JOURNAL OF
POSITIVE SEXUALITY

Volume 8, Number 2, November 2022

The journal of the Center for Positive Sexuality, a 501c3 non-profit organization.
Burbank, CA

MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

Please see the Submission Guidelines at the back of the issue for details regarding submissions. Manuscripts and supporting documents should be submitted as email attachments in Microsoft Word format to submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org. Any questions or correspondence should be sent to the editor at info@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

JOURNAL OF POSITIVE SEXUALITY

Volume 8, Number 2, November 2022

The journal of the Center for Positive Sexuality, a 501c3 non-profit organization.

Table of Contents

Name That Community? Critical Reflections on the Ethics About Disseminating Research into Online Fetish Communities

Frazer Heritage[1]
Birmingham City University[2]

Abstract

This paper explores the ethics of analyzing extant online data from a sex-positive perspective. The author presents a case study of a research project exploring the sexual practices of an online community who did not want to be identified. On analysis of the data, it was found that members of the community could be identified, and that using a pseudonym for the community would not have provided sufficient anonymization. The paper takes a multidisciplinary approach to exploring some of the ethical challenges of online research and argues for the need to consider ethical implications at every stage of the research process.

Introduction

With the growing development of social media, multiple communities based around sexual practices are gathering in online spaces. In particular, there has been a growing interest in how online kink/fetish communities gather in online spaces (see, e.g., Colosi & Lister, 2019; Sundén et al., 2021). Some websites such as *Fetlife* and *Recon* are specifically dedicated to enabling people to connect with others based around these sexual practices. These websites are often behind a password-protected landing page, meaning that in order to access such data, one must become a member of the forum. Given that almost all members of the forums are members of the community, it is highly implied to other users of the website that by signing up, one also indicates their membership in the community. Many ethical guidelines are in agreement that accessing such password-protected data requires considerably more ethical considerations, such as consent from the owners of the website/group and the producers of the data under analysis (Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). However, there are other social networking websites such as *Reddit*, *Twitter*, and *Tik Tok* which still contain fetish-related content, but which are accessible by any member of the public. (This is not too dissimilar to the issues related to data collection discussed in Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011.)

At this point, a distinction should be made in how I use the term 'online data'. Online data can be either gathered through online means (e.g., surveys hosted on websites such as Qualtrics or interviews conducted online such as on Teams) or extant data (e.g., data which have been posted to online forums such as *Reddit*, *Twitter*, and *TikTok* discussed previously). It is the latter of these forms of online data that this paper deals with. Two of the distinguishing features between data collected in-person and using extant online data are that of how anonymity is operationalised in the context of research and questions about who the intended recipients of the

---

data are (see British Psychology Society, 2021; Townsend & Wallace, 2016). In other words, when collecting data through interviews (either online or face-to-face), participants (a) might be seen or have their voices heard and so may feel as though they could be identified by at least the researcher and (b) will be asked about specific topics to answer questions the researcher may have. This is not necessarily the case with extant online data, where content may be published without anyone knowing the identity of who posted it (other than the poster), and it may not be possible to ask follow-up questions based on the data posted.

As touched upon in the previous paragraph, one of the issues with online data may be who the data producer believes they are talking to. One way to conceptualize such intended audiences is through applying Bell's (1984) audience design framework to the data. Drawing on the work of Goffman (1964) and the notion of who is/is not a ratified participant, Bell argues that audiences of spoken language can be categorized based on three criteria from the perspective of the speaker (see also Dynel, 2011). First, those who are known (i.e., whether an addressee is known to be part of a speech context). Second, those who are ratified (i.e., those who the speaker acknowledges are present in the speech context). And finally, those who are addressed (i.e., those who are directly spoken to). Using these categories, Bell argues that audiences can shift and become fluid, depending on how the speaker ratifies them. Bell further broke members of audiences down to have one of four roles:

1. Addressees – these are listeners who are known, ratified, and addressed
2. Auditor – these are listeners who are not directly addressed, but are known and ratified
3. Overhearer – these are non-ratified listeners of whom the speaker is aware and
4. Eavesdropper – these are non-ratified listeners of whom the speaker is unaware

In a research context, when interviewing participants, researchers are addressees – they are known, ratified, and addressed by participants. This is particularly well-documented in previous work into fetish communities, as investigated through interview-based methods (e.g., Wignall, 2017). Sometimes, researchers might be auditors (i.e., participants who sign up know that their data may be disseminated and read by other academics – as is the case with secondary analysis of data, e.g., the analysis provided and discussed by Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). However, in research which explores extant online data (e.g., content analysis of online I), researchers become either overhearers or eavesdroppers – that is to say, usually researchers are not-ratified and data producers are usually unaware that they will have their data looked at by such people (though, see Coimbra-Gomes & Motschenbacher, 2019).

However, what happens when members of the community (a) do not anticipate that there will be eavesdroppers and (b) do not want to be found/researched? How do we, as researchers, respect the wishes of these kinds of sex-based communities of practice, while simultaneously still doing research within ethical frameworks? In addition, how do we take a sex-positive approach to such data? This paper starts with a case study of how members of one fetish community use public-facing social media platform as a springboard to a discussion of what can be reported on in an ethical way within research reports. Throughout, I draw on ethical guidelines from psychology, linguistics, media studies, and internet research. I argue that careful

consideration of multiple members from different communities is required before such research is conducted.

The Case Study

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of studies which explore how communities construct their identities on public-facing forums such as Reddit (see Proferes et al., 2021). This kind of research has not come without ethical challenges, and indeed, as Proferes et al. (2021) note, a number of studies have been criticized for their decisions to share personal information from online forums. The researchers also go on to explore how the analysis of various data sets from onlIfora might cause ethical challenges – paying particular attention to the website Reddit, where a number of published papers chose not only to analyse small communities, but also publish the usernames of members within those communities.

In 2020, I embarked on a linguistic study of data from a fetish community across two different social media platforms: Reddit and Twitter. Studies building large corpora from these websites are not uncommon in linguistics (see for example Baker & McEnery, 2015; Collins, 2019; see also Proferes et al., 2021 for a meta-analysis using corpus methods, examining articles which use Reddit data). In accordance with the British Psychological Society's guidelines for Internet-mediated research, using such data was acceptable because it is publicly available. Consent would not have to have been sought from the users as the data were in a publicly available forum (see Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). In addition, collecting data from over 200 users would mean that gathering informed consent from each user would be unfeasible. This approach is not isolated to just psychology, but also an accepted approach within other ethical guidelines (see for example, guidelines published by the Association for Internet Researchers, discussed in franzke et al., 2020). Indeed, both Reddit and Twitter actively encourage third-party collection of tweets and associated metadata by making their APIs open and accessible to users, companies, and developers. These APIs only collect information that the company deems 'public' (see Reddit, 2021; Twitter, 2021)

Although the study introduced above and touched upon in subsequent sections was abandoned, I complied with common ethical standards in the initial stages of the study (e.g., applying for ethical approval from my host institution, only collecting data from publicly available Twitter profiles, and using appropriate web scraping scripts that were approved by Reddit, etc.). During the data collection stage, it soon became apparent that a small number of users were not comfortable sharing information about themselves. Many members of this community would not include their location in their profile, note that their profile was a 'throwaway' account, or cover their face with stickers in pictures. In addition, some members of the community were more explicit about wanting to remain anonymous and would place in their bios descriptions such as "no face pictures due to my work" (N.b., this is a fictious example). It was clear that the majority of the community wanted to remain anonymous online (approximately 90% of users in a sample of about 200 did not show any form of uncovered face picture or had stated that they wanted to remain anonymous; only about 10% made an explicit note to say they were not comfortable sharing face pictures). As a community, the data creators were sex-positive – often sharing images or videos of themselves having sex, pictures of themselves naked, or posting about having sex. However, the community was cautious of

outsiders commenting on such content, possibly because they had previously faced backlash for their fetishes. In itself, this brings to the fore important ethical considerations: if a community wants to remain anonymous, should we as researchers be naming them? Although researchers might be sex-positive and be ready to embrace the sexual practices of this community, others may be less willing to do so (e.g., employers, friends, family).

The data demonstrated that members of the community also clearly had an awareness of addressees and auditors (tagging people in posts, asking for likes), as well as potential overhearers (e.g., hoping to make connections with people in the community they may not have met yet). However, members of this community also considered the potential for a small number of eavesdroppers – e.g., people who might either target them with sex-negative harassment or who they might have a personal connection with and did not want to compromise that relationship. However, it also appeared as though they may not have considered the potential greater number of eavesdroppers – such as academic researchers and the people to whom researchers might disseminate their data.

An exploration of the data quickly revealed that I was able to pin-point the location of some of these users to within suburbs of major cities, and in one case even pinpoint the user's exact location of work. Importantly, when I returned to the user's account, I discovered that this specific user did not feel comfortable sharing pictures of their face because they were worried about potential backlash from sex-negative work colleagues discovering their fetishes and seeing pictures of the user having sex. This was just a single case, though deeper analysis might have revealed several more – and, if the community were named in disseminated work, other researchers, journalists, or members of the public might have been able to misuse this information to the detriment of the data producers (see Proferes et al., 2021). To return to a point made previously, while, as a sex-positive researcher, this kind of data is not distressing or "strange", it must be acknowledged that not all members of the general public are sex-positive (the same is also true for some academics). Given that this community felt worried about people they knew who are sex-negative seeing their posts, I would argue that one of more sex-positive acts we researchers can do is to prevent this worry from becoming a reality. As such, disseminating the name of this community and potentially endangering their professions would not only be problematic from a sex-positivity perspective, but would likely run against most researchers' definitions of what is considered 'ethical' research. In other words, to link to Bell's notion of audience design from earlier, it must be remembered that not all eavesdroppers are the same and all will have different ideologies towards particular topics.

At this point, I want to turn to a comment I received on an earlier presentation of this work. While discussing ethics which relate to sex and sexuality, one researcher recommended that one way to circumvent these issues might be to remove any language which might identify the community and that the community should be anonymized. However, this also comes with several challenges for those interested in (critical) discourse analysis, which focuses on the language used by individuals. One such example of the challenge this presents to those interested in how power is negotiated in sexual-based interactions comes from the most frequently used words and keyword lists (i.e., lists of what words the community used statistically more frequently than words in a comparable dataset, such as on Twitter more broadly). The community I investigated were so heavily tied to specified titles and roles that the language they

used immediately revealed the broader community. Similarly, linguistic examples from the community could not be changed in a way that retained the exact lexical and grammatical features without the same data being able to be found via a Google search. To that end, while anonymization and reducing the number of examples presented in the dissemination of findings might be useful, it is often not practical to do in a way which continues to protect communities being researched.

Discussion: Rethinking Ethical Considerations

Under several ethical guidelines, using these data would be considered low-risk as long as the usernames of the people were anonymized (see, for example, British Psychological Society, 2021; franzke et al., 2020). However, drawing attention to a community where several members do not want attention from members outside of the community in itself is problematic. As researchers, we are therefore faced with a dilemma: do we report on the community and draw attention to it, do we heavily anonymize the data to a point where it might make researching specific communities harder, or do we just not research it all together? As noted earlier, one potential way might be to anonymize the community, such as using a pseudonym or broadly referring to it as 'a fetish community' (as done in this paper). However, doing this might mean that important elements of that community's social structure are removed. For example, in some communities, specific terms are used depending on the sexual role people fulfil, and this might also have to be removed if it could otherwise identify the community. Such a role might be important for the construction of gender and sexuality or might denote in-group markers. For linguistic analysis, this also presents problems as changing the lexico-grammatical structure changes the meaning associated with such constructions.

However, although anonymizing communities or changing phrases is a potential method of circumnavigating such ethical issues, researchers should also consider the replicability of their studies. Anonymizing the community means that those researching that specific community might struggle to make connections to their own research, while anonymizing any language or visual data might mean that analytical points or systematic frameworks are less obvious in how they are applied to the data. An issue of transparency also emerges with regards to evidencing that such data collection and analysis has been thoroughly and methodically conducted. This is why being an auditor within a poster's imagined community is useful because it is expected that such data will be shared.

A different but nonetheless challenging consideration is the degree to which we incorporate certain members of the community. In the case study noted above, only about 10% made a note to say they were actively against showing their face. However, a closer analysis of the data revealed that the majority of profiles (approximately 90%) did not show a face picture. There are therefore questions about ethics with regards to what is (not) said and the implicature of such actions. It could be the case that 70% of the users did not feel comfortable showing their face but did not mention this in their user-bios (while the other 20% might not have minded but did not post their face without realizing they were doing this). It could also be the case that users had used 'stock' posts at some point in their posting history, but web-scraping software might not have captured this (assuming limits are set on number of posts scraped – e.g., some web scrapers may only collect the first 20 posts per profile). While many researchers will agree that warnings,

such as "Warning to all institutions and researchers - You do not have my permission to use any of my data in any form or forum"[3] are an instant deterrent, what should a researcher do if they scrape a user's data but do not find such a warning until it is later brought to their attention? In addition, a number of data producers might not be aware that their data could even be used in such a way (see Fiesler & Proferes, 2018) and as such might not know to include such sentences. Such challenges speak to the need to continue to be reflexive in our research, in order to best protect the communities that we are examining.

Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is also worth noting the positionality of sex-positive researchers within their exploration of these kinds of communities. Researchers who are part of these communities may also be privy to additional information and concepts that inform their decisions. For example, if I were already a member of the community I explored, I would have known not to disseminate the findings, due to a number of members not wanting their information shared.

Analysis vs. Dissemination

One of the main issues faced by the case study noted here was that of dissemination. While data can be ethically gathered and ethically analyzed, ethics must be considered at each step of the research process. In line with a range of fields, I would argue that the research process also includes both publication and dissemination (e.g., see Downes, Breeze & Griffin, 2013; Regmi, 2011). This is also somewhat in line with the notions of "ethnographic refusal", whereby both researchers and participants choose what to make publicly available, or not (see Zahara, 2016). This latter notion of refusing to make data publicly available, however, might also be somewhat challenging for progressing the state of knowledge. In other words, some researchers may need access to such knowledge and practical guidance rooted within that research. Within the context of sex research, one possible way we can continue to research communities like this might be to limit our readership to researchers who we know are sex-positive. This includes, for example, sex-positive reading groups, conferences where sex-positivity is enshrined in attendee agreements, and academic journals specifically read by sex-positive researchers. This last method of dissemination still carries some risk of communities being identified (especially with the growing nature of open-access journals), but the likelihood of sex-negative readers finding such journal articles is likely to be much lower.

