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### “In This Industry, You're No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden

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# “In This Industry, You're No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden

## Abstract

Despite being a global, billion-dollar industry, very little is known about the conditions women face within the pornography industry. The aim of this study was to explore women’s experiences in pornography production, with a particular focus on structural antecedents to entrance, coercion, and violence within the industry, as well as current needs and any barriers to exiting the industry. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine women with experiences in pornography production in Sweden. Participants identified young age, financial insecurity, earlier exposure to sexualized violence, and poor mental health as typical antecedents to entering the pornography industry. Once in the industry, women risk manipulation and coercion by pornographers and porn buyers, making it difficult to maintain personal boundaries. Women are regularly harassed by porn buyers who send requests to purchase specific sexualized acts online or offline. The greater a woman’s vulnerability, the more difficult it is to resist pornographer’s and porn buyer’s demands. Experiences in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation are common. A significant barrier to exiting pornography production is the distress of having one’s pornographic images remain online indefinitely. In order to exit the pornography industry and access real alternatives, participants stressed the importance of vocational training, further education and psychosocial support. This study is an important step in elucidating the situation faced by women in pornography production. Further documentation of harms and assessment of needs is warranted for policymaking and the development of effective support services for this vulnerable population.

## Keywords

Sweden, pornography production, pornography industry, commercial sexualized exploitation, sexualized violence, prostitution, support services

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**“IN THIS INDUSTRY, YOU’RE NO LONGER HUMAN”:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES  
IN PORNOGRAPHY PRODUCTION IN SWEDEN**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite being a global, billion-dollar industry, very little is known about the conditions women face within the pornography industry. The aim of this study was to explore women's experiences in pornography production, with a particular focus on structural antecedents to entrance, coercion, and violence within the industry, as well as current needs and any barriers to exiting the industry. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine women with experiences in pornography production in Sweden. Participants identified young age, financial insecurity, earlier exposure to sexualized violence, and poor mental health as typical antecedents to entering the pornography industry. Once in the industry, women risk manipulation and coercion by pornographers and porn buyers, making it difficult to maintain personal boundaries. Women are regularly harassed by porn buyers who send requests to purchase specific sexualized acts online or offline. The greater a woman's vulnerability, the more difficult it is to resist pornographer's and porn buyer's demands. Experiences in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation are common. A significant barrier to exiting pornography production is the distress of having one's pornographic images remain online indefinitely. In order to exit the pornography industry and access real alternatives, participants stressed the importance of vocational training, further education and psychosocial support. This study is an important step in elucidating the situation faced by women in pornography production. Further documentation of harms and assessment of needs is warranted for policymaking and the development of effective support services for this vulnerable population.

**KEYWORDS**

Sweden, pornography production, pornography industry, commercial sexualized exploitation, sexualized violence, prostitution, support services

**R**ESearch on pornography's societal impact has proliferated in recent years. With a particular focus on pornography's consequences for young people, the growing body of literature demonstrates a clear link between pornography consumption and several adverse outcomes, including risky sexual behaviors and sexualized violence (Gassó & Bruch-Granados, 2021; Owens et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). In response, a concerted effort to combat these harms has developed among researchers, professionals, decision-makers, and members of the general public. Unfortunately, these efforts have often failed to account for pornography's impact on the women involved in its production.

The limited research on the conditions of the pornography industry indicates that women performing in pornography face considerable risks to their health and well-being. One Los Angeles study found that women in pornography were significantly more likely to have been raped, lived in poverty, and been placed in foster care as children compared to women from the Californian general population (Grudzen et al., 2011). In a qualitative study among individuals filmed for pornography production, financial insecurity and mental health problems were identified as reasons for entrance into the industry (Grudzen et al., 2009). Once they begin performing in pornography production, women face pressure to take part in risky, unprotected sexualized acts, resulting in high rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea (Javanbakht et al., 2017). They also risk being subject to verbal and physical violence and forced to perform unwanted sexualized acts (Bridges et al., 2010; Fritz et al., 2020a; Grudzen et al., 2009; Javanbakht et al., 2017; Shor, 2019). Many women in pornography have experiences in prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation (Farley et al., 2003; Grudzen et al., 2009; Javanbakht et al., 2017). In a study among 854 individuals in various forms of prostitution, as many as 49% had been filmed for pornography, and these particular individuals suffered from significantly more severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to those who had not been filmed (Farley et al., 2003). This suggests that pornography may be a particularly damaging form of prostitution (Tyler, 2015; Waltman, 2014).

Recent data from Switzerland suggests that pornography production is a common form of commercial sexualized exploitation affecting young women and girls today (Averdijk et al., 2020). It is thereby a pertinent time to further investigate the conditions of pornography production, particularly in a context outside of the United States. As early as 2004, a systematic mapping of pornography websites, financial flows, and Internet traffic was conducted in Sweden, when pornography was first transitioning online (Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). Since then, the industry has expanded rapidly into new online spaces, and user-generated pornography, or *amateur* and *do-it-yourself* (DIY) pornography, has become increasingly common (Van Doorn, 2010). This calls for up-to-date research that crucially involves the voices of women directly affected by pornography production with the purpose of elucidating their current situation and needs.

