognition and Categorization*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 27–29.

[64] Camp, 'Logical Concepts', 601–14; Jost, *et al*, 39–42, 63–64.

[65] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–26.

[66] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–24.

[67] Bridges, *et al*, 1074–81; Sun, *et al*, 988–92; Brown and L'Engle, 139–48.

[68] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19–24.

sexual activity.[69] Thus, belief–desire models fail to fully account for the complicated relationship women have with their sexual role in a gendered society. Characterisations allow us to consider that women can hold certain beliefs and desires towards sex while also holding characterisations towards sex that are in tension with those beliefs and desires. However, characterisations are only a piece of the puzzle in investigating the full impact of pornography on people's thoughts and behaviours. Following Camp, to account for how pornographic representations guide an agent's characterisation of sex, we must consider an agent's perspective on sex.

3.4 Generating Characterisations from Perspectives

Characterisations are seldom isolated. Agents have default proclivities to form certain characterisations of subjects.[70] Camp describes these proclivities as being perspectives:

> open-ended dispositions to interpret, and specifically to produce intuitive structures of thoughts about, or *characterizations* of, particular subjects.[71]

Ultimately, perspectives are tools for thinking; they produce and structure an agent's intuitive thoughts and characterisations of certain subjects.[72] Perspectives structure an agent's intuitive patterns of attention, responses, and explanations towards certain subjects, not just an agent's propositional attitudes towards those subjects.[73] Perspectives contain the same 'intuitive implementational aspect' of the characterisations they generate.[74] That is, perspectives come to form the type of intuitive thoughts that make up an agent's characterisations. Perspectives have two main features. First, they are intuitive and open-ended dispositions towards certain subjects.[75] Second, they generate characterisations of certain subjects.[76] These features allow perspectives to determine which information, feelings, and images agents attribute to certain subjects. Perspectives determine what features an agent tends to notice, the explanatory connections an agent makes, and the emotional and evaluative responses an agent tends to have to particular subjects.[77] Most importantly, perspectives structure these responses to subjects in cognitively intuitive ways, leading an agent to form certain evaluative, emotional, judgmental, and behavioural responses to those subjects.[78]

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[69] Peterson and Muehlenhard, 77–84.

[70] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 19, 23.

[71] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 18–19.

[72] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 18–19, 24–28.

[73] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 24–28.

[74] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 25.

[75] Camp, Elisabeth (2017) 'Perspectives in Imaginative Engagements With Fiction', *Philosophical Perspectives* **31**, 77–79.

[76] Camp, 'Perspectives in Imaginative Engagements', 77–79.

[77] Camp, 'Perspectives and Frames', 24–28.

[78] Camp, 'Perspectives in Imaginative Engagements', 77–79, 84–95.

Perspectives, applied to pornography, would determine which features of pornography agents tend to notice and agents' emotional and evaluative responses to those features and determine what information, feelings, and images agents attribute to sex. Adopting a pornographic perspective of sex is thus not just adopting a certain representation of sex. It is adopting a certain disposition to what sex *is*, how one should *feel* about it, and how one *responds* to sexual situations.

As perspectives are open-ended dispositions to interpret and produce intuitive thoughts about subjects, an important feature of perspectives is that they can be understood and adopted by other people. For example, when sharing a piece of information with someone I know well, I can predict and anticipate how they will respond to the new information—as well as how they will assimilate this information into their broader and existing frameworks about the subject—by understanding or adopting their perspective on the subject. If I understand that my mother is afraid of sharks and I tell her about a recent shark attack close to her home, I can anticipate that she will be fearful and might exclaim that we should not go swimming near her home. Her perspective on sharks is something I intuitively understand. If all the information I had concerning sharks came from my mother, I may begin to respond to sharks with fear; I may adopt her perspective on sharks. My perspective on sharks can change as I have new experiences with—and information about—sharks that I had not considered previously. This would change how I interpret and respond to sharks in the future. The way that I interpret, respond to, and construct characterisations of certain subjects can be impacted by the different perspectives I temporarily or permanently adopt, even if these perspectives are not my own.

However, it is difficult to determine whether an agent is operating with a perspective that is their own or whether they have adopted their perspective from someone else.[79] Applied to pornography, it is difficult to determine whether an agent who consumes abusive pornography and thinks that it is sexy is operating with their own perspective or a pornographic perspective that they have adopted. The open-ended nature of perspectives makes it difficult to identify and individuate sameness and difference. Consequently, it becomes difficult to determine when an agent is operating with a perspective that is their own or adopted. In the case of pornography, empirical data shows that people who regularly watch pornography are more likely to believe that pornography is representative of the real world and are more likely to recreate what they see with (or on) real-life partners.[80] I thus grant that at least some pornography consumers adopt pornographic perspectives which would differ from their own—had they not consumed pornography—when thinking about sex and sexual relations. These adopted perspectives eventually influence the consumer's intuitions about which features of sex are central to the act of sex itself and how they respond to those features. Consumers can adopt pornographic perspectives of sex and then generate

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[79] Camp, 'Perspectives in Imaginative Engagements', 74.
[80] Tsitsika, *et al*, 546–49; Sun, *et al*, 988–92.

characterisations of sex that inform how they interpret and respond to sexual situations in the real world. When consumers adopt a pornographic perspective of sex, their evaluative, emotional, judgmental, and behavioural responses to pornography bleed into their evaluative, emotional, judgmental, and behavioural responses to sex in real life.