Another way in which sex-positive researchers can protect broader communities is to use smaller samples for interviews (e.g., Wignall, 2017). While these interviews can reveal important information about group dynamics which might be comparable to the data found in online contexts, such research is less likely to encourage others to Google-search examples. While these kinds of papers might still draw attention to communities who do not want to be found, they are less likely to contain identifying information than analyzing publicly available data. However, these interviews do also utilize participants who view researchers as either addressees or auditors. Indeed, this also brings forward questions about how researchers might make our analysis of such data more well known, in order to move from being eavesdroppers towards auditors or overhearers.

---

[3] N.b., this is a fictious example, based on seeing similar warnings on different platforms.

Finally, as academic researchers, we must remember that we benefit from researching potentially vulnerable communities. While these benefits may not always be short-term monetary benefits, such research can lead to promotions, tenure, and/or other acknowledgements for our research. As such, we have a duty to protect the communities who afford us such benefits and ensure that no harm is brought to them through miscommunication or allowing them to become the victims of online harassment. Part of this protection also comes in the form of being selective with non-academic dissemination work. Articles in far-right newspapers might lead to the identification of such communities from people with historically sex-negative stances. As such, all forms of publication, including non-academic pieces, Tweets, and blog posts, should continue to be scrutinized for the degrees to which they identify possibly vulnerable communities.

The decision-making process behind whether or not we publish research, quotes, data, and similar information is complex: although our work might be in line with many best practice models, there may still be cases where dissemination can do more harm than good. In this instance, I let a thorough exploration of the data inform my decision, but it might be the case that participants in other's data are more willing to have light shone on their community. Ultimately, researchers must weigh up potential risks to communities, the desires of the community, and their own positionality on certain topics before such decisions can be made.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated some of the tensions between sex-positive academic research and ethical considerations for investigating online fetish communities who are wary of receiving sex-negative backlash. Although this paper presented a single case study, it is hoped that such an example provides the starting point for a deeper and more nuanced discussion about how sex-positive researchers can further protect these communities when disseminating findings. I propose that, sometimes, one of the most sex-positive acts a researcher can do is to allow a community the privacy to continue to flourish, away from the eyes of (possibly) sex-negative unintended audiences.

Although this paper has not addressed the issue directly, the ethical challenges raised within the above case study also raise more questions, such as "are there topics we shouldn't explore as researchers?" and "Do we have the potential to harm communities by investigating them?". Given the limitations of space, I have only alluded to the potential harms that might occur if communities like this were uncovered by sex-negative people. However, additional work might want to address such questions with a greater range of data.

As a final point, I would like to reiterate that ethical considerations are often not clear-cut and our positive approach to sex should inform all decisions made in this kind of research. To that end, I would argue in line with the new recommendations on good practice provided by the British Association of Applied Linguistics (2021) in this kind of research, i.e., that ethical considerations should be taken on a case-by-case basis. This case-by-case basis should consider what potential harms might come to a community at each stage of research, be that in reviewing previous literature, collecting data, analyzing data, dissemination of data, and any public engagement. Such considerations must extend both to the community and, importantly, to the researcher too.

References

Association of Internet Researchers (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0.* https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf

Baker, P., & McEnery, T. (2015). Who benefits when discourse gets democratizedcratised? Analysing a Twitter corpus around the British Benefits Street debate. In P. Baker and T. McEnery (Eds.) *Corpora and discourse studies* (pp. 244-265). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bell, A. (1984). Language style as audience design. *Language in society*, *13*(2), 145-204. https://doi.org/10.1017/S004740450001037X

British Association of Applied Linguistics. (2021) *Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics* (4th ed.). British Association for Applied Linguistics

British Psychological Society. (2021). *Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research.* British Psychological Society.

Coimbra-Gomes, E. & Motschenbacher, H. (2019). Language, normativity and sexual orientation obsessive-compulsive disorder (SO-OCD): A corpus-assisted discourse analysis. *Language in Society 48*(4): 565-584. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404519000423

Collins, L. C. (2019). *Corpus linguistics for online communication: A guide for research.* Routledge.

Colosi, R. & Lister, B. (2019). Kinking it up: An exploration of the role of online social networking site FetLife in the stigma management of kink practices. *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*. 19. [online]. Available from https://www.britsoccrim.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Kinking-it-Up-PBCC19.pdf (Accessed 26th May 2022)

Downes, J., Breeze, M., & Griffin, N. (2013). Researching DIY cultures: towards a situated ethical practice for activist-academia. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, *10*(3), 100-124. ISSN: 1572-3763

Dynel, M. (2011). Revisiting Goffman's postulates on participant statuses in verbal interaction. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *5*(7), 454-465. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2011.00286.x

Fiesler, C., & Proferes, N. (2018). "Participant" perceptions of Twitter research ethics. *Social Media+ Society*, *4*(1), https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118763366

franzke, a. s., Bechmann, A., Zimmer, M., Ess, C. & the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0.* https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf (Accessed 26th May 2022)

Goffman, E. (1964). The neglected situation. *American Anthropologist*, *66*(1), 133-6. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1964.66.suppl_3.02a00090

Long-Sutehall, T., Sque, M., & Addington-Hall, J. (2011). Secondary analysis of qualitative data: a valuable method for exploring sensitive issues with an elusive population? *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *16*(4), 335-344. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987110381553

Proferes, N., Jones, N., Gilbert, S., Fiesler, C., & Zimmer, M. (2021). Studying Reddit: A systematic overview of disciplines, approaches, methods, and ethics. *Social Media+ Society*, *7*(2), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211019004

Reddit. (2021). https://www.reddit.com/r/redditdev/

Regmi, K. (2011). Ethical and legal issues in publication and dissemination of scholarly knowledge: A summary of the published evidence. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *9*(1), 71-81. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-011-9133-4

Sundén, J., Tiidenberg, K., Paasonen, S., & Vihlman, M. (2021). Space, place and location in sexual social media. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*. https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2021i0.12132

Townsend, L., & Wallace, C. (2016). *Social media research: A guide to ethics*. University of Aberdeen.

Twitter Rules and Policies. (2021). https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-api

Wignall, L. (2017). The sexual use of a social networking site: The case of pup Twitter. *Sociological Research Online*, *22*(3), 21-37. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780417724066

Wilkinson, D., & Thelwall, M. (2011). Researching personal information on the public web: Methods and ethics. *Social Science Computer Review*, *29*(4), 387-401. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439310378979

Zahara, A. (2016). Ethnographic refusal: A how to guide. *Discard Studies* August, 8, 2016. [online] https://discardstudies.com/2016/08/08/ethnographic-refusal-a-how-to-guide/ (Accessed 26th May 2022)

Intersectional Masturbation: A Content Analysis on Female Masturbation Studies Through a Sex Positive and Intersectional Lens

Carrie Bohmer
University of Nebraska-Lincoln cbohmer2@huskers.unl.edu

Queen-Ayanna Sullivan
Radford University qsullivan@radford.edu

Anyoliny Sanchez
Arizona State University asanc230@asu.edu

Shemeka Thorpe
University of Kentucky shemeka.Thorpe@uky.edu

Candice Hargons
University of Kentucky cncr229@g.uky.edu

Abstract

This content analysis examined the literature on female masturbation from 2000-2020. We sought to elucidate the demographics of women most often studied, whether scholarship favored people with more privileged identities, and the degree to which the literature is sex-positive. Our hypotheses were: a) there is a gap in sex research surrounding female masturbation for women with marginalized identities, and b) the literature will be predominantly sex-positive. Using the search terms "female masturbation" and "women & masturbation" we analyzed 85 articles. Results showed that female masturbation scholarship is primarily sex-positive; however, the samples' demographics still tend to be less marginalized and more privileged. Further, the results varied based on the articles' country of origin. This study highlights gaps in the study of female masturbation among marginalized women and the need to improve sex positivity within the literature. Future research directions are discussed.

Introduction

Colloquially described as, "flicking the bean," "double-clicking the mouse," and, "buttering your muffin" (Evans-Grimm, 2011, p. 28), masturbation is defined as the act of touching oneself to feel sexual pleasure and/or orgasm (Bowman, 2017). Pleasing oneself is a vital aspect of human sexuality, often debuting in childhood (Kayiran & Sonmez, 2020). For women, masturbation has been studied both in the individual and partnered context (Rowland et al., 2020). Studies present varying data on the percentage of women who masturbate, primarily depending on the study's timeframe. For example, Herbenick et al. (2011) found that just over 40% of women aged 14-94 masturbated in the last year, while another study reported 40.8% of women masturbating in the last month and 21.8% never masturbating (Herbenick et al., 2017). Additionally, Bowman (2017) found that 73% of women have masturbated in their lifetime. Masturbation is a developmentally normal behavior, with researchers having records of female fetuses masturbating to orgasm in the womb (Brenot & Broussin, 1996; Giorgi & Siccardi, 1996). Additionally, masturbation has several psychological and physical benefits, including

increased self-esteem (Shulman & Horne, 2003), sexual pleasure, learning about one's body, sexual empowerment (Meiller & Hargons, 2019), decreased risk of pregnancy, and prevention of cervical infection (Bowman, 2014; 2017).

Although research suggests masturbating is natural and beneficial, there is still significant shame associated with it (Carvalheira & Leal, 2015; Uca & Kozak, 2015). For example, in one study focusing on masturbation as a migraine-relief intervention, women noted feeling guilty and shameful for masturbating, especially when they had a partner or spouse (Uca & Kozak, 2015). Additionally, gendered double standards and societal responses to masturbating exist, such that women often feel more guilt and shame for masturbating than men, due to gender socialization (Kaestle & Allen, 2011). Historically, male masturbation has been centered in the field of sexuality research (Kaestle & Allen, 2011), and when women are included, they are often heterosexual and cisgender (Meiller & Hargons, 2019).

The current study is a content analysis of the literature on female masturbation. Although our focus was on women, our conceptualization of this term includes transgender and non-binary people with clitorises. However, we assumed that this group would have likely been excluded from the studies' participant pools. In our analysis of marginalized identities there were a few studies that included participants who were transgender or nonbinary, and these were still included in the data. Further, White people have been the most commonly studied race in sex research within counseling psychology journals (Hargons et al., 2017). A study of sex research overall found that over 68%-88% of samples are from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) populations and are androcentric (Klein et al., 2021). Thus, examining research on women's masturbation is a next step in extending the scholarship around sexuality to include diverse topics and peoples.

In 2006 the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended a shift into a sex-positive framework for the growing field of sexuality research. This shift centered the need to highlight and support, through the use of literature, programs, and policy change, the ways in which sexuality can positively impact the lives of individuals, which in turn could lead to a more inclusive "sexually healthy society" (World Health Organization, 2006). Sex positivity is a broad term often referenced in sex research. Recently, human sexuality experts have concluded that sex positivity can be best understood as an ideology surrounding sex which centers themes of consent, sexual autonomy, pleasure, education, and acceptance of all gender and sexual identities (Ivanski & Kohut, 2017). Sex positivity replaces the restrictive and limiting views that compulsory heterosexuality and an emphasis on procreative sex force onto people and allows for dynamic and fluid sexuality to bloom (Burnes et al., 2017). Allowing sexuality to develop freely can be helpful for people of all ages, starting in childhood and adolescence.

Early Messages Surrounding Sex and Masturbation

Like most non-reproductive sexual activities, masturbation is a topic that is not readily discussed in most contexts in Western society (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009). For some, a sense of shame related to masturbating is situated in complex historical legacies and misinformed science (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009). For example, due to Calvinist influence in the United States, seeking out pleasure is generally seen as shameful, much less giving it to yourself (Wise, 2020). These

messages have persisted through time. As an example, masturbation has been blamed for physical, mental, and spiritual problems (King & Ragan, 2019). In the 18th and 19th centuries, people believed masturbation could lead to blindness, vertigo, loss of hearing, and general loss of health and strength (Engelhardt, 1974).

Sex-Negativity and Shame Around Masturbation

There are differences in acceptability and normalization of masturbation between women and men (Kaestle & Allen, 2011). For example, one study found that with children as young as 18-months old, parents felt more discomfort with their daughter touching her genitals than they did with their son touching his (Geasler et al., 1995). Subsequent research shows that mothers tend to emphasize morality when discussing sex with their daughters more than sons (Martin & Luke, 2010). Traditionally, adolescent boys are perceived as more sexual and sexually exploratory with their bodies than their female counterparts (Kaestle & Allen, 2011). Often, masturbation is normalized among boys and men (Salaires et al., 2017), albeit not necessarily without shame. Girls, on the other hand, are typically raised to maintain sexual purity and refrain from partnered and solo sexual exploration (Kaestle & Allen, 2011) until they enter a committed relationship or marriage. If girls decide to masturbate, they risk both cultural and societal stigma (Saliares et al., 2017). This process of explicitly and implicitly teaching girls to avoid masturbating has implications for their sexual development into adulthood. These socialization messages situate women's pleasure, sex, and bodies in the context of partnered sex only (Kaestle & Allen, 2011; Tolman, 2002).

One study found that women's perceptions of masturbation are focused on the potential negative influences that masturbation may have on their relationship with a male partner, such that the partner might feel emasculated or excluded from the woman's sexual pleasure (Kılıç Onar et al., 2020). When women's sexualities are formed upon the basis of partnered, heterosexual sex, this may negatively affect the subjective feelings of sexual empowerment, wellbeing, and pleasure that women experience. This study also found that women's masturbatory habits change when single versus partnered and that perceptions of and motives to masturbate vary for women at different times in their lives (Kılıç Onar et al., 2020). This points to the need to further study and understand the relationship women have with masturbation.

Some women feel sexual shame that can take years to overcome (Ussher et al. 2017). However, in a society that privileges being in a relationship over being single (Pepping et al., 2018), masturbation-related shame may be overlooked because partnered sex can become the priority in partnered women's lives. In one qualitative study about shame and sexual embodiment, women described shame as the dominant shaping force of their sexual embodiment (Ussher et al. 2017). Some argue that societally, we are taught to be ambivalent to pleasure and that women experience more shame for seeking out pleasure when compared to men (Wise, 2020). Other research suggests that many women feel shame and guilt around masturbation (Bowman, 2014; Carvalheira & Leal, 2013). Hogarth and Ingham (2009) found that many women felt feelings of disgust, disinterest, and discomfort towards masturbation. When the shame of masturbation goes unchallenged, it can underpin a woman's life and prevent her from maximizing her pleasure and connection to her body. For some women and girls, many obstacles must be overcome to simply consider masturbating (Meiller & Hargons, 2019). There is some

research that explores the relationships that women have with masturbating, although a research gap exists in that few studies examine these relationships (Carvalheira & Leal, 2013; Pinkerton, 2002; Towne, 2019; Yuxin & Ho Sik Ying, 2009). What research that does exist is narrowly focused on a few privileged identities, and excludes older women, women of color, trans and gender-diverse (TGD) folx with clitorises, and women with disabilities, to name a few.