## METHODS

### Point of Departure and Positionality

Pornography lacks a unanimous definition within the academic literature. Most definitions describe pornography as images featuring sexual activities intended to sexually arouse the viewer. What these definitions fail to consider is: *Who is doing what, to whom, and for whom*, in pornography.

Previous research has revealed how pornography portrays and promotes the objectification and degradation of women by men. In a content analysis of pornography in 2010, Ana Bridges and colleagues found that 88% of the most popular rented pornography films contained physical violence like gagging, open-hand slapping, hair pulling and choking (Bridges et al., 2010). Nearly half of all scenes contained verbally aggressive acts, where women were called dehumanizing and derogatory names or threatened with physical harm. Virtually all of the humiliation and violence was directed by men towards women. Recent studies investigating online pornography specifically have observed the same theme of men's dominance over and violence towards women (Fritz et al., 2020a; Shor, 2019; Vera-Gray et al., 2021), and noted a very

high incidence of overt racism (Fritz et al., 2020b). In pornography, women—especially women of color—are presented as sexualized objects appearing to enjoy pain, humiliation and violence (Bridges et al., 2010; Fritz et al., 2020b, 2020a; Shor, 2019; Vera-Gray et al., 2021). Pornography has been rightly described as a patriarchal institution eroticizing male dominance and female submission (McVey et al., 2020). The operationalization of pornography I adopt in this study therefore seeks to include this power and gender analysis generally lacking in the literature:

Pornography is defined as third-party produced or user-generated photos or videos featuring sexualized acts intended to sexually arouse the viewer. These images are produced for the purpose of generating income and are characterized by men's dominance over women, where women appear to enjoy humiliation, degradation, and violence.

Here, pornography is also understood as being fully integrated into what is often referred to as the sex trade (Farley & Donevan, in press). I use the term commercial sexualized exploitation in this paper to describe all forms of purchased sexualized acts, both offline and online. Despite their common use, I wish to refrain from using terms like "sex trade," "sex buyer," and "sex purchase," as the word sex describes a mutual act built on intimacy, respect, and consent, occurring only between active and consenting participants. The exchange of money that ensues when a man buys access to a woman's body, and the clear power imbalance between the buyer and the woman being sold, effectively removes the ingredients demarcating consent. This phenomenon can thus only be described as a sexualization of men's violence against women. Inspired by the important analysis and framework developed by Linda Coates and Allan Wade (2004), the term commercial sexualized exploitation seeks to "tell it like it is," without obscuring and concealing the violence inherent to prostitution in all its forms.

## Design

This study was conducted within the framework of a larger project aimed at uncovering and mapping out the pornography industry in Sweden. The project was instigated and funded by Talita, an organization supporting women exploited in prostitution, pornography, and human trafficking for sexualized exploitation. The first phase of the project consisted of an exploratory mapping of production and distribution of pornography in Sweden, where general trends were documented. The second phase of the project involved in-depth interviews among women with experiences in pornography production, where eligibility criteria was women aged 18 and older who have been photographed or filmed in pornography production in Sweden. Interviews were conducted between May and August 2018.

This exploratory qualitative study involved primary data collection through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of participants. Requests for interviews were sent to 32 women providing contact details on the platforms identified during the initial qualitative mapping phase. The request for interview was also distributed within the networks of two Swedish non-profit organizations supporting individuals with experiences in prostitution or pornography.

## Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 18 women responded and expressed interest in participating in the study. These women were screened for eligibility, and if eligible, were provided a date and time for the interview. One woman did not meet the eligibility criteria, three

women chose not to participate and five of the women did not respond to the follow-up e-mail. In total, nine women consented to participate in the study. All participants were given the option of an in-person, telephone, or skype interview. Two women asked to complete the interview in written form with follow-up questions. Despite some disadvantages to written interviews, including the lack of nonverbal cues, this form of interviewing can be effective in eliciting sensitive and personal information (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). To increase their comfort level, this request was granted. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were informed of the study's aims, its voluntary and confidential nature, potential risks and benefits of participating in the study, and their right to refrain from answering questions or withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. Once participants provided their informed consent, the interviews lasted approximately one hour, and all women were reimbursed with an honorarium of 300 SEK (Swedish Kroner) in appreciation for their time. The interviews were conducted in Swedish by the author.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, which was iteratively revised as data collection and analysis progressed. The interview guide elicited a number of topic areas drawn from previous research on commercial sexualized exploitation (Farley et al., 2003; Farley et al., 2011; Grudzen et al., 2009, 2011; Javanbakht et al., 2017). The interviews began with questions about the participants' current life situation: age, education, work, financial situation, and relationships. Participants were asked about their experiences in pornography, such as age of entry, reason for entering, the recruitment process and any exposure to manipulation, coercion, or violence. Participants were asked about their experiences in other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation, and how performing in pornography affects their own sense of self, their views of men, and their general well-being. Finally, the women were asked about their current needs and potential barriers to exiting the pornography industry.