Consumers who adopt pornographic perspectives come to know their way about the pornographic worlds they engage with. They begin to know how to extrapolate the base-level facts being offered to them about the domain of sex, how to respond to information in pornography as it presents itself, and how to navigate the information they already know about the domain of sex. Adopting a pornographic perspective means an agent gains intuitive insight into the world pornography is offering and can anticipate, expect, evaluate, and emotively respond to particular information being presented. For example, a person who engages in watching non-consensual pornography may come to a new pornographic video within that category, in which a man and a woman are sitting on the couch. If the viewer has adopted some pornographic dispositions and perspectives, they will anticipate that the man will want to have sex with the woman, that the woman will not want to have sex with the man, that the man will force himself onto the woman, that the woman secretly likes what is happening to her and, most importantly, that what is happening is *sexy*. The consumer responds to the initial information given (a man and a woman sitting on a couch), evaluates this scene, and responds with an extrapolation or anticipation of the scenes to follow. Consumers intuitively understand what is happening in pornography, why it is happening, and how they should feel about it.

Remembering Dworkin and MacKinnon's argument (that pornography socialises sexuality) [81] my analysis provides a cognitive framework for conceptualising how socialisation manifests in the pornography consumer. Rather than arguing that one's desires become pornographically conditioned, I contend that people adopt certain perspectives and dispositions which come to generate pornographic characterisations of sex. The behavioural result is more or less the same under both models: women act submissively and men act dominantly during sex. The utility of my argument, however, is that it provides philosophers with a robust discussion about how desire-hindering and discordant behaviours can manifest in sexual situations without automatically implicating the harmed participants' beliefs or desires. Under my model, someone's beliefs and desires do not need to be affected in order for a subject to act in some way; sexuality is less to do with sexual desire, or purported belief, and more to do with gendered structures and cognitive representation. However, this does not mean that the characterisations an agent holds towards a subject or domain cannot affect their desires and beliefs; I contend that characterisations do affect desires and beliefs. What distinguishes my model is that it does not rely on one's beliefs or desires

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[81] Dworkin and MacKinnon, 61.

to be conditioned, a distinction from how traditional and radical feminists conceptualise the socialisation process.

Philosophers who discuss the role pornography has on different sociological and behavioural phenomena, such as unwanted consensual sex, ought to do so in ways that neither stigmatise nor victim-blame the disenfranchised party. Belief–desire models, as they currently stand, cannot offer philosophers the means to do so. However, by supplementing the analysis with a discussion on perspectives and characterisations, feminists have a new way of accounting for some women's behavioural tendencies during sexual interactions with male partners. Returning to §3.1, consider the following case again.

> A woman and her partner are having sex. During the act, her partner begins to pull her hair; she knows that this sexually excites her partner. She neither likes nor desires this act, to the point where it turns her off sexually. Irrespective of her personal feelings of desire towards hair pulling, she does not protest, resist, or vocalise any discomfort, she lets them pull her hair.

The woman in this example has a clear grasp of her sexual desires; she doesn't like her hair being pulled. Her belief that her partner likes hair-pulling does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that she must also hold beliefs about the relatively lesser significance of her sexual pleasure and fulfilment of desire. However, if this woman's characterisation of sex and her role in sex is informed by patriarchal and/or pornographic representations of sex, then her action of not resisting or vocalising discomfort is consistent with her represented role. Her characterisations of sex generate sexually subservient actions that *fit* her gendered role.

4. Conclusion

I have presented a new way of thinking about the role pornography plays in how people conceptualise, and have, sex. However, the contributions of this paper are preliminary. The broader social implications of pornographic representations of sex and their impact on consumers remain outside the scope of this paper. though I have given a new account of how pornography impacts individual consumers—with special consideration to its effect on women—I also want to nod to possible remedies. These remedies include accurate sexual education resources that focus on female pleasure and promote informed consent, the fulfilment of all parties' desires, and respectful and equal participation during sexual interactions. Due to my explanation endorsing social-cognitive constructivist models, the issue of bad sex and sexual inequality is considered an issue of the public world, not the private. The onus of bad sex is thus not individualised; bad sex is a social condition.

Additionally, the promotion of shared sexual resources that have an emphasis on shared pleasure may help women to construct sexual thoughts which prioritise respectful and healthy sex, encouraging women to vocalise their discomforts and needs. Absent from my discussion are the several moral and epistemic implications

surrounding the questions pornography poses. Living within patriarchal social structures would entice most agents to form patriarchal characterisations of sex, gender, and women, even if these agents do not consume pornography. The next question is *what do we do now*? Is all sex under patriarchy problematic? Is all sex influenced by pornographic characterisations wrong? These questions remain outside the scope of this paper, however, they are questions I nevertheless believe are important to ask. MacKinnon and Dworkin's mission to censor and restrict the use of pornography largely failed due to the vast expansion of internet pornography. Thus, in trying to solve the issue of bad sex, feminists will have to look towards other solutions, such as comprehensive sexual education, the distribution of health-based sexual resources, and feminist-led consciousness-raising. There have been many other propositions by feminists for bettering our sexuality and capacity for sexual expression and agency. Though I do not discuss these remedies and propositions extensively in this paper, I aim to do so in future work.

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