To this end, the intersecting identities that women can hold have implications for their relationships to masturbating as well. For instance, Frank (2010) focuses on studies of black women's masturbation and argues that they reinforced White Supremacist and deviant notions of Black women's sexualities. This supports the notion that it is not simply the people who are studied that matter, but also how they are studied, as this has important implications for ongoing and overarching systems of oppression that impact women's lives and sexualities. The unique identities that women hold, in addition to their gender, have important impacts on the shame or sex negativity that they may face in their relationship to masturbation.

Sex Positivity and Celebration Around Masturbation

Despite this aforementioned history of shame and negativity around masturbation, more recent studies highlight the benefits of, and offer some positive messages around, female masturbation. For instance, Horne (2005) found that women who masturbated felt more entitled to sexual pleasure, either from themselves or a partner. Overall, the women in that study who gave themselves more orgasms had higher levels of healthy sexual self-development and a greater sense of sexual subjectivity, which is defined as their sense of sexual body-esteem, entitlement to pleasure from oneself and a partner, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual self-reflection (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2006). Huong (2018) studied women in Vietnam, where masturbating became a symbolic way for them to transition into modernity and break free of more domestic stereotypes women were thought to fulfill. Meiller and Hargons (2019) highlighted the reasons women masturbate, including a desire to better one's mental and physical health and improving sexual skills for future sexual partners. These studies point to the array of positive motivations and outcomes for women who masturbate. The results of these studies align with the sex positivity that, as a field, we should strive for. When masturbation is studied as a normative and healthy experience, rather than a pathological behavior, the experiences of women are centered and normalized, which aligns with a sex-positive framework.

Marginalized Identities

Understanding the recent shift towards sex positivity within psychology (Burnes, et al., 2017), it is pertinent to acknowledge marginalized identities often overlooked and/or understudied. Particularly, motivations to masturbate may vary by race, sexual identity and orientation, and other aspects of identity, yet there is little research on what motivates women to masturbate outside of a partnered context (Bowman, 2014; Meiller & Hargons, 2019; see Kılıç Onar et al., 2020). Race, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability status, class, and age are all salient aspects of a person's identity that impact their lived experiences. These identities require due consideration in sex-positive research. However, the lack of inclusive literature, particularly on women, shows that historically this consideration of identity has not been present. This is a significant issue because sex is a basic human function that all people encounter,

regardless of sexual identity. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is also essential to recognize when conducting sex-positive research because these identities directly align with the various sexual experiences people will encounter throughout their lifetime, based on the systems of power and privilege from which they operate. Taking an intersectional lens to the study of female masturbation offers a tool to understanding how systems of oppression and privilege co-construct each other in this context (Grzanka, 2017). For example, the sexual experiences of an old Black, queer, atheist, able-bodied, high socioeconomic status, American woman may be drastically different from the experiences of a young Latinx, heterosexual, Catholic, disabled, middle class, Brazilian woman based on their social contexts and marginalization. When social identities do not receive due consideration, it reinforces traditionally non-inclusive sex research which does not accurately represent the evolving world in the 21st century. Furthermore, when marginalized identities are overlooked, it can lead to significant gaps of knowledge of communities where this research is needed (Alexander, 2019; Christensen, et al., 2017; Hargons, et al., 2017). In the study of sexuality, those with more privileged identities from the aforementioned list are centered in the literature, thus contributing to a system of marginalization in science (Hargons et al., 2020). This leaves much of the literature focusing on White, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual men, severely limiting the results' generalizability and applicability of the results to those not sharing those identities. This form of oppression demonstrates how individuals who hold marginalized identities are understudied, which is a significant point of concern. Historically, the voices and stories of the most marginalized are silenced by White narratives and stories of sexuality (Hargons et al., 2017), effectively erasing entire perspectives.

Sexuality research is beginning to expand and focus on more marginalized people, however. Meiller and Hargons (2019) studied curvy queer women's experiences of masturbation as a way to fill the gap surrounding those identities in the literature. This qualitative study included a sample of queer Black and White women with larger body sizes. Further, Haus and Thompson (2020) examined double standards around masturbation and the effect of the assumed motives to masturbate. This study highlighted the need to enrich sexual health within the United States by reducing double standards. These researchers specifically acknowledged and examined the potential racial and cultural differences that could arise within men's and women's judgments within their study. This recognition alone is a form of resistance against historically non-inclusive sex research (Haus & Thompson, 2020). Further, many masturbation studies are international, bringing diversity from other cultures (Baćak & Stulhofer, 2011; Huong & Liamputtong, 2018; Narayanan, 2015; Philippsohn & Hartmann, 2009; Wang et al., 2007). These examples show progress; however, there is still more to do. This content analysis seeks to provide a clearer picture of who is studied within female masturbation in order to inform ongoing research to fill those gaps.

Sex Positivity

Acknowledging the extensive shame and negativity surrounding sex throughout history, a shift towards sex positivity is now becoming apparent (Fahs, 2014). Burnes et al. (2017) published a special issue on sex positivity within counseling psychology and argued that this stance aligns with the field's core values, including social justice, resilience, and wellness. Fields outside of counseling psychology, including social work and medicine, are also seeing a call

from researchers for increasing their sex positivity (Alexander, 2019; Higgins, 2013; Kar, 2020; Prior et al., 2016).

A sex-positive framework can be used to enhance people's pleasure, and specifically women's pleasure. Sex-positive approaches emphasize ideal experiences by celebrating confidence, consent, and sexuality, whereas shaming experiences can reinforce fear (Singh et al., 2021). This room for growth in pleasure is evidenced by a significant orgasm gap between men and women (Mahar et al., 2020), meaning there is a difference in the number of orgasms cisgender women and men report resulting from partnered heterosexual sex, where men have more orgasms. Some researchers argue that this is the case due to a focus on penile-vaginal intercourse, instead of clitoris-focused sex acts between men and women (Mahar et al., 2020; Mintz, 2017). Furthermore, a sex-positive framework allows for individuals who hold marginalized identities, such as Black women, to reclaim sexual narratives that have been told about them for centuries, thus returning agency to them (Hargons, 2020; Morgan, 2015).

Because of this call for more sex positivity, this content analysis focuses only on the last 20 years of masturbation research, under the assumption that previous research would be inherently less sex-positive. This was done not to skew data in favor of our hypotheses, but instead to offer a more recent, and therefore accurate, account of the current state of research on this topic. In summary, this content analysis sought to elucidate, within the topic of female masturbation, who has primarily been studied and whether authors used a sex-positive framework from 2000-2020.

We hypothesized the following: a) there is a gap in sex research surrounding female masturbation for women with marginalized identities, and b) the literature will be predominantly sex-positive. Sex positivity, which is centered on underrepresented and marginalized populations, directly aligns with common values within many helping professions that focus on inclusivity and positive regard for clients, and multicultural and intersectional frameworks (Burnes et al., 2017).

Method

This content analysis examines the demographics typically studied in the realm of female masturbation within peer-reviewed journals from the years 2000 to 2020. Search engines used include EBSCOHost, and data were gathered from the Academic Search Complete, APA PsycInfo, and the Psychology and Behavioral Sciences databases using the search terms "female masturbation" and, "women & masturbation". Initially, 250 articles were found to analyze. After a preliminary review, 110 articles were eliminated due to overlap, leaving 140 articles to analyze (see Figure 1). The articles were divided amongst the three researchers to be selected or omitted from the analysis by abstract review. Then 100% agreement was achieved through rotating the sections once more to ensure consensus. At this stage, the researchers verified that the central focus of each study was on female masturbation. Studies that did not have this focus, but merely mentioned masturbation, were excluded. We also looked for duplicate articles and this step left researchers with 103 articles to analyze and excluded 37 articles due to overlap and irrelevance. Researchers then reviewed each article in-depth and 18 were excluded due to irrelevance and
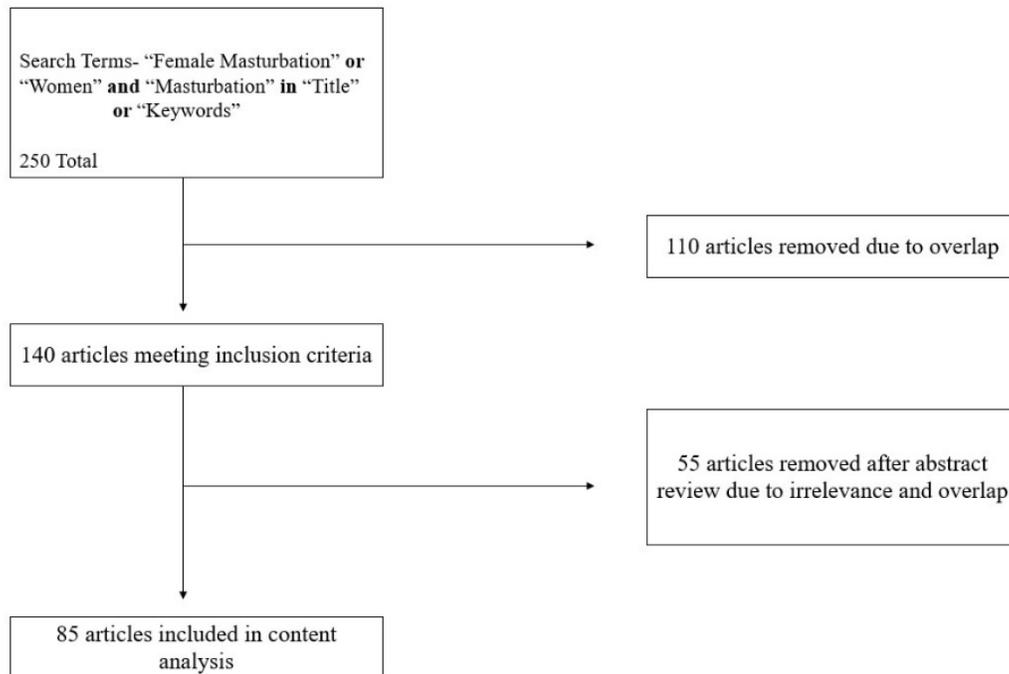
Figure 1. Process of inclusion/exclusion of articles for assessment.

overlap. Lastly, the remaining 85 articles were individually coded for sex positivity and inclusivity of marginalized participants within the categories of race, gender identity, sexual identity, ability status, and age.

Sex positivity in this analysis was coded as either eudaemonic (sex-positive), sex-neutral, or preventative (sex-negative), as previous studies have done (Hargons et al., 2017). Studies discussing sexual health and assuming sex is additive to one's life were coded as sex-positive. The studies that focused on preventative and fear-based sexual health messages were coded as negative, as they have an underpinning of sexuality detracting from someone. The studies that either had an equal combination of sex-positive and sex-negative messages or were neither positive nor negative were coded as sex-neutral. The research team divided the articles amongst the three coders, and each read their assigned articles to determine if the overall tone aligned with a sex-positive, neutral, or negative framework based on general impressions and the above criteria. Numbered coding was used to code the sex positivity of the articles. A "1" was used for sex-positive articles, "2" was used for sex-neutral articles, and a "3" was used for sex-negative articles. After an initial coding of 47 articles between the three coders, we then rotated the articles once amongst the coders. Initially, there were differences between raters, so the three coders discussed the difference until there was consensus on the appropriate code. We achieved 100% agreement by these discussions and repeated this coding process through rotation.

In order to quantify the diversity of the samples, the percentages of articles including primarily marginalized people in five identity categories was calculated. These categories included race, gender identity, sexual identity, ability status, and age. For each study, it was noted 1) whether or not the demographic category was reported and 2) if the individual categories contained primarily marginalized or privileged people. We conceptualized privileged identities as the White, cisgender, heterosexual, young (30 and below), and able-bodied due to

the global impact of White Supremacist Patriarchal Capitalistic power structures (hooks, 1995). This standard was used across studies, even if the country had a non-White majority because Whiteness is still privileged in countries throughout the world due to colonization, imperialism, and emphasis on White beauty standards. Whether the sample for a particular category was privileged or marginalized was determined by seeing which group held the majority (i.e., more than 50% of participants.) For example, a study looking at Black cis-women's sexuality would be coded as having marginalized people in the race category, privileged people in the gender category, and so on depending on the remaining demographics. Additionally, the coding based on age was determined using the median age reported in the studies. If the median was not provided, the mean was used in its place. Further, we coded the articles as international or US-based and noted if any differences exist between the two groups. Additionally, we noted whether articles focused on masturbation in a partnered or individual context, as well as a combination of the two.

For further analysis, we looked at each demographic category and calculated the percentage of marginalized and privileged participants overall. We then looked to see if there was a difference in the omission rates between international or US-based papers, per category. For example, we looked at all studies who reported the race category and calculated what percentage was marginalized versus privileged and then looked to see if international or US studies differed in their frequency of reporting this category. This allows us to see detailed results about differences in emphasizing marginalized or privileged people and the rates of reporting certain demographic categories.

Results

Demographics.

The first research question was whether the studies in this analysis had inclusive demographics of marginalized people. Overall, 48.2% (n = 41) of the articles were from international journals and the remainder were from the US. Many studies (62.2%) had at least one demographic category not reported. As a result, we organized our results by the number of categories that were reported, ranging from zero to five (see Table 1). Further, within each of these sections, we compare the results between international and US-based studies.