None of the participants reported any feelings of distress during or after the interviews, and several of the women specifically emphasized their gratitude for having the opportunity to share their situation, as well as the comfortable, respectful interview atmosphere they experienced. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts for written responses were prepared and structured for analysis. No personal identifiers were collected to secure confidentiality and complete anonymity. All interview materials were treated as sensitive data and locked in a secure location only accessible by the researcher.

An initial coding framework with pre-set codes was developed based on themes observed in previous research. After transcribing the first interviews, the transcripts were read and re-read to check for accuracy, to comprehend the data, and to identify any additional themes that emerged from the text. Data collection was concluded once theoretical saturation was considered reached, while the coding process was completed when no new concepts were identified. The data was then organized around the pre-set codes and any emergent codes that arose. Any quotes included in the study were translated from Swedish to English.

### Population

All of the participants identified as female, and the median age of the sample was 26. The age of entry into pornography production ranged between 16 and 26. The span of time that participants had been involved in pornography production ranged from less than one year to over 20 years. At the time of data collection, eight of the nine participants were still involved in pornography production. These women had

experiences selling either user-generated or third-party produced content on third-party websites, where so-called "fans," or porn buyers, either pay for individual photos or videos, or purchase a monthly subscription. The women retained a certain percentage of the earnings, while owners of the websites took a 20-30% cut on each transaction. The women uploaded and sold a variety of pornographic content: one participant had uploaded nude photos and films of herself alone and with other women; four had performed in films of themselves masturbating, often penetrating themselves with foreign objects; and three had uploaded films where they engaged in sexualized acts with one or several men at a time. The participant who was no longer involved in pornography production had been forced into pornography by her trafficker, who had pimped her out and produced photographs and films of men buying access to her body in prostitution. Of those who were involved in pornography production at the time of data collection, five women identified pornography as their primary source of income. This diversity of experiences helps to improve sample representativeness.

## RESULTS

### Antecedents to Entry into Pornography Production

One aim of this study was to explore the factors impacting a woman's entrance into pornography production. The researcher was especially interested in potential structural vulnerabilities that may have prompted the woman to begin producing their own content or be filmed by third-parties—vulnerabilities which have been observed in previous studies (Grudzen et al., 2009, 2011).

#### YOUNG AGE

The participants were all relatively young at age of entry (median 22 years). They also reported that young women and girls are indeed overrepresented in pornography production in Sweden. This coincides with research observing that most women enter prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation as children (Farley et al., 2003; Waltman, 2014). Young age is connected to several vulnerabilities, including lack of education, vocational training, and professional experiences necessary to access the labor market. Pornographers, defined as those who produce and disseminate pornography for economic gain, that is, pimps (Waltman, 2014), are well aware that young girls are more vulnerable and thus easier to groom, recruit, control and exploit. Moreover, the younger the woman, the higher the demand for her body (Dunn, 2018). This age hierarchy means that young women's involvement in pornography translates into larger profits for pornographers.

The pornographers behind Scandalbeauties, one of the platforms identified during the mapping in the first phase of the project, intentionally target young women and girls. Their website and social media platforms feature images of limousines, parties, and exotic travel, conveying a seemingly glamorous lifestyle. The message they want to convey is that by using their services, young women and girls can live lavishly, travel to exotic destinations and become famous. The pornographers also actively recruit young women and girls by writing directly on their social media accounts, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Referring to pornography production as "blogging" and "glamour modelling," they attempt to appeal to young women and girls and disguise the nature of the images and films they are expected to produce. *Are you our next top blogger?* they write. Another advertisement reads, *Why be content with likes? Tag someone you think should begin to blog on Scandalbeauties!*

Scandalbeauties recruit very young girls. It's so wrong...The girls aren't even 18 years old...They have now hired young good-looking guys who are 18-, 19-year-olds, to recruit young girls who have just turned 18.

I think it's mostly young girls actually. A lot of young girls. And I think it has to do with... You know how it's all about selfies nowadays...We've learned that we should get likes, and if we get likes, we're doing well...And it's often young people this message is directed at. Their boundaries end up being pushed further and further, and then the step [to selling images] is actually very small. All it takes is for someone to say, "You can earn money instead of likes."

In today's influencer culture, young people are conditioned to believe that their worth is defined by the number of likes and followers they attain on social media. Young girls are simultaneously bombarded with images of the hypersexualized female body in advertising, TV-shows, movies, and other media outlets (APA TF on the Sexualization of Girls 2007; Pape, 2017; Ward, 2016). Immersed in this pornified culture, young girls are pressured by boys to send nude images, which are then shared with others, transforming the private sexual images into pornography, and socially branding the girl as a slut (Amundsen, 2019; Burén & Lunde, 2018; Salter, 2016). In effect, girls learn at a very young age that they must present a hypersexualized, pornified version of themselves to the world (Farley, 2013). By concealing pornography production as blogging and modelling, pornographers are able to appeal to young women and girls already burdened by the societal pressure to be seen, all the while disguising the exploitative nature of the industry. These realities show why the shift from uploading sexualized images on social media to exchanging them for money on platforms like Scandalbeauties is negligible.

Two of the women who had been involved in pornography production for several years emphasized the need for additional hurdles to prevent young girls from entering the pornography industry.

The young girls shouldn't be in this industry; they are way too young...I've been thinking that my industry needs an age-limit, and I would set that at 23 in order to make sure that they can do the job...That they have an understanding of their worth, and that they know that "I can do this, I have two feet to stand on." The older ones are less vulnerable than the young girls who begin when they are 18. It's too early; it's far too early to be able to last in our industry. I would like to see a law with an age limit —23...or maybe 25—I think that's reasonable. They still look young, they have the energy to travel around to different countries, and they want to experience things. But no—not younger than 23. That is too young. They are too fragile for this work.

I don't think young girls should work in this industry. I myself wasn't all that old—I was 24—but I was at least comfortable with who I was...I knew who I was...But I think that many young people begin too early. They don't think about what sort of rumors can spread and how people will react...I think it's much too easy to enter into the industry. It should really be more difficult. All it takes is sending an email with a few pictures, and then suddenly you have a webpage you are making money off of. I think people need to be informed about what can happen once you actually enter the industry. They need to hear from those who have had very negative experiences in this industry. It hasn't been negative for me, but there are others who have really bad experi-



ences. Information about the negative consequences has to be readily available, because right now it sounds like "if I post a picture of my ass, I'll earn several thousands a month." People have to know that it probably won't be just the one image.

As one participant described, "Applying as a model" simply requires submitting a name and sending a sexualized photo to create a "blog," where content is then uploaded and sold. Under the presumption that she is becoming a model with her own blog, it is easy to see why a young woman might be unaware of the physical, psychological and social consequences she may face once she begins uploading and selling content. The women highlighted the need for educational, preventative measures informing young women and girls about the negative consequences they may encounter once they begin uploading and selling pornography. Paradoxically, even those who did not report an overall negative experience in the industry were still adamant that other young women and girls should hear about the significant risks and negative consequences.

#### FINANCIAL INSECURITY

Four participants identified financial difficulties as the main reason they entered pornography, and they confirmed that this is one of the main reasons why other women enter the industry.

I needed more money.

The biggest reason is money...[My ex] put me in a lot of debt. I think that is why I initially entered the industry...I thought I could quickly earn a lot of money, and quickly.

When I began it was because I like to test new things, and at the same time I knew I could earn money from it. That was the biggest reason to why I started.

I was not doing well financially, I didn't enjoy being at my (strip)club, I had been at all the different clubs and there weren't many choices left. I had a colleague who said, "It's a good way to earn money," and that was a time when there was still money in the industry. I posted an image, and the money rushed in.

Now it feels like everyone who starts is desperate for money.

I don't have the need for the money that I make on the site...But then there are those who are on sick leave or quit school, who really need the money. Then I think it's easy for them to end up doing the things that will earn them the most money.

This theme aligns with earlier research observing that women's financial insecurity serves as a means of coercion into commercial sexualized exploitation, including pornography (Farley et al., 2003; Grudzen et al., 2009, 2011). Alleging that selling pornography is an "easy" way to earn "quick money," pornographers take advantage of the woman's economic situation. According to some of the older participants, most young women are unaware that there is relatively little money left in the industry today. For those who had entered the industry in the early 2000s, the limited supply of pornographic content online corresponded with higher prices. Since then, with the

establishment of new pornography platforms disguised as social media, and the growing number of women entering the industry, competition has increased, earnings have declined, and women have been forced to sell not only more content, but also more extreme content, to secure the same amount of earnings over time. While pornographers rack up profits, the women they exploit leave the industry in the exact same conditions they entered into it; poor, desperate and marginalized (Grudzen et al., 2009).

#### SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

While financial insecurity propels women and girls into pornography and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation, this factor alone is not usually sufficient and is almost always in combination with other adverse background factors. Commercial sexualized exploitation overwhelmingly affects women and girls with multiple, intersecting disadvantages, who have few to no other viable survival alternatives (Waltman, 2014). Research has shown how child sexualized abuse “functions as a training ground for prostitution” (Farley 2003). Childhood sexualized abuse is the most common precursor to prostitution, with studies finding that between 60-90% of prostituted persons have been subject to sexualized abuse in childhood (Farley et al., 2003; Waltman, 2016). Grudzen and colleagues’ study among 134 women filmed for pornography production likewise found that this group was three times more likely to have been subject to rape in childhood compared to a matched control group (Grudzen et al., 2011). In line with these earlier findings, four of the participants explicitly stated that they were survivors of sexualized abuse and other forms of violence either during childhood or by an intimate partner as a young adult.

One of my ex-boyfriends harassed and pressured me into having sex with him. He hit me several times. He forced himself on me and even offered me to his friends. I had a hard time saying no.

When I was a teenager, it was one of my ex-boyfriends. What can I have been—16 years old, turning 17, maybe? My ex didn’t think that girls should be able to experience things in life, except for sitting inside all day. He was very controlling. He beat me and sexually abused me. I felt brain washed because I kept defending him even when everyone else said he wasn’t a good guy. But then I ended up in the hospital, and I realized that this needed to stop. Friends and family helped me leave him.