Table 1

Studies Organized by the Number of Categories Reported

Author	Year	Sex Positive /Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3=-)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized = people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
0 Categories Reported								
Coleman, E.	2002	1	No					
Fuss et al.	2017	3	No					
Studd, J.	2007	1	No					
1 Category Reported								
Walthall, A.	2009	1	Yes	Marginalized				
2 Categories Reported								
Frohlich, P., & Meston, C.	2002	2	No		Privileged			Privileged
Herbenick et al.	2010	1	No		Privileged			Marginalized
Riley, A., & Riley, E.	2003	1	No		Privileged			Privileged
Robbins et al.	2011	1	No	Marginalized				Privileged
Schedlowski et al.	2003	2	No		Privileged	Privileged		
Uca, A., & Kozak, H.	2015	3	Yes		Privileged			Privileged
3 Categories Reported								
Abdel-Magied, A.	2007	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged	
Aras et al.	2007	3	Yes	Marginalized		Privileged		Privileged
Black, J. S.	2006	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged		Privileged	

Author	Year	Sex Positive/ Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3= -)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized= people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
Brody et al.	2016	3	No		Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	
Brody et al.	2013	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged			Privileged
Brody, S., & Krüger, T. H.	2006	2	No		Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Brody, S., & Costa, R.	2011	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
Hensley et al.	2001	2	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged		
Kaestle, C. E., & Allen, K. R.	2011	1	No	Privileged	Privileged			Privileged
Kontula, O., & Miettinen, A.	2016	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged			Marginalized
Kraus, F.	2017	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
Mills et al.	2011	3	No	Privileged	Privileged			Privileged
Nappi, R. E.	2015	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
Rowland et al.	2018	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		
Rowland et al.	2019	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged			Privileged
Rowland et al.	2020	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
Shirazi et al.	2018	1	No		Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized
Shulman, J. L., & Horne, S. G.	2003	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
Tortorici, Z.	2007	3	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized		
van Anders, S. M.	2012	2	No	Privileged	Privileged			Privileged

Author	Year	Sex Positive/ Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3= -)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized = people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
Wade et al.	2005	1	No		Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Wright et al.	2020	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Marginalized
Zhang et al.	2012	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged			Privileged
4 Categories Reported								
Adaikan, P. G.	2017	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized
Alexander, M. G., & Fisher, T. D.	2003	2	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Bowman, C. P.	2014	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Das, A.	2007	1	No		Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
DeLamater, J., & Moorman, S. M.	2007	1	No		Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Fahs, B., & Frank, E.	2014	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Herbenick et al.	2011	2	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized
Hess et al.	2007	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged		Privileged	Privileged
Hiller, J., & Hekster, B.	2007	3	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized
Kirschbaum, A. L., & Peterson, Z. D.	2018	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized

Author	Year	Sex Positive/ Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3= -)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized = people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
Klapilová et al.	2015	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Martz, D.	2003	3	No	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged	Privileged
Morales et al.	2016	1	No		Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged
O'Keefe et al.	2009	3	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged
Philippsohn, S. & Hartmann, U.	2009	2	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged		Marginalized
Ready, K.	2019	3	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized	
Shelton, J. D.	2010	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	
Smith et al.	2007	2	No	Privileged	Privileged		Privileged	Marginalized
Træen et al.	2016	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized		Privileged
5 Categories Reported								
Abdolmanafi et al.	2015	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Baćak, V. & Stulhofer, A.	2011	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Blanc Molina, A., & Rojas Tejada, A.	2017	3	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Burri, A., & Carvalheira, A.	2019	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Burri, Andrea V.	2009	1	yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized

Author	Year	Sex Positive/ Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3= -)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized = people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
Carvalheira, A., & Leal, I.	2013	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Couper, R. & Huynh, H.	2002	2	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Das et al.	2009	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Dekker, A., & Schmidt, G.	2003	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Driemeyer et al.	2017	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Fahs, B. & Frank, E.	2014	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized
Farramola Bello et al.	2011	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged
Goldey	2018	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Goldey et al.	2016	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized
Gunduz et al.	2019	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Herbenick et al.	2018	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Herbenick, D. & Reece, M.	2010	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Hogarth, H., & Ingham, R.	2009	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Horne, S., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J.	2005	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged

Author	Year	Sex Positive/ Neutral/ Negative (1= +, 2= neutral, 3= -)	International (yes/no)	Race (Marginalized = people of color; Privileged= white people)	Gender (Marginalized = TNB; Privileged= Cisgender)	Sexuality (Marginalized= LGBT; Privileged= Heterosexual)	Ability Status (Marginalized = differently abled; Privileged= able-bodied)	Age (Marginalized= >30; Privileged= 30 and below is young)
Huong, B., & Liamputtong, P.	2018	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Keels et al.	2013	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Kontula, O.	2017	1	Yes	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Lorenz, T. K.	2020	2	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Meiller, C., & Hargons, C. N.	2019	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged	Marginalized
Morales et al.	2016	2	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized	Marginalized
Narayanan, A.	2015	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Pinkerton, S. D.	2002	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Robinson et al.	2003	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Towne, A.	2019	1	No	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized
Wang et al.	2007	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Wentland et al.	2009	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged
Willis et al.	2018	1	No	Privileged	Privileged	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged
Yuxin, P., & Ho Sik Ying, P.	2009	1	Yes	Marginalized	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged	Privileged

Analysis of the Number of Categories Reported

Overall, 38.8% (*n*=33) of the studies reported demographic information for all five categories (See Figure 2), with 48.8% (*n*=20) of international studies reporting demographic information for all five categories compared to 29.5% (*n*=13) of U.S. studies. Of those that reported all demographic categories, 33.3% (*n*=11) had zero categories comprised primarily of marginalized people, 39.4% (*n*=13) had one, 18.1% (*n*=6) had two, 9.1% (*n*=3) had three and no studies had four or more categories consisting of marginalized people. Next, 22.4% (*n*=19) of the studies reported demographics information for four out of the five categories. Of those that reported four demographic categories, 21.1% (*n*=4) had zero categories comprised of marginalized people, 73.7% (n = 14) had one, 5.3% (*n*=1) had two, and 0% had three or above. In total, 27.1% (*n*=23) of the studies reported demographics information for only three out of the five categories. Of these studies, 43.5% (*n*=10) had zero categories comprised of marginalized people, 47.8% (*n*=11) had one, 8.7% (*n*=2) had two, and 0% had three. 7.1% (*n*=6) of the studies reported demographics information for two out of the five categories. Of these, 66.7% (*n*=4) had no marginalized identities reported, while 33.3% (*n*=2) had only one category made up of marginalized people. One study only reported one demographic category, and this category was primarily marginalized. The remaining 3.5% of the total studies did not report any demographic information.
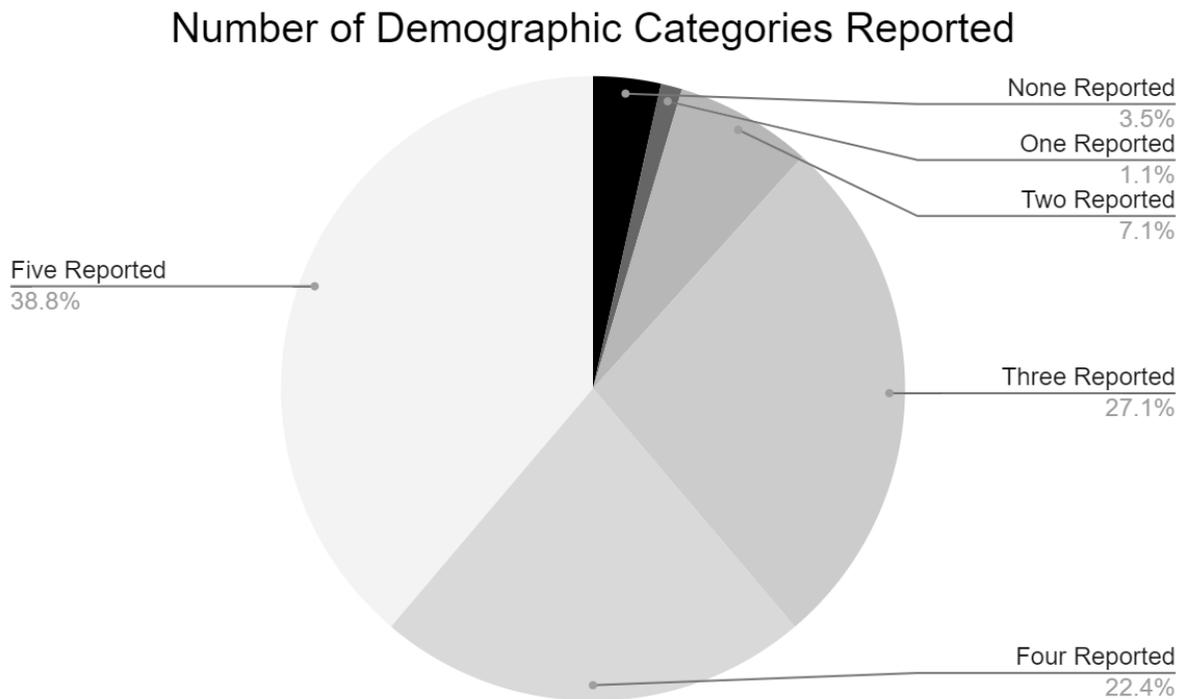

Figure 2. Number of Demographic Categories Reported.

Analysis of Individual Categories

For the next portion of the results, each individual category of demographics is discussed; and results are reported on: overall reporting of marginalized or privileged identities and trends in omission or reporting of the category, depending on the origin of the study. This is reported in percentages and will allow clearer comparisons and more nuanced conclusions to be made.

Race. In total, 82.4% (*n*=70) of the studies reported the race of their participants. Of those that reported this category, 51.4% (*n*=36) of the studies had a majority (>50%) their sample made up of people of color, with the remaining 48.6% (*n*=34) had majority-White samples. Within the 41 international studies, 56.1% (*n*=23) had a majority of their sample made up of people of color, 41.5% (*n*=17) had a majority White sample, and 2.4% (*n*=1) did not report race, whereas within the 44 U.S. studies, 29.5% (*n*=13) had a majority of their sample made up of people of color, 38.6% (*n*=17) had a majority White sample, and 31.8% (*n*=14) did not report race.

Gender. Overall, 92.9% (*n*= 9) of the studies reported participants' gender identity. Of those that reported this category, 100% had primarily cisgender samples and none had primarily gender-expansive samples. A total of 7.1% (*n*=6) of the studies omitted gender identity from their demographic reporting. All but one of these studies with this omission were from the US.

Sexuality. Out of our sample, 68.2% (*n*=58) of studies reported the sexual orientation of their participants and 31.8% (*n*=27) did not. Of the studies that reported this, 89.7% (*n*=52) had primarily heterosexual people sampled. The remaining 10.3% (n = 6) of the studies reporting this category focused on those with LGB identities. Within the 41 international studies, 4.9% (*n*=2) had a majority LGB sample, 61.0% (*n*=25) had a majority heterosexual sample, and 34.1% (*n*=14) did not report sexual orientation, whereas within the 44 U.S. studies, 9.1% (*n*=4) had a majority LGB sample, 61.4% (*n*=27) had a majority heterosexual sample, and 29.5% (*n*=13) did not report sexual orientation.

Ability Status. In sum, 51.8% (*n*=44) reported the ability status of their participants and of these, 90.9% (n = 40) had primarily able-bodied people. Only 4 studies had most of their sample comprised of people with differing abilities. Additionally, 48.2% (*n*=41) of the studies did not report this category. Within the 41 international studies, 4.8% (*n*=2) had samples comprised mostly of people with disabilities, 51.2% (*n*=21) had a majority able-bodied sample, and 43.9% (*n*=18) did not report the participants' ability status. Within the 44 U.S. studies, 4.5% (*n*=2) had samples comprised mostly of people with disabilities, 36.4% (*n*=16) had a majority able-bodied sample, and 52.3 % (*n*=23) did not report the participants' ability status.

Age. Last, out of our sample, 84.7% (*n*=72) of the studies reported the age of their participants and 15.3% (*n*=13) did not. Of those that reported age, 31.9% (*n*=23) featured primarily adults over the age of 30 and the remaining 68.1% (*n*=49) centered young people. Within the international studies, 24.4 % (*n*=10) had samples comprised mostly of people over 30 years old, 43.9% (*n*=18) had a majority under-30 sample, and 9.8% (*n*=4) did not report the participants' age. Within the 44 U.S. studies, 27.3 % (*n*=12) had samples comprised mostly of

people over 30 years old, 52.3% (*n*=23) had a majority under-30 sample, and 20.5% (*n*=9) did not report the participants' age.

Partnered-Status. Although not part of our main analysis, we noted the percentage of studies focusing on individual, partnered, or both when studying female masturbation. Overall, 80% (*n*=68) reported this categorization of their studies. We found that 83.8% (*n*=57) focused on masturbation in individual contexts while 5.9% (*n*=4) and 10.3% (*n*=7) focused on partnered and a combination of individual and partnered masturbation, respectively.