I’ve had a lot of traumatic events in my life...Several rapes, a lot of manipulation and violence. The first rape was when I was 13. He was nagging me all the time about sex, and then it all escalated. In the end, you don’t dare to say no because you feel threatened, forced into it. It was really horrible in school because I couldn’t concentrate. I didn’t have the energy. It was hard realizing “I can’t manage this” and eventually I started skipping school to avoid it all...I have also been threatened by a guy who said, “I have this nude picture of you. I’m going to send it to everyone you know.” I felt horrible; I had so much anxiety. Where will this image circulate? Who’s going to see it? Will my siblings or my classmates see it?

I met a guy when I was 22. Already on the first date, he raped me. Everything escalated very quickly...It was an abrupt entrance into the industry. Over the course of the next four months, he held complete control over my life and sold me to other men. He had a website where he sold pictures and films of me. He also sold the films on other forums online.

These accounts provide further evidence that sexualized violence usually precedes entry into commercial sexualized exploitation (Farley et al., 2003).

It is useful to assess not only how the violence itself, but also how the social responses surrounding that violence (Hydén et al., 2016) contributed to the women's entrance into pornography. One woman described how she was branded as the "whore" of her hometown after she had had sex for the first time with a boy at the age of 13. Her identity as the "whore" was cemented, while the boy was venerated by their peers. Another young woman recalled several instances when her ex-boyfriend verbally and physically abused her in front of his friends in public spaces. What was most painful for her was not the verbal and physical abuses her ex-boyfriend subjected her to; it was his friends witnessing the abuses unfold without intervening. For her, the public humiliation and condoning of the abusive behavior was evidence that she was indeed a "worthless whore."

Several women also recalled experiencing negative social responses when interacting with public authorities. Two women mentioned specific instances where they attempted to report a crime and felt that they were not taken seriously, or were subtly blamed for the incident. These negative responses directly contributed to the women remaining in their vulnerable situation, which ultimately impacted their step into the pornography industry.

There's always a risk that you'll be disclosed and humiliated, and you have to go around with the fear, "How long will this last...What consequences will I have to face?" while the guy rarely faces any consequences. For instance, if an 18-year-old circulates an image of a 17-year-old girl, it's seldom that he's accused and convicted of child pornography. Meanwhile if she reports the crime, they ask, "Well why did you send the image?" It's she who has to defend herself, not, "Why did you share an image of a minor?"

These are all examples of the conditioning that women and girls face within a culture of silence around sexualized violence and abuse. As the #MeToo movement has shown, no woman or girl is free from this culture of mainstreamed misogyny, a culture that condones men's sexualized violence against women (Ward, 2016) and enables the commodification of women's bodies (Pape, 2017). And once this cultural conditioning takes place, pimps can easily hammer in the message that the young woman is a "worthless whore;" she belongs in prostitution (Farley, 2007). The processes rendering women and girls vulnerable to commercial sexualized exploitation can thus only be fully understood when violence is embedded within its social context (Hydén et al., 2016).

#### POOR MENTAL HEALTH

Against the backdrop of exposure to systematic and everyday violence, it is not surprising that five of the women shared about pre-existing mental health problems before entering the pornography industry. Trauma, which can be understood as the consequences of violence, manifests itself as anxiety, depression, dissociation, panic attacks, suicidal ideation, and other painful ways of mentally coping.

I've experienced anxiety. There was a lot that happened before I started...I had really difficult teenage years, both in middle and high school. I have had a long history of poor mental health.

I've had a lot of anxiety. I also suffer from claustrophobia and have had panic attacks since I was little. I'm going to get tested for ADHD this fall.

I feel anxious, depressed. I have a low self-image and suicidal thoughts. I'm not in a good place mentally, although I felt this way even before I started...

When I have felt down, that's when I've spent a lot of time online, but that's also when I don't put a lot of time into work or the like. I think it's because when a person feels poorly, you don't want to work, you just want to be left alone. So, I think it's easy to be drawn into this industry because you don't have the energy to work at a normal job, but you can still make money.

Poor mental health greatly affects one's capacity for studies and work, perpetuating the already perilous financial situation that women may face, and propelling some to sell pornography to make ends meet.

When asked about the reasons why other women enter the pornography industry, several women agreed that it often stemmed from low self-esteem—a deep-rooted need for affirmation and acceptance. They reflected on how young women who have not received sufficient affirmation from home enter into the pornography industry hoping to find it, and that this can easily be exploited.

Sometimes it can be those who are insecure who are drawn into this industry, those who aren't so mentally strong. These types of people are, sadly, easier to manipulate. It's often those who didn't receive what they should have from home. I think that adult and parental responsibility must improve. It's really sad.

I think that poor mental health and the fact that you can easily make money off of this...I think the two go hand in hand. And I think that there are many who are depressed and in very low spirits in this industry. I mean, I've been in the company of many friends who I know are mentally low and who have slept with many guys. Then again, I have also slept with a lot of guys but it's because I didn't want to have sex with the same person—it would get boring—but I have had many friends who have seriously felt horrible after every time they slept with a new guy. They get some sort of affirmation, but then afterwards they feel like shit, and I think it's really easy—when you are always looking for that kind of affirmation—to come into this industry because you get affirmation in the form of money. You get affirmation and a reward.

I think there are many girls in the industry who feel the need to receive affirmation, because they feel horrible on the inside. In this industry, you get a lot of attention, and when you're as self-conscious as I was, you just want affirmation about who you are as a person. And maybe then you just do it for the attention, even though you actually don't even want to be there.

Women may experience an initial boost in self-confidence as porn buyers begin to purchase and consume their images and comment on their appearance. However, as one woman reasoned, this does not necessarily translate into improved self-esteem.

I think it's a role—a mask women put on as a type of defense. Sure, there may be some who think it's fun, but I think that most wear this mask to cope with their everyday life—to be able to stand themselves. I also think that self-esteem can be terribly low even if self-confidence feels high. They may think, "I can do this, I'm good-looking." But self-insight—the understanding that I'm worth something—I don't think that exists. I think it's all just a product one has become. And I think sometimes it requires completely breaking down

and realizing that one didn't actually feel well at all...When it's possible to look back on the past, and actually see the situation clearly.

Here, the participant characterizes the feeling of self-confidence as a coping mechanism, necessary to "stand one's self" and differentiates between feeling higher self-confidence, especially about one's appearance, and understanding one's self-worth. She believes that it is only in hindsight, once a woman has received support and exited pornography, that she can fully understand just how poorly she felt within the industry. And, this feeling of increased confidence is not guaranteed to last in the long run. Earlier data suggests that over time, mental health problems at the very least persist (Grudzen et al., 2009) but may very likely escalate, in view of the physical and psychological risks pornography production entails (Grudzen et al., 2009, 2011; Javanbakht et al., 2017).

Young age, financial insecurity, previous exposure to sexualized violence and poor mental health all appear to be typical antecedents to entering the pornography industry. This aligns with earlier research not only on pornography specifically (Averdijk et al., 2020; Grudzen et al., 2009, 2011; Javanbakht et al., 2017) but prostitution more generally (Farley et al., 2003; Fredlund et al., 2018; Jonsson et al., 2015; Krisch et al., 2019; Sven-Axel Månsson, 2018; Silbert & Pines, 1981; Svedin et al., 2012). In effect, this provides additional evidence that women in pornography come from similar personal backgrounds as women in prostitution (Waltman, 2014). Most often, these personal background factors are not isolated; rather, they are intersecting and are very much related to the unequal gender order placing women and girls at a higher risk for poverty, lower education, fewer alternatives, and various forms of men's violence. One woman's experience provides a compelling example of how multiple vulnerabilities—in her case, economic desperation, multiple forms of violence, and poor mental health during her young adult years—intersect and propel women into commercial sexualized exploitation.

It was a boyfriend I met when I was 20. I moved quite far from home to be with him, so I felt very dependent on him. He was really controlling, sexually violent, and extremely aggressive. I was psychologically abused by him during the 2.5 years we lived together. He isolated me...I wasn't allowed to go see my family. I didn't get to use my computer or phone freely. He was very, very controlling...[My ex] even put me in a lot of debt. I think that's why I entered the industry, or that was at least in part why I started at a strip club and then began selling images. I thought I could quickly earn a lot of money, and quickly...It was actually one of my bosses at a strip club who helped me leave him. He sorted out an apartment for me in a larger city that I was able to move to... And that's what I did, so I was able to escape the economic crisis my boyfriend put me in.

Sexually, physically and psychologically tortured by her boyfriend, she had little choice but to accept a strip-club owner's enticing offer of "easy money". It is not difficult to see why she saw this as her opportunity to escape the economic and social crisis she found herself in. From striptease, she eventually transitioned into pornography.

## Manipulation, Coercion, and Violence within the Pornography Industry

The multiple vulnerabilities described above place women in a position rendering them vulnerable to manipulation, coercion, and exploitation by unscrupulous pornographers (Waltman, 2016). Multiple vulnerabilities ultimately lead to a lack of bargaining power, which explains why women risk being coerced into performing physically and psychologically dangerous acts in pornography (Bridges et al., 2010; Fritz et al., 2020a; Shor, 2019; Waltman, 2016). Although this study did not inquire into the specific types of sexualized acts the women performed, the researcher was interested in exploring the women's perceptions of men in the pornography industry and what forms of threats, manipulation, or coercion to which women may be subject.

### PORNOGRAPHERS

Pornographers are those profiting off of pornography production and distribution. Like other pimps and traffickers, pornographers are well aware that boundaries are more easily pushed when women and girls face multiple vulnerabilities, which is why they target the most vulnerable women and girls.

The men target young girls who they notice have low self-esteem...Those who have a damaged self-image, because it's easier to reach out and manipulate them. They are really vulnerable, and these men often try to control them psychologically. These men groom the girls.

These men, they go after the weakest. There are fucking bad men out there, who groom [young girls] and try to get their way."

Once they lure the women and girls into the industry, pornographers alternate between lavish praise and threats to coerce the young women into performing unwanted sexualized acts—both when it comes to the frequency of filming and uploading those acts, but also the actual content. The more vulnerable a woman is, the greater the difficulty in maintaining her pre-determined boundaries.

There are a lot of girls I talk to, and they have a lot of difficulties with keeping boundaries—it's really difficult for them.