Sex Positivity

The second research question is what percentage of the literature is sex-positive? Overall, the analysis found that 67.1% (*n*=57) of the articles on female masturbation were sex-positive, 20.0% (*n*=17) were sex-neutral, and 12.9% (*n*=11) were sex-negative. Within the 41 international studies, 68.3% (*n*=28) were sex-positive, 19.5% (*n*=8) were sex-neutral, and 12.2% (*n*=5) were sex-negative, whereas within the 44 U.S. studies, 65.9% (*n*=29) were sex-positive, 20.5% (*n*=9) were sex-neutral, and 13.6% (*n*=6) were sex-negative. The overwhelming majority of the articles were sex-positive (see Figure 3), supporting our second hypothesis. Overall, 35.4% (*n*=29) of all of the studies that reported any demographics (*n*=82) in this analysis reported only privileged identities in their demographics while the remaining 64.6% (*n*=53) contained at least one reported category comprised of marginalized women. Additionally, 54.5% (*n*=6) of the sex-negative studies featured only privileged identities in the categories they reported. When examining the trend of sex positivity, there was an increase in the percentage of sex-positive articles from 2000-2020 such that from 2000-2004, 50.0% (*n*=6) of the 12 articles were sex-positive, from 2005-2009, 63.6% (*n*=14), from 2010-2015, 72.2% were sex-positive, and from 2016-2020, 72.7% (*n*=37) were sex-positive (see Figure 4).
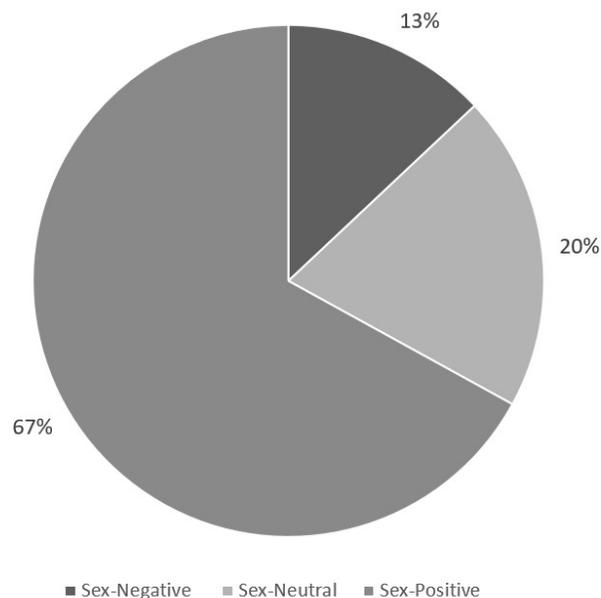

Figure 3. Percentage of studies that were categorized as sex-negative, sex-neutral, and sex-positive.
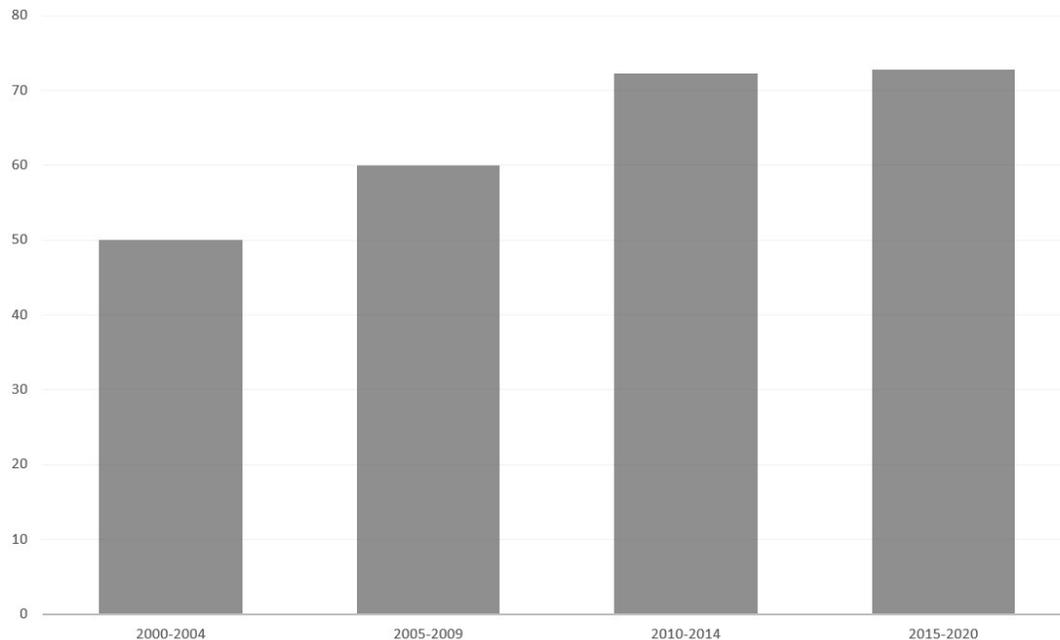
Figure 4. Percentage of sex-positive studies across time periods.

Framing of Sexuality and Identities

Additionally, we calculated what percentage of each demographic category was sex-positive, neutral, and negative to elucidate any trends between these variables. To start, 72.2% (*n*=26) of the studies with primarily people of color were sex-positive, followed by 19.4% (*n*=7) sex-neutral studies, and 8.3% (*n*=3) sex-negative articles. Of the studies with primarily White people in them, 64.7% (*n*=22) were sex-positive, 20.6% (*n*=7) were neutral and 14.7% (*n*=5) were negative. Of those that reported the gender of their participants, 67.1% (n = 53) were sex-positive, 21.5% (*n*=17) were sex-neutral, and 11.4% (*n*=9) were sex-negative. In the studies with a majority of their sample being from the LGBTQ+ community, 83.3% (*n*=5) of the articles were sex-positive and 16.7% (*n*=1) were sex-negative. Additionally, 69.2% (*n*=36) of the studies with mostly heterosexual participants were sex-positive, followed by 19.2% (n = 10) and 11.5% (*n*=6) being sex-neutral and negative, respectively. Of the studies with primarily able-bodied people, 80% (*n*=32) were positive, 12.5% (*n*=5) were neutral, and 7.5 (*n*=3) were sex negative. Only four studies had differently-abled participants primarily, but of those, two were sex-positive, one was neutral and the last was negative. Lastly, of the studies with most participants over the age of 30, 73.9% (*n*=17), 21.7% (*n*=5), and 4.3% (*n*=1) were sex-positive, sex neutral and sex negative, respectively. Of the studies with young people making up the majority of the samples, 67.3% (*n*=33) were sex-positive, 20.4% (*n*=10) sex-neutral, and 12.2% (*n*=6) sex-negative.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the demographics of participants and the sex-positive discourse of female masturbation studies from 2000-2020. The gap in demographics of the literature reflects a historical bias against marginalized identities within research. However, this content analysis revealed strides towards sex-positive masturbation studies over the past ten years in both US and international journals, pointing to an improvement in the way researchers think about

and study masturbation by utilizing a more sex-positive framework. The results also clarify that there is much to be done to increase sex positivity in the literature, with over a quarter of the most recent articles not taking a sex-positive stance. Additionally, a previous content analysis found counseling psychology literature was overwhelmingly sex-negative (Hargons, 2017), so our findings suggest that either including other fields improves the prevalence of sex positivity, or that the coding and methodology of the two studies simply yielded conflicting results. The increase in sex-positive research, including female masturbation studies, directly adheres to the WHO's call for adopting a sex-positive framework when exploring and addressing sexual health (WHO, 2005). Further, a sex-positive framework can still include discussions of negative outcomes from sexual activity; however, when this deficit-based approach is not used alongside a sex-positive approach, the literature and our understanding of people's sexuality are harmed. Studies using this framework, while discussing tangible adverse outcomes, will lead to a more holistic and balanced way of experiencing, thinking about, and discussing human sexuality.

A few general trends within the study are worth mentioning. Approximately 48% of articles used samples from outside the United States but had a higher overall percentage of studies reporting all demographics. This may suggest an emphasis of reporting full demographics in countries outside of the US, however it is unclear what may be driving this trend. Another theme that emerged, likely due to the sex positivity in the literature, was a focus on pleasure and enjoyment from masturbation (Goldey et al., 2016; Meiller & Hargons, 2019; Rowland et al., 2019), rather than the focus being on shame and guilt that one might feel from partaking in the activity. Lastly, case studies tended to be sex-negative compared to other methodologies (Gündüz, 2019; Martz, 2003; Uca, 2015). In our sample, there were six case studies, five of which were from the medical field. The more sex-negative messaging in these studies may be due to the more pathologizing nature of their field of origin and its focus on diagnosis rather than other factors.

Omissions

Interestingly, in all but one category (sexuality), international studies made up a smaller percentage of those omitting demographic information than did US-based studies. This may be a manifestation of the myth of the American melting pot, described as the idea that the US is made up of many diverse identities that blend together to form a united nation (Smith, 2012). Researchers may then internalize this myth, leading to the erasure and nondisclosure of unique identities that participants may hold, due to a cultural devaluation of difference and diversity.

Intersecting Identities

Based on our findings there is a need to diversify the female masturbation literature by including narratives of individuals who may not hold privileged identities such as White, cis-gender, able-bodied, young, heterosexual women. One positive finding of ours is that more than half of the articles that reported race primarily had people of color in their samples. This is primarily due to the international studies, many of which were from countries where people of color are more prevalent. However, given the context of global impacts of White Supremacy and colonialism, this result still shows that research on female masturbation succeeds in centering women of color. Our findings partially confirm previous studies, which show that most

masturbation research focuses on heterosexual White women (Kaestle & Allen, 2011). However, as mentioned above, our results differ in that White woman are no longer the majority. This change could be due to progress in sex research as more studies have centered Black sexuality and pleasure (e.g., Hargons et al., 2021; Malone et al., 2021; Thorpe et al., 2022a; Thorpe et al., 2022b). The remaining categories (gender, sexuality, ability status, and age) had fewer people of marginalized identities. None of the studies included non-cisgender women primarily, and this could be due to the search terms falling within the gender binary (i.e., "female" and "woman"). However, it could also be due to a lack of emphasis on this aspect of women's identities and how that relates to masturbation. Diverse populations of female participants are necessary to unpack any potential identity-specific shame, guilt, and/or trauma surrounding female masturbation. Moreover, the literature rarely discusses people of color experiencing race-related stressors within systems of marginalization contributing to further levels of vulnerability within sexual relationships (Hargons et al., 2020). Importantly, understanding the experiences of pleasure and masturbation among women with marginalized identities is essential to promoting their sexual wellness. Using an intersectional lens, we can see how power and privilege is reified and shifted when differing demographics are reported and included in studies on female masturbation. Increasing the diversity of those studies will paint a clearer picture of masturbation across intersecting identities, thus amplifying the voices of marginalized populations.

Although research has shown that women of color are less likely to masturbate than their White counterparts (Herbenick et al., 2010; Shulman & Horne, 2003); the same is not true for female adolescents. Hispanic female adolescents are more likely than their White and Black counterparts to report a history of masturbation (Robbins et al., 2009). While considering these conflicting findings, it is vital to become familiar with barriers to masturbation and cultural norms surrounding masturbation among various races and ethnicities, so all women can engage in self-pleasure and reap the health benefits associated with masturbation (Das, 2007; Wyatt, Peters, & Guthrie, 1988). There are also significant differences in masturbation frequency and experiences by sexual orientation, with lesbian women reporting more frequent masturbation compared to bisexual women, as well as bisexual women reporting masturbating more than heterosexual women (Traeen et al., 2002). Nevertheless, little is known about the masturbation practices of transgender women. There are also age differences in masturbation research with most research focusing on girls from adolescence (Robbins et al., 2011) to mid adulthood (Herbenick et al., 2010), and neglecting older adult women. In order to take an intersectional lifespan approach to masturbation research, studies on people from various marginalized identities should be included.

The Future of Masturbation Research

The voices of marginalized populations in sex research have often been silenced by focusing primarily on disease prevention (Hargons et al., 2020). The high percentage of the sex-negative studies that only feature privileged identities confirm this trend. Further, the same silencing occurs within policy decision making in government. For example, in 1994, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders was fired for suggesting that masturbation be mentioned in school sexuality education programs. This decision solidified the United States' stance on masturbation as a taboo topic that should not be discussed, particularly among adolescents. Nevertheless, the

late Betty Dodson (1929-2020), named the "godmother of masturbation", taught classes since the 1970s focused on solo sex, self-pleasure, and masturbation. Betty Dodson believed that:

> Masturbation is our first natural sexual activity. Masturbation is the ongoing love affair that each of us has with ourselves throughout our lifetime. Masturbation is an erotic meditation. Masturbation inspires creativity. Masturbation is a way to gain sexual self-knowledge. Cultural denial of masturbation is the basis of sexual repression. Sharing masturbation with a lover enhances sexual intimacy. Being responsible for our own orgasm gives us a choice when it comes to partner sex. (dodsonandross.com)

Sex researchers should continue to produce sex-positive research that illuminates the benefits and motivations of female masturbation, the experiences of masturbation for women of various intersecting identities and should continue to advocate for self-pleasure like many of the pioneers that came before them. Further, creating spaces for reflection, sexual liberation, community, and resistance of body shame and sex-negative messages is vital. Additionally, our findings offer a new perspective and hope in that the studies with primarily marginalized participants also were overwhelmingly sex-positive, showing an emphasis on positive aspects of sexuality when studying marginalized people. Should this trend continue and expand to center more marginalized people, then we will be closer to world that Betty Dodson fought for.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this paper has many contributions, it is not without its limitations. First, this content analysis was limited to the search databases available at the host university. Future studies could capitalize on other databases (e,g., Microsoft Academic) to conduct forward citation searches of the articles included. Second, the articles in this paper were limited by date of publication within the years of 2000-2020. Third, the search terms used in the content analysis were limited to "female masturbation" and "women & masturbation" in the title and keyword searches. Future studies would benefit from a more comprehensive search approach that displays the visibility of all identities represented (i.e., utilizing search terms such as LGBTQ+, menopause, racial diversity, etc.). Fourth, many articles did not include more detailed information about the demographics, making it hard to report specifics. Fifth, we conceptualized privileged identities as White, cisgender, heterosexual, young, and able-bodied. This limits the analyses we can make of different forms of privilege and how this may present in cultures outside of the US. This was meant to standardize the coding; however, the authors recognize that privilege and marginalization are not simple concepts. Therefore, the generalizability of these results is limited. Finally, although we made efforts to avoid coding error there could still be human error in coding. Together, this content analysis provides readers with a glimpse of the whole picture and sheds light on the areas that need more focused research.

Future research should leverage this content analysis to apply sex-positive frameworks to studies of marginalized populations in order to increase their representation in sex-positive masturbation studies. Further, the fact that over 60% of the studies we looked at did not report one or more demographic categories points to a need to push for researchers to: 1) ask their subjects about their identities and 2) report, in detail, the identities and social locations of the people they study. Additionally, topics of sexual enrichment through masturbation, such as

understanding sexual anatomy and enhancing sexual pleasure, should be examined. Recommendations for future studies include emphasizing sexual pleasure and desire as tools of liberation for people with multiple marginalized identities through an intersectional approach. Ultimately, the information from this content analysis can be used to inform and develop sex counseling interventions and inclusive sexual education curricula.

Conclusion

This analysis highlights the importance of purposely seeking out more diverse and inclusive samples within masturbation research to increase the generalizability of the findings. Further, the results show that researchers have room to become more sex-positive in their methods and ways of discussing sexuality. Both findings implore researchers to take an active and mindful role in the recruitment and research design portions of the research process. It is crucial to recognize that women are not a monolith and having more diverse samples will reveal more accurate representations of women's experiences. For this reason, including all of the intersections of race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation remains relevant to ensure broader representation in sex research. Finally, our analysis highlights that women holding privileged identities are the focus of current research on female masturbation. The marginalized women who are not studied are silenced, and their experiences of sexual enrichment remain hidden, limiting our knowledge of their sexual lives. An intentional focus on sex-positive research is needed for marginalized groups of women to promote their humanity and reduce the disparity in who is studied or favored related to female masturbation.