The young girls don't seem to have any boundaries, whatsoever. It feels like they upload anything...You see young girls crossing their boundaries and unable to stand it, and they disappear as fast as they appeared.

I know of many models who show up at a photography session, and it's nothing like what they had agreed upon...It's not at all what she expected. And in the end, it's easy to feel coerced. Some photographers can be assholes who really push you, "You know you want to do this," "This is going to be great," "This is really going to sell." Like, "This is what you want." You can become really manipulated, and it's often these types of photographers that keep contacting you afterward, "This was a great collaboration," "You were really great," who really try to get someone to come back. I know very well that this type of thing is really easy to get caught up in...When you're in the studio, it's not easy to speak up and feel that what you say will be respected.

They pressure the girls who blog to do more and more. They push their boundaries, even though the girls make no money! They put a lot of pressure on them. I know and speak to quite a few young girls, maybe 7-8 in total. And they all say the same thing: that they feel pressured. And when I ask them

why they are still there, they say, "I know, but he's now said that..."—you know, the game they play all the time, the things they convince the girls to say. The men who own these websites, just like strip club owners, they are often quite charismatic people who say, "You are so beautiful, and I'm going to help you." It's awful, but that's how it is! And you know how people are—we are hopeful, and we think that everything will work out in the end; that this is my chance.

The women discussed how some pornographers avoid contracts or else find ways to make them non-binding. They may refuse to disclose certain information, and many have requirements that are only made known to the women once they've already begun uploading and selling pornographic content.

It happens quite a bit. Even if they sign the contract, they plan to just ignore it. They make things up, like "That wasn't agreed upon in the contract", or "There's no way I've done that."

Scandalbeauties always had requirements, that we had to upload a certain number of posts per week. You have to post a lot to be able to be seen. They play favorites at Scandalbeauties.

They deceive people a lot. It's impossible to know how much money your images have actually brought in, and many are manipulated.

One photographer I worked with was extremely manipulative...There were a lot of pictures and films I wasn't at all comfortable with. So I contacted him and said that I wanted him to remove them because it wasn't what I had agreed on, and not something I want others to see. And yet the pictures still ended up in the hands of people who shouldn't have them! It's a lot of pressure.

#### PORN BUYERS

On top of the pressure and coercion women face from pornographers, women risk being subject to further manipulation and harassment by porn buyers. Today, simply uploading and selling pornography online is no longer sufficient. Unlike more conventional websites where pornographers would upload studio-produced content, newer pornography websites like Scandalbeauties share similarities with other social media platforms, and allow porn buyers to interact with the women uploading and selling content. Women are expected to upload images while interacting with their "fans" on a regular basis.

When I first began, I uploaded one picture per week and at that time I had 80,000 new visitors per month. Now, I have to post something every day, several times a day, on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat – I have two Snapchat and two Instagram accounts. Otherwise, I immediately see the traffic decreasing. As soon as I upload something, traffic volume increases, and the selling happens. But it requires more and more—more work for the same amount of money...It's a pain in the ass to have post pictures even when I'm on holiday, especially when I have a bad connection. Yes, I can post things in advance, but then the followers don't see it in "real-time." And that's when you lose them.

People want to see things, they want to know things about me, but over the last 8 months I have faced huge barriers in my private life and difficulty feeling at peace. And maybe it's because, well, I've felt horrible on these forums because it's beyond my boundaries. My boundaries—they are quite brutal at strip clubs, but when it comes to not being able to have control over who looks at my material online—that makes me uncomfortable. It's hard to navigate this modern society.

During these interactions, women receive requests from porn buyers to perform certain sexualized acts, meet the men in person, or sell sexualized acts offline. Many of the women described how they were forced to see the worst side of men, who view and treat them as sexualized objects.

The worst part about this job is the men. They don't respect my boundaries at all...

The worst part is that in this industry, you're no longer human. You are just an object that can be bought for money and the man can do what he wants with you. That is what the men believe. And then they discover that that is not at all the case. We have boundaries, and we can't be treated in whatever way. Then the men become offended and rude—you know how offended men get. That is what you have to deal with every day. It is very seldom that I am met with respect. It feels like this industry is where men show you who they really are. And it's often not a beautiful side.

It's this constant defense of my integrity and my body. I have to defend it all the time. And that is really draining in the long run.

The way women described men in general revealed how their negative views of men had already been cemented prior to entering the pornography industry, which isn't surprising considering many have been subject to men's violence during childhood or in adolescence. The pornography industry—and commercial sexualized exploitation in general—reinforced their understanding that men's harassment and abuse is an inevitable part of their lives.

I've known since I was young that most men are bad eggs. This industry hasn't changed my opinion of them. Boys will be boys.

I've always thought men are gross. They think that they are the biggest, best and most beautiful species. I always assume the worst, and then it's up to them to show me the opposite. But that's how it always has been.

Several women described the systematic harassment and abuse directed at them by porn buyers. One participant shared about how a porn buyer, after mistakenly believing she had a child, wrote to her on her social media and said, "Think about the fact that your child will go to high school and have to defend something that you have done. You are disgusting. You are dirty. You should be stoned. You should be raped." The infuriating irony of this verbal abuse is that without *his* demand for access to her body, she would not be selling those images. Another interviewee described how porn buyers subject her to harassment in the form of offensive comments or sending her an unwanted image of their genitals ("dickpics").