References

References marked with an asterisk indicate studies included in the content analysis

*Abdel-Magied, A. (2007). Masturbation practice among female university students. *Ahfad Journal*, *24*(1), 79-80.

*Abdolmanafi, A., Azadfallah, P., Fata, L., Roosta, M., Peixoto, M. M., & Nobre, P. (2015). Sexual dysfunctional beliefs questionnaire (SDBQ): Translation and psychometric properties of the Iranian version. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *12*(8), 1820-1827.

*Adaikan, P. G. (2017). PL-30 Female masturbation: Prevalence, characteristics & therapeutic implications. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *14*(5), e219.

Alexander, A. A. (2019). Sex for all: Sex positivity and intersectionality in clinical and counseling psychology. *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships, 6*(1), 49-72. https://doi.org/10.1353/bsr.2019.0015

*Alexander, M. G., & Fisher, T. D. (2003). Truth and consequences: Using the bogus pipeline to examine sex differences in self-reported sexuality. *Journal of Sex Research*, *40*(1), 27-35.

*Aras, S., Orcin, E., Ozan, S., & Semin, S. (2007). Sexual behaviours and contraception among university students in Turkey. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, *39*(1), 121-135.

*Baćak, V. & Stulhofer, A. (2011). Masturbation among sexually active young women in Croatia: Associations with religiosity and pornography use. *International Journal of Sexual Health, 23*(4), 248-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2011.611220

*Black, J. S. (2006). Orgasmic women: 13 Selfloving divas. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *21*(4).

*Blanc Molina, A., & Rojas Tejada, A. (2017). Comportamientos sexuales convencionales, en solitario, a través de las TIC y no convencionales en jóvenes heterosexuales. *Revista Espanola de Comunicacion en Salud*, *8*(2).

*Bowman, C. P. (2014). Women's masturbation: Experiences of sexual empowerment in a primarily sex-positive sample. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 38*(3), 363–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313514855

Bowman, C. P. (2017). Masturbation. In K. Nadal (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of psychology and gender* (pp.1124–1124). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Brenot, P., & Broussin, B. (1996). Orgasm in utero? *Sexologies, 5*,15–16.

*Brody, S., & Costa, R. M. (2011). Vaginal orgasm is more prevalent among women with a prominent tubercle of the upper lip. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *8*(10), 2793-2799.

*Brody, S., Klapilova, K., & Weiss, P. (2016). Women's masturbation history, vaginal orgasm consistency, and sexual and relationship satisfaction. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *13*(5), S227.

*Brody, S., Klapilova, K., & Krejčová, L. (2013). More frequent vaginal orgasm is associated with experiencing greater excitement from deep vaginal stimulation. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *10*(7), 1730-1736.

*Brody, S., & Krüger, T. H. (2006). The post-orgasmic prolactin increase following intercourse is greater than following masturbation and suggests greater satiety. *Biological Psychology*, *71*(3), 312-315.

*Burri, A., & Carvalheira, A. (2019). Masturbatory behavior in a population sample of German women. *The journal of sexual medicine*, *16*(7), 963-974.

Burnes, T. R., Singh, A. A., & Witherspoon, R. G. (2017). Sex positivity and counseling psychology: An introduction to the major contribution. *The Counseling Psychologist, 45*(4), 470-486. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017710216

*Carvalheira, A., & Leal, I. (2013). Masturbation among women: Associated factors and sexual response in a Portuguese community sample. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 39*(4), 347–367. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1080/0092623X.2011.628440

Christensen, M. C., Wright, R., & Dunn, J. (2017). 'It's awkward stuff': conversations about sexuality with young children. *Child & Family Social Work, 22*(2), 711-720. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12287

*Coleman, E. (2002). Masturbation as a means of achieving sexual health. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality, 14*, 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_02

*Couper, R. & Huynh, H. (2002). Female masturbation masquerading as abdominal pain. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health., 38*(2), 199-200.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. [1989]. In *Feminist legal theory* (pp. 57-80). Routledge.

*Das, A. (2007). Masturbation in the United States. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *33*(4), 301-317. https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230701385514

*Das, A., Parish, W., & Laumann, L. (2009). Masturbation in Urban China. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 38*(1), 108-120.

*DeLamater, J., & Moorman, S. M. (2007). Sexual behavior in later life. *Journal of Aging and Health*, *19*(6), 921-945.

*Dekker, A., & Schmidt, G. (2003). Patterns of masturbatory behaviour: Changes between the sixties and the nineties. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, *14*(2-3), 35-48.

*Donaghue, C. (2015). Sex outside the lines: Authentic sexuality in a sexually dysfunctional culture. Benbella Books.

*Driemeyer, W., Janssen, E., Wiltfang, J., & Elmerstig, E. (2017). Masturbation Experiences of Swedish Senior High School Students: Gender Differences and Similarities. *The Journal of Sex Research: Annual Review of Sex Research 54*(4-5), 631-641.

Engelhardt, H. T. (1974). The disease of masturbation: values and the concept of disease. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 48*(2), 234-248.

Evans-Grimm, Geoffrey, "Talking Masturbation: Men, Women, and Sexuality through Playful Discourse" (2011). Honors Projects. Paper 39. http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/socanth_honproj/39

*Fahs, B., & Frank, E. (2014). Notes from the back room: Gender, power, and (in)visibility in women's experiences of masturbation. *Journal of Sex Research, 51*(3), 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474

Fahs, B. (2014). 'Freedom to' and 'freedom from': A new vision for sex-positive politics. *Sexualities, 17*(3), 267–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713516334

*Farramola Bello, L. A., Erice Rivero, T. S., & Frías Alvarez, Y. (2011). Anorgasmia femenina como problema de salud. *Revista Cubana de Investigaciones Biomédicas*, *30*(3), 312-317.

Frank, E. (2010). The Color of Self-Love: Exploring racism in black female masturbation research.

*Frohlich, P., & Meston, C. (2002). Sexual functioning and self-reported depressive symptoms among college women. *Journal of Sex Research*, *39*(4), 321-325.

*Fuss, J., Bindila, L., Wiedemann, K., Auer, M. K., Briken, P., & Biedermann, S. V. (2017). Masturbation to orgasm stimulates the release of the endocannabinoid 2-arachidonoylglycerol in humans. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *14*(11), 1372-1379.

Geasler, M. J., Dannison, L. L., & Edlund, C. J. (1995). Sexuality education of young children: Parental concerns. *Family relations, 44*(2), 184-188. https://doi.org/10.2307/584807

Giorgi, G., & Siccardi, M. (1996). Ultrasonographic observation of a female fetus' sexual behavior in utero. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, 175*(3 Pt 1), 753-753. https://doi.org/10.1053/ob.1996.v175.aob17503a10

*Glickman, C. (2000). The language of sex positivity. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality, 3*. http://www.ejhs.org/volume3/sexpositive.htm

*Goldey, Katherine L. (2018). Dynamic associations between testosterone, partnering, and sexuality during the college transition in women. *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology, 4*(1), 42-68.

*Goldey, K. L., Posh, A. R., Bell, S. N., & van Anders, S. M. (2016). Defining pleasure: A focus group study of solitary and partnered sexual pleasure in queer and heterosexual women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *45*(8), 2137–2154. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1007/s10508-016-0704-8

*Gunduz, N., Turan, H., & Polat, A. (2019). Hypersexuality Manifesting as Excessive Masturbation in a Female Patient After Temporal Lobe Epileptic Surgery: A Rare Case Report. *Archives of Neuropsychiatry / Noropsikiatri Arsivi*, *56*(4), 316–318. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.29399/npa.23475

Hargons, C. N., Dogan, J., Malone, N., Thorpe, S., Mosley, D. V., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2021). Balancing the sexology scales: a content analysis of Black women's sexuality research. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2020.1776399

*Hargons, C. N., Mosley, D. V., Meiller, C., Stuck, J., Kirkpatrick, B., Adams, C., & Angyal, B. (2018). "It feels so good": Pleasure in last sexual encounter narratives of Black university students. *Journal of Black Psychology, 44*(2), 103-127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798417749400

*Hargons, C., Mosley, D. V., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2017). Studying sex: A content analysis of sexuality research in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 45*(4), 528-546. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017713756

Haus, K.R., Thompson, A.E. An examination of the sexual double standard pertaining to masturbation and the impact of assumed

motives. *Sexuality & Culture, 24*, 809–834 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-019-09666-8

*Hensley, C., Tewksbury, R., & Koscheski, M. (2001). Masturbation Uncovered: Autoeroticism in a Female Prison. *The Prison Journal, 81*(4), 491-501.

Herbenick, D., Bowling, J., Fu, T. C., Dodge, B., Guerra-Reyes, L., & Sanders, S. (2017). Sexual diversity in the United States: Results from a nationally representative probability sample of adult women and men. *PloS one, 12*(7), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181198

*Herbenick, D., Fu, T.-C., Arter, J., Sanders, S. A., & Dodge, B. (2018). Women's experiences with genital touching, sexual pleasure, and orgasm: Results from a US probability sample of women ages 18 to 94. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 44*(2), 201–212. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1080/0092623X.2017.1346530

*Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Schick, V., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). Sexual behaviors, relationships, and perceived health status among adult women in the United States: results from a national probability sample. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 7* (suppl 5), 277-290. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.02010.x

*Herbenick, D. & Reece, M. (2010). Development and Validation of the Female Genital Self-Image Scale. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine., 7*(5), 1822-1830.

*Herbenick, D., Schick, V., Reece, M., Sanders, S., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2011). The Female Genital Self-Image Scale (FGSIS): Results from a nationally representative probability sample of women in the United States. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 8*(1), 158-166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.02071.x

*Hess, U., Brody, S., Van Der Schalk, J., & Fischer, A. H. (2007). Sexual activity is inversely related to women's perceptions of the facial attractiveness of unknown men. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *43*(8), 1991-1997.

Higgins, J. (2013). Sex positivity, pleasure and prophylactics. *Contraception, 88*(2), 303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.contraception.2013.04.079

*Hiller, J., & Hekster, B. (2007). Couple therapy with cognitive behavioural techniques for persistent sexual arousal syndrome. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, *22*(1), 91–96. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1080/14681990600815285

*Hogarth, H., & Ingham, R. (2009). Masturbation among young women and associations with sexual health: An exploratory study. *Journal of Sex Research, 46*(6), 558–56 https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490902878993

hooks, b. (1995). *Killing rage: Ending racism.* New York, NY: Henry Holt, LLC.

*Horne, S., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2005). Female sexual subjectivity and well-being: Comparing late adolescents with different sexual experiences. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 2*, 25–40. https://doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2005.2.3.25

Horne, & Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2006). The Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Inventory for Late Adolescents and Emerging Adults. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *30*(2), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00276.x

*Huong, B., & Liamputtong, P. (2018). 'There was a struggle between my instinct and my head': Women's perception and experience of masturbation in contemporary Vietnam. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 20*(5), 504-515. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2017.1359339

Ivanski, C., & Kohut, T. (2017). Exploring definitions of sex positivity through thematic analysis. The *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 26*(3), 216-225. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2017-0017

*Kaestle, C. E., & Allen, K. R. (2011). The role of masturbation in healthy sexual development: Perceptions of young adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40*(5), 983-994. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9722-0

Kar, A., Bhugra, D., Mukherjee, S., Mondal, A., & Kumar, A. S. (2020). PrEP in India's HIV prevention policy in the era of social media and sex positivity. *Central Asian Journal of Global Health, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.5195/cajgh.2020.407

Kayiran, D., & Sönmez, M. (2020). A need analysis study for intimacy program for early childhood education: preschool teachers' attitudes on masturbation behavior in preschool students. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 28*(5), 731-742. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1817244

*Keels, M., Lee, Z., Knox, D., & Wilson, K. (2013). Lecture versus DVD and attitude change toward

female masturbation. *Education*, *134*(2), 212-217.

Kılıç Onar, D., Armstrong, H., & Graham, C. A. (2020). What does research tell us about women's experiences, motives and perceptions of masturbation within a relationship context?: A systematic review of qualitative studies. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 46*(7), 683-716. https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2020.1781722

King, B. M., & Ragan, P. C. (2019). *Human sexuality today* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

*Kirschbaum, A. L., & Peterson, Z. D. (2018). Would you say you "had masturbated" if…?: The influence of situational and individual factors on labeling a behavior as masturbation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(2), 263-272.

*Klapilová, K., Brody, S., Krejčová, L., Husárová, B., & Binter, J. (2015). Sexual satisfaction, sexual compatibility, and relationship adjustment in couples: The role of sexual behaviors, orgasm, and men's discernment of women's intercourse orgasm. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *12*(3), 667-675.

Klein, V., Savaş, Ö., & Conley, T. D. (2021). How WEIRD and androcentric is sex research? Global inequities in study populations. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1-8.

*Kontula, O. (2017). PL-28 Determinants of Female Sexual Orgasms. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *14*(5), e219.

*Kraus, F. (2017). The practice of masturbation for women: The end of a taboo?. *Sexologies*, *26*(4), e35-e41.

*Lorenz, T. K. (2020). Antidepressant use during development may impair women's sexual desire in adulthood. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *17*(3), 470–476. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.12.012

*Mahar, E. A., Mintz, L. B., & Akers, B. M. (2020). Orgasm equality: Scientific findings and societal implications. *Current Sexual Health Reports, 12*(1), 24-32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-020-00237-9

Malone, N., Thorpe, S., Jester, J. K., Dogan, J. N., Stevens-Watkins, D., & Hargons, C. N. (2021). Pursuing Pleasure Despite Pain: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Black Women's Responses to Sexual Pain and Coping. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 1-15.

*Martz, Denise. (2003). Behavioral Treatment for a Female Engaging in Autoerotic Asphyxiation. *Clinical Case Studies*, 2(3), 236-242.

Martin, K. A., & Luke, K. (2010). Gender differences in the ABC's of the birds and the bees: What mothers teach young children about sexuality and reproduction. *Sex Roles, 62*(3-4), 278-291. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9731-4

*Meiller, C., & Hargons, C. N. (2019). "It's happiness and relief and release": Exploring masturbation among bisexual and queer women. *Journal of Counseling Sexology & Sexual Wellness: Research, Practice, and Education, 1*(1), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.34296/01011009

*Mills, L. A., Vanderpool, R. C., & Crosby, R. A. (2011). Sexually related behaviors as predictors of HPV vaccination among young rural women. *Journal of Women's Health, 20*(12), 1909-1915. https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2011.3000

Mintz, L. B. (2017). *Becoming cliterate: Why orgasm equality matters--and how to get it.* HarperOne.