You know, everything happening with #MeToo...You try to get men to open their eyes, but I think it's gotten worse...I don't know, but I just don't feel like it's moving in the right direction...I receive tons of questions and stupid comments on all my social media, and sometimes I take up the fight and I want to know how these men think. So I ask them, "Why did you do that?" and I've noticed that they often don't even get it—that they've done something wrong. They say, "What do you mean?" Don't you understand that girls don't like getting a video of your dick? "Well you know, I just wanted to hear what you thought" they say. And I ask them, "Your parents, did they raise you like this? Would your mom and dad think that they raised you well?" I just don't understand where it comes from.

She went on to clarify how she has no respect for the men she has to interact with on a daily basis, and that she remains baffled by their ignorance over sexualized harassment and violence, and their systematic mistreatment of women.

I look down on men. I have such a damn hard time with most men actually. I've become cynical, really cynical. Because I see what happens in my industry, and I have no respect for them, especially those who buy sex. I have the absolute least respect for those who do nothing more than exploit other people. Strip clubs—I can't really understand the phenomenon either. I don't even believe in my own product. Yes, I'm glad that men visit strip clubs so that I can earn money, but I don't understand why someone would come to a strip club—why someone would want to be there. And I see these men...How they actually believe that this is something the stripper actually likes—that this is what she wants to do. You know what I mean? I don't get it. She just does and says exactly what she knows the bastard wants.

She described the role that she and others must play in order to appease the male fantasy. Far from wanting to be there, she "does and says exactly what she knows the bastard wants" in order to sustain herself economically.

With all the free pornography content otherwise available online, men buying access to a woman's images want an *exclusive* experience—they want to feel as though they have a relationship with the woman. Surviving in the pornography industry today often requires spending hours on end interacting with porn buyers, many of whom harass the women with dickpics or degrading comments. Women must not only mask their disgust but pretend to actually *enjoy* the various forms of sexualized harassment and abuse they are systematically subject to.

Guys don't respect my boundaries. They just harass you even more when you tell them that that's where you draw the line...I mean—it's fun to get attention, and when a guy thinks you're hot and pays to see you. But there are a lot of weird and gross guys who write to you. One guy wondered whether my dad was turned on by me—stuff like that.

This added element of humiliation and emotional toil comes at a great psychological cost—one that may even threaten the women's personal safety. Porn buyers may go as far as to try to establish and maintain control over the women by incessantly contacting and harassing them, pressuring them to meet in person, and threatening them with consequences if the women do not succumb to their demands. A number of women described experiences of porn buyers' harassment escalating into stalking behavior.

I have heard many stories where girls say, “There was someone who followed me home” or “Someone likes my films and won’t stop writing to me and wants to do this and that.”... There’s a lot of men who become stalkers and look up where you live, what your phone number is, follow you on social media and keep track of every little thing you do.

When I started in this industry, I had my own blog where people could buy images. But I began to have a lot of problems with stalkers because I was so open about myself on the blog.

I know a woman who has been followed home. I’ve been stalked too—not home, but...being stalked...like when someone finds you on social media like Facebook and writes you non-stop and contacts you privately—well, this happens a lot in our industry. People don’t understand that this is a job...Neither at strip clubs nor on the blogs—the men don’t understand; they are completely disrespectful towards our boundaries.

Every little thing I post he writes “You’re so beautiful,” “I miss you,” “I love you.” He’s convinced that he will meet me in person and that he’s in love with me. It’s extremely uncomfortable. He hasn’t received a response from me in over half a year now—no attention whatsoever—and yet he still goes in and writes “Have you dyed your hair?” “Have you cut your hair?” “You have great clothes,” “I love you sweetheart.” It’s just wrong. They often become obsessed, and when they realize that the woman is not going to respond, and what they have planned isn’t going to happen, they often become aggressive instead. They affect most of all your private life. It’s like a creepy stalker that knows everything about my life, and it makes me so uncomfortable.

They make you feel that you can’t just stop responding to them because there may be consequences—he is the one who decides if there will be consequences or not.

This psychological terror may continue to threaten the woman’s personal safety and psychological wellbeing even after she has left the pornography industry. In the end, the greater the level of vulnerability the woman faces, the less power she has to say no to the porn buyer’s requests, demands, and threats.

### **Overlap Between Pornography and Other Forms of Commercial Sexualized Exploitation**

Over time, as a woman faces the age hierarchy in the industry, and in order to maintain the demand for her images, she risks being forced to produce increasingly hardcore content and transition into other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation. Indeed, five of the women highlighted the fact that they had experiences in other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation. Four of these women had been exploited in prostitution, including Girlfriend experience prostitution (so-called “sugar dating”), and three of these women were already involved in striptease before transitioning into pornography.

I’ve gone on a paid date with a guy who wanted me to pretend to be his girlfriend. Know girls who do it...Boundaries are easily pushed, and if you get offered 5,000 SEK for sex, you might