*Morales, E., Gauthier, V., Edwards, G., & Courtois, F. (2016). Women with disabilities' perceptions of sexuality, sexual abuse and masturbation. *Sexuality and Disability*, *34*(3), 303-314.

*Morales, E., Gauthier, V., Edwards, G., & Courtois, F. (2016). Masturbation practices of men and women with upper limb motor disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability*, *34*(4), 417-431.

Morgan, J. (2015). Why we get off: Moving towards a Black feminist politics of pleasure. *The Black Scholar, 45*(4), 36-46. https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2015.1080915

*Mosher, C. M. (2017). Historical perspectives of sex positivity: Contributing to a new paradigm within counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 45* (4), 487-503. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017713755

*Nappi, R. E. (2015). To be or not to be in sexual desire: the androgen dilemma. *Climacteric*, *18*(5), 672-674. https://doi.org/10.3109/13697137.2015.1064268

*Narayanan, A. (2015). Inaccessible masturbation, impossible mourning: Collective melancholia, the prohibition on female sexual subjects in India, and masturbation fantasy as a zone of the strange. *The Psychoanalytic Review., 102*(6), 803-826. https://doi.org/10.1521/prev.2015.102.6.803

*O'Keefe SL, Beard KW, Stroebel SS, Berhie G, Bickham PJ, & Robinett SR. (2009). Correlates of inserted object-assisted sexual behaviors in women: a model for development of paraphilic and non-paraphilic urges. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, *16*(2), 101–130.

Peters, H. C. (2017). Multicultural complexity: An intersectional lens for clinical supervision. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling, 39*(2), 176-187. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-017-9290-2

Petersen, J. L., & Hyde, J. S. (2011). Gender differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors: A

review of meta-analytic results and large datasets. *Journal of Sex Research, 48*(2-3), 149-165. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2011.551851

*Philippsohn, S. & Hartmann, U. (2009). Determinants of sexual satisfaction in a sample of German women. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 6*(4), 1001-1010. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2008.00989.x

*Pinkerton, S. D. (2002). Factors associated with masturbation in a collegiate sample. *Journal of Psychology, 14*(2-3), 103-121. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_07

Prior, E., Williams, D. J., Zavala, T., & Milford, J. (2016). What do(n't) American undergraduate social work students learn about sex? A content analysis of sex positivity and diversity in five popular HBSE textbooks. *Critical Social Work, 17*(1). https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v17i1.5895

*Ready, K. (2019). Masturbation, modernity, and the Swiftian diagnosis re-examined. *History of European Ideas*, *45*(5), 661-674.

*Riley, A., & Riley, E. (2003). The effect of Clitstim (Vielle™) on sexual response induced by masturbation in female volunteers. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *18*(1), 45-52.

*Robbins, C. L., Schick, V., Reece, M., Herbenick, D., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2011). Prevalence, frequency, and associations of masturbation with partnered sexual behaviors among US adolescents. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 165*(12), 1087-1093. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2011.142

*Robinson, B. B. E., Bockting, W. O., & Harrell, T. (2003). Masturbation and sexual health: An exploratory study of low-income African American women. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, *14*(2-3), 85-102

*Rowland, D., Donarski, A., Graves, V., Caldwell, C., Hevesi, B., & Hevesi, K. (2019). The experience of orgasmic pleasure during partnered and masturbatory sex in women with and without orgasmic difficulty. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *45*(6), 550-561.

*Rowland, D. L., Kolba, T. N., McNabney, S. M., Uribe, D., & Hevesi, K. (2020). Why and How Women Masturbate, and the Relationship to Orgasmic Response. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *46*(4), 361-376.

Rowland, D. L., Hevesi, K., Conway, G. R., & Kolba, T. N. (2020). Relationship between masturbation and partnered sex in women: Does the former facilitate, inhibit, or not affect the latter?. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 17*(1),

37-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.10.012

*Rowland, D. L., Sullivan, S. L., Hevesi, K., & Hevesi, B. (2018). Orgasmic latency and related parameters in women during partnered and masturbatory sex. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *15*(10), 1463-1471

Saliares, E., Wilkerson, J. M., Sieving, R. E., & Brady, S. S. (2017). Sexually experienced adolescents' thoughts about sexual pleasure. *The Journal of Sex Research, 54*(4-5), 604-618. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1170101

*Schedlowski, Kruger, & Exton. (2003). Prolactin secretion after orgasm: Feedback-mechanism for sexual drive or a reproductive reflex? *Journal of Psychophysiology, 17*(3), 176-177.

*Shelton, J. D. (2010). Masturbation: breaking the silence. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *36*(3), 157.

*Shirazi, T., Renfro, K. J., Lloyd, E., & Wallen, K. (2018). Women's experience of orgasm during intercourse: Question semantics affect women's reports and men's estimates of orgasm occurrence. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *47*(3), 605-613.

*Shulman, J. L., & Horne, S. G. (2003). The use of self-pleasure: Masturbation and body image among African American and European American women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *27*(3), 262-269.

Singh, A., Both, R., & Philpott, A. (2021). 'I tell them that sex is sweet at the right time'–A qualitative review of 'pleasure gaps and opportunities' in sexuality education programmes in Ghana and Kenya. *Global Public Health, 16*(5), 788-800. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1809691

Smith, D. M. (2012). The American melting pot: A national myth in public and popular discourse. *National Identities, 14*(4), 387-402.

*Smith, L. J., Mulhall, J. P., Deveci, S., Monaghan, N., & Reid, M. C. (2007). Sex after seventy: a pilot study of sexual function in older persons. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *4*(5), 1247-1253.

*Studd, J. (2007). A comparison of 19th century and current attitudes to female sexuality. *Gynecological Endocrinology, 23*(12), 673–681. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1080/09513590701708860

Thorpe, S., Dogan, J. N., Malone, N., Jester, J. K., Hargons, C. N., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2022a). Correlates of Sexual Self-Consciousness Among Black Women. *Sexuality & Culture, 26*(2), 707-728.

Thorpe, S., Malone, N., Hargons, C. N., Dogan, J. N., & Jester, J. K. (2022b). The Peak of Pleasure: US Southern Black Women's Definitions of and Feelings Toward Sexual Pleasure. *Sexuality & Culture*, 1-17.

Tolman, D. L. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Harvard University Press.

*Tortorici, Z. (2007). Masturbation, salvation, and desire: connecting sexuality and religiosity in colonial Mexico. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, *16*(3), 355-372.

*Towne, A. (2019). Clitoral stimulation during penile-vaginal intercourse: A phenomenological study exploring sexual experiences in support of female orgasm. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, 28*(1), 68–80. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2018-0022

*Træen, B., Samuelsen, S. O., & Roen, K. (2016). Sexual debut ages in heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults in Norway. *Sexuality & Culture, 20*(3), 699-716. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9353-2

*Uca, A. U., & Kozak, H. H. (2015). Masturbation and orgasm as migraine headache treatment: Report of a case. *Neurology Asia, 20*(2), 185–186.

Ussher, J., Perz, J., Metusela, C., Hawkey, A., Morrow, M., Narchal, R., & Estoesta, J. (2017). Negotiating discourses of shame, secrecy, and silence: Migrant and refugee women's experiences of sexual embodiment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 46* (7), 1901-1921. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0898-9

*van Anders, S. M. (2012). Testosterone and sexual desire in healthy women and men. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *41*(6), 1471-1484.

*Wade, L. D., Kremer, E. C., & Brown, J. (2005). The incidental orgasm: The presence of clitoral knowledge and the absence of orgasm for women. *Women & health*, *42*(1), 117-138.

*Walthall, A. (2009). Masturbation and discourse on female sexual practices in Early Modern Japan. *Gender & History, 21*(1), 1-18.

*Wang, R., Huang, Y., & Lin, Y. (2007). A study of masturbatory knowledge and attitudes and related factors among Taiwan adolescents. *Journal of Nursing Research (Taiwan Nurses Association), 15*(3), 233–242. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1097/01.JNR.0000387619.10554.f5

*Wentland J. J., Herold E. S., Desmarais S., & Milhausen R. R. (2009). Differentiating highly sexual women from less sexual women. *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, *18*(4), 169–182.

*Williams, D J, Thomas, J. N., Prior, E. E., Walters, W. (2015). Introducing a multidisciplinary framework of positive sexuality. *Journal of Positive Sexuality, 1*, 6-11.

*Williams, D J, Prior, E. E., & Wegner, J. (2013). Resolving problems associated with sexuality: Can a "sex-positive" approach help? *Social Work, 58* (3), 273-276. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt024

*Willis, M., Jozkowski, K. N., Lo, W. J., & Sanders, S. A. (2018). Are women's orgasms hindered by phallocentric imperatives?. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *47*(6), 1565-1576.

Wise, N. (2020). *Why good sex matters: Understanding the neuroscience of pleasure for a smarter, happier, and more purpose-filled life*. Houghton Mifflin.

World Health Organization (2006). Defining sexual health: Report of a technical consultation on sexual health. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/gender_rights/defining_sexual_health.pdf?ua=1

*Wright, H., Jenks, R. A., & Lee, D. M. (2020). Sexual expression and cognitive function: Gender-divergent associations in older adults. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *49*(3), 941-951.

Wyatt, G. E., Peters, S. D., & Guthrie, D. (1988). Kinsey revisited, Part II: Comparisons of the sexual socialization and sexual behavior of Black women over 33 years. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 17*(4), 289-332. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01541741

*Yuxin, P., & Ho Sik Ying, P. (2009). Gender, self and pleasure: young women's discourse on masturbation in contemporary Shanghai. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11*(5), 515–528. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uky.edu/10.1080/13691050902912775

*Zhang, N., Parish, W. L., Huang, Y., & Pan, S. (2012). Sexual infidelity in China: Prevalence and gender-specific correlates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *41*(4), 861-873.

A Focus Group Study Exploring Perceptions of Online Hookup App Use Among Heterosexual Women

Lauren N. Maziarz[1]
Department of Public and Allied Health, Bowling Green State University

Abstract

Online dating platforms have become a more common way for adults in the United States (U.S.) to find both romantic partners as well as sex partners. While certain hookup apps, such as Grindr, market towards men who have sex with men (MSM), other platforms, like Tinder, tend to attract people who identify as heterosexual. Eighteen self-identified heterosexual college women participated in one of four focus groups between April and October 2019. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by the research team and themes were analyzed after all focus groups were complete. Four salient themes emerged which included concerns about meeting in person for the first time, apps making it easier to find partners, apps promoting hookup culture, and differences in perception depending on which gender you identify as. There are perceived advantages to using apps to find a partner but also hesitation. Future research should focus on the extent to which heterosexual women are using hookup apps to find sex partners and how these apps affect the sexual health and mental wellbeing of self-identified heterosexual women.

Introduction

Online dating platforms are increasingly common in the United States (U.S.) with three in 10 American adults saying they've used a dating site or app at some point (Vogels, 2020). Hookup or dating apps, which are also known as geosocial networking apps, have been discussed as giving rise to "hookup culture" (Ay-Tayyib et al., 2009; Cabecinha, et al., 2017; Rosenfeld, 2017) where individuals have more non-committed sexual encounters and fewer long-term partners. It should be noted that hookups are not a new phenomenon, however. For example, historical reports show the expansion of cars and movie theaters in the 1920's gave rise to young adults leaving home and engaging in freer sexual expression (Garcia et al., 2013). While some research has shown hookup encounters can negatively affect both mental and physical wellbeing (Garcia et al., 2012), hookups have also been considered by some to be a part of an adult's normal sexual exploration where individuals can go through a phase of hooking up only to later end up in a committed relationship (Bogle, 2008; Rosenfeld, 2017).

A Vanity Fair article by Nancy Jo Sales (2015) claimed that Tinder was the end of dating as we know it, calling this newfound era a "dating apocalypse." Sales quotes one male who remarks

on going on two or three Tinder dates a week, sleeping with 100 girls in a year. Of course, Sales' arguments are anecdotal and to what extent hookup apps are driving a trend towards less committed relationships is largely undetermined. While the studies are few, data by Rosenfeld (2017) shows that more than 80% of unpartnered heterosexual adults in the US have not met for a date or hookup in the last year. Furthermore, those who did use Tinder met an average of five people for sex or romance over the last 12 months (Rosenfeld, 2017), far fewer than what Sales is claiming in her expose.

There is also considerable variability in who reports using these platforms. Being younger, male, and identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) increases the odds of using social media platforms to find a partner (Vogels, 2020) with LGB adults reporting use twice as often as those who identify as straight (55% versus 28%, respectively) (Vogels, 2020). These data are corroborated by Rosenfeld (2017) who found both unpartnered LGB men and women were more likely than heterosexual men and women to report finding a partner on a dating or hookup app. For women who identify as heterosexual, hookup or dating app use to find a romantic or sex partner is not widely reported. Of the 11.4% of unpartnered heterosexual women who met at least one person for dating, romance, or sex in last 12 months, 22% of these dates were met through a phone app (Rosenfeld, 2017). Furthermore, at least one study correlated using hookup apps with increased sexual risk behavior among women such as less condom use and concurrent substance use (Cabecinha et al., 2017), although a selection bias could be confounding these associations, as those who use the apps may be more sexually active than those who use other means of finding sexual partners.

Certain apps such as Grindr market towards men who have sex with men (MSM), while other online dating platforms, such as Tinder, tend to attract people who identify as heterosexual. Even though reported app use is lower among heterosexual women (Barrada & Castro, 2020), the perceptions surrounding app use are largely unknown. In other words, why aren't heterosexual women using apps to find sex or romantic partners as often as other demographics? While at least one other study comparing heterosexual and non-heterosexual men and women has shown that there are perceived advantages for finding partners online, such as easier communication, more familiarity, and increased trust (Seal et al., 2015), data are lacking in terms of perceptions of hookup app use, as opposed to other online platforms, as a means for finding partners. Thus, the purpose of this study is to further explore the perceptions of heterosexual women regarding their use of online dating apps as means for hooking up. The researchers were interested in the following research questions: 1) How are women utilizing dating and hookup apps for finding romantic versus sex partners? and 2) What are the perceptions of self-identified heterosexual women when using online dating or hookup apps for finding romantic and/or sex partners?

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited at a mid-size public university in the Midwest via posters distributed across campus as well as through a university-wide campus email which announces daily events for students, faculty, and staff. Interested participants were asked to call a research assistant to register for a focus group and were encouraged to use a pseudonym when registering

to ensure confidentiality. Flyers stated the researchers were recruiting self-identified heterosexual women at the university, although the research team did not screen further for sexual orientation after participants registered. The first focus group was held in April 2019 (*n*=8) with three other focus groups held in October and November 2019 (total *n*=10) for a total sample size of 18.

Several days prior to the focus group, each registered participant received an email reminding them of the date and time. Upon arrival, participants were given a name card where they could list a pseudonym if desired, an informed consent document, and a brief demographic survey. Participants were reminded that participation was voluntary, and they could leave at any time or not answer a particular question. Additionally, due to the nature of focus groups, anonymity was not guaranteed; however, participants could choose to use the pseudonym they registered with or another pseudonym of their choosing. The moderator reminded each group that the discussion should remain confidential and asked that no information shared during the sessions be discussed outside of the focus group. Participants were offered a $10 Visa gift card for their participation and pizza was provided as an additional incentive.

The primary investigator (PI) moderated all focus groups to improve congruence across sessions. Seven semi-structured questions were used to moderate the focus groups and included questions on perceptions of hook-up app use, gender differences in perceptions of use, and perceptions of sexual risk when meeting a partner found on a hookup app. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, no theoretical framework was used to guide creation of the moderator guide. Each focus group lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Sessions were audio recorded and transcribed by a research assistant and notes were taken to assist with data transcription. Audio files were subsequently destroyed after all data were transcribed. The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the protocol before recruitment began.

Data Analysis

Described by Braun and Clarke (2006), an inductive thematic analysis approach was used to organize and identify themes both within and between focus groups. After reviewing the transcribed data, initial codes were generated by the researchers before beginning thematic analysis. Overarching, broad themes were then used to group several individual codes into one theme. Researchers developed codes and broad themes individually and used discussion to reach 100% agreement before the themes were applied to all data. Across all focus groups, four major themes were identified (e.g., Lack of Safety and Concern for Wellbeing, Easier to Navigate Relationship Dynamics, Apps Promote Hookup Culture, Using Apps is Different for Women).

Results

On the demographic survey, most participants identified as White (83.3%) between the ages of 18 and 22 (*M*=21.05) (see Table 1). While 72.2% of participants (*n*=13) said they had used an app to find a romantic partner, only five participants (27.7%) said they had used an app to find a sex partner.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Ever Used Data App to Find Romantic Partner	Ever Used Dating App to Find Sex Partner?
P1	37	White	Y	Y
P2	21	White	Y	N
P3	20	White	Y	N
P4	21	White	N	N
P5	19	White	Y	N
P6	19	White	Y	N
P7	22	White	Y	Y
P8	*	*	*	*
P9	19	White	Y	N
P10	21	Asian	Y	N
P11	20	White	Y	Y
P12	20	White	*	*
P13	18	White	*	*
P14	23	White	Y	N
P15	19	White	Y	Y
P16	21	White	Y	N
P17	20	White	Y	Y
P18	18	Hispanic/Latinx	N	N

*Participant chose not to disclose

Lack of Safety and Concern for Wellbeing

Within and between groups, the first theme of lack of safety and concern for wellbeing emerged and spoke to feelings of fear of not knowing who they might meet online. Participants expressed thoughts of reticence at meeting individuals without having a chance to vet a partner first in person. One participant noted, "…you never know who you could be meeting online…someone might be like, 'oh maybe you shouldn't do that because they could give you an STD or they could not be who they say they are'" (P16). Another participant stated a similar sentiment, saying, "It seems like it would be the most dangerous way because you don't know who they are and you don't know who's behind the photo, you know, and if you do go to meet them, it could be some crazy person" (P5). Additional feelings were shared from another participant, who stated "…I wouldn't just meet someone for the first time at three in the morning or something. I definitely think that's where the safety comes into play because you don't really know this person" (P3).

There were also concerns about how to verify identities. Two focus groups noted that Snapchat (Snap, Inc.©) can be used for real time communication before meeting someone for the first time as mentioned by one participant, "… [one way] is getting other forms of social media when you start talking to them. Like Snapchat and obviously Snapchatting them. Actually seeing their face." (P16). As noted by a different participant, last names are not typically given on hookup apps so using other forms of social media, like Snapchat, allows for verification instead

of getting "catfished" (P15), which is when an individual uses fake pictures or information, usually from another individual, to create new identities online.

Easier to Navigate Relationship Dynamics

The second theme that emerged both within and between focus groups was one that spoke to a sense of apps being easier for fostering communication than in-person conversations. It was remarked by several participants that there are few options for meeting partners outside of online apps, "I think an app is easier because in person people have to actually go talk to each other, and that's really hard for our generation" (P2). Another participant commented, "It's really good if you're shy because you can meet new people, they use it as like a pass time. They're just like 'oh just swiping…'" (P11). Another participant said, "I think it's a pretty convenient way, outside of that, the only other ways I can think of if that's what you're looking for is bars" (P1).

Other participants commented on how using apps allowed for a freer sense of self with one participant stating, "I did do the dating app thing, when I did do it, I was able to talk more than I do in real life, so I was living this life I've never lived" (P5). Another participant discussed how using apps increased their confidence while dating, stating,

> If you were to go to the bar you don't have the control as much. I don't have as many cards in my hands as I do on the app, like I can choose to respond to who I want, but if I'm at a bar, then I have to be on it…I think [using these apps] has built my confidence a bit. I've become more comfortable stating my expectations, knowing what I want from whatever type of relationship I'm getting into, whether that's one night or more than one night. (P3)

Participants also noted decreased fears of being rebuffed when meeting online, saying, "[Meeting in person] is more natural and all that stuff but there is a lot more risk in rejection there…less bravery that you have to do" (P2).

Apps Promote Hookup Culture

The third emergent theme across all focus groups was an idea of a promotion of hookup culture, where people who use social media apps are looking for sex, not a romantic partner. Certain apps, such as Tinder, were noted as being stigmatized, especially for women. One participant commented, "…I think that when I'm using Tinder my intent is not that I'm going to be romantically involved with this person. It's usually like, would I want to hook up with this person once?" (P3) while another participant said, "so personally I have three dating apps. Tinder is more if you want a hookup, Bumble is kind of more for dating. And then I have this one called Hinge, which is like just strictly dating" (P9). Another participant stated,

> I think also especially with Tinder and stuff I kind of have a stereotype that people on there are just kind of looking for hookups. I haven't used Tinder but I wouldn't expect people on there to be looking for committed relationships. (P4)

Using Apps is Different for Women

Finally, the fourth emergent theme across all focus groups spoke to perceived differences for men and women when using apps, where there are different social standards depending on which gender you identify as. One participant stated, "…in the guys' bios the first thing is like, 'I'm just looking for a hookup.' And you would never see that on a girls' profile…" (P15) while another said, "I feel like women use it a lot more for the actual relationships, but men use it not for relationships, for hookups" (P9). Another participant elaborated to say,

> I mean that's the social norm that women aren't supposed to go on dating apps to just hookup or to have sex for pleasure, like it's supposed to be that you want to get into a relationship before you have sex like 'oh you want to be in a relationship before you have sex' or you're seen as a whore…but I think no matter what men are not judged for that… (P3)

Another participant commented on gender disparities when voicing intentions to engage in casual sex, saying, "…overall if my friend said she was getting on Tinder to get some dick, then I'd be like, 'Sure go for it.' You might as well. Half the guys are on there for that anyways" (P16). Participants also noted that admitting to using the apps may go against preconceived personal perceptions as discussed by one participant, "I feel people would question if I said I'm only looking for sex, especially because that would probably go against perceptions of me" (P14).

Discussion

What emerged from the data was a complex picture of how women both personally use as well as perceive dating and hookup apps. Participants noted clear reticence shaped by concerns for personal safety and hesitation based on societal norms of what is considered "acceptable." Not all hookup apps were perceived equally, however, as certain apps like Tinder had noted stigmas depending on which gender you identify as. Women expressed frustration with the bold way in which men may declare they want a casual sex partner on app profiles while noting the reverse would bring ridicule and shame. Engaging in more sex-positive discussions on dating app use could help normalize app use, even if women continue to be stigmatized for wanting casual sex.

Hookup apps were also viewed as an easier way to find a partner versus meeting someone face-to-face, and in fact may even act as a social buffer to decrease anxiety. As at least one other study has shown, this may be an inherent advantage of meeting people online (Seal et al., 2015). Since only 5 women admitted to using hookup apps to find a sex partner, it is unclear if these feelings center around hookup apps, where the intention is finding a casual partner, or dating apps, where the focus is on finding a romantic partner. Generational differences were also noted where starting a conversation with a stranger face-to-face was viewed as harder for younger women. Due to their ubiquity, social media platforms, including hookup apps, may have circumvented in-person conversations for younger adults, although it is unclear how this translates into decreased anxiety surrounding meeting new people.

While use of apps for finding romantic partners was common among young women in our study it is unclear how these apps are being used to find sex partners. Our findings show that delineating intent of app use (romantic partner versus sex partner) may be an important factor in determining when and how heterosexual women are using these platforms, which is dissimilar from other studies (Rosenfeld, 2017; Vogels, 2020). Going online with an intent to find a sex partner versus going online to find a romantic partner and then having sex should be conceptualized as two different activities. It is also unclear to what extent the perceived advantages to using apps to find a partner outweigh the hesitations, whether it is concerns about social acceptance or perceived risk of who they will end up meeting in person.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, due to the qualitative nature of this research, no causation can be inferred from the results. Further, the small sample size and lack of diversity among participants means the feelings and thoughts expressed may not be representative of all college-aged heterosexual women. Given the nature of focus groups, group bias and social desirability of responses is also a risk. Some women may have felt uncomfortable expressing their intentions of using apps to find a sex partner and thus did not engage in conversations related to their actual use. Future research using a mixed methods or quantitative approach should focus on how often hookup apps are being used to find sex versus romantic partners and how these apps affect the sexual health and mental wellbeing of self-identified heterosexual women.

References

Al-Tayyib, A.A., McFarlane, M., & Rietmeijer, C.A. (2009). Finding sex partners on the internet: What is the risk for sexually transmitted infections? Sexually Transmitted Infections, 85, 216-220. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/sti.2008.032631

Barrada, J.R. & Castro, A. (2020). Tinder users: Sociodemographic, psychological, and psychosexual characteristics. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(21), 8047. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218047

Bogle, K.A. 2008. Hooking up: Sex, dating and relationships on campus. New York: New York University Press.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cabecinha, M., Mercer, C.H., Gravningen, K., Aicken, C., Jones, K.G., Tanton, C., Wellings, K., Sonnenberg, P., & Field, N. (2017). Finding sexual partners online: prevalence and associations with sexual behavior, Sexually Transmitted Infections, 93, 572-582. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/sextrans-2016-052994

Garcia, J.R., Reiber, C., Massey, S.G., & Merriwweather, A.M. (2012). Sexual hookup culture: A review. Review of General Psychology, 16(2), 161-176.

Garcia, J.R., Reiber, C., Massey, S.G., & Merriwweather, A.M. (2013). Sexual hookup culture. American Psychological Association (APA). https://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/02/ce-corner

Rosenfeld, M.J. (2018). Are Tinder and dating apps changing dating and mating in the U.S.?" Families and Technology, edited by Jennifer Van Hook, Susan M. McHale, and Valarie King: Springer, 103-117.

Sales, N.J. (2015). "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse'." Vanity Fair, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/tinder-hook-up-culture-end-of-dating

Seal, D.W., Benotsch, E.G., Green, M., Snipes, D.J., Bull, S.S., Cejka, A., Lance, S.P., & Nettles, C.D. (2015). The use of the internet to meet sexual partners: A comparison of non-heterosexually-identified men with heterosexually identified men and women. International Journal of Sexual Health, 27(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2014.918921

Vogels, E. (2020). 10 facts about Americans and online dating. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/06/10-facts-about-americans-and-online-dating/

Submission Guidelines

We invite the submission of original manuscripts on any topics relevant to positive sexuality. We encourage submissions from diverse epistemological perspectives, and we welcome a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, as well as theoretical and conceptual essays. Alongside the work of scholars and students, we are interested in contributions from community, clinical, and other nonacademic professionals, especially contributions that help strengthen the connection between the study and practice of positive sexuality.

While the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* has a preference for shorter manuscripts (2,000–3,000 words), longer manuscripts up to 10,000 words will be considered. In preparation for submission, authors should observe the following guidelines:

- Manuscripts should have a clear sex-positive focus.
- Given the diverse readership of the journal, authors should write in a straight-forward and non-technical manner, avoiding jargon when possible. Manuscripts should be written such that they can be easily understood by scholars and professionals outside of one's own field or discipline.
- Manuscripts should be written in a style consistent with the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). Please include DOIs for all references when available. Instead of endnotes, please use footnotes when necessary.

New submissions should be emailed to submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org, and should include the following Microsoft Word attachments:

- A title page, including: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) names, institutional affiliations, and contact information for each author; (3) the word count of the main manuscript; (4) a statement certifying that the submission has not been previously published and/or is not currently under review elsewhere; (5) any pertinent information about the approval or regulatory process for human subjects research; (6) any acknowledgements that the authors would like to include for publication.
- A fully-blinded manuscript, including: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) a brief abstract, 100 words or less; (3) the body of the manuscript; (4) references
- Tables or figures can be submitted in separate files in either Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel format, or embedded in the manuscript. If tables or figures are being submitted separately, please provide the preferred location as a reference note within the manuscript.

Manuscripts will be reviewed initially by the Editor-in-Chief and/or Associate Editors. Appropriate manuscripts will then be sent out for double-blind peer review by at least two reviewers. While not always possible, the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* strives to return editorial decisions within two months of submission.

Editorial decisions may include acceptance, minor revisions, major revisions, or rejection. In the case of requested revisions, authors will be asked to resubmit their revised manuscripts within two months. When submitting a revised manuscript, authors will also be asked to provide a detailed response to the reviewers.

Accepted manuscripts will be copy edited, and proofs will be sent to authors for correction and approval prior to publication.

To submit manuscripts for review or inquire about submissions, please email submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

For all other questions, comments, or concerns, please email info@journalofpositivesexuality.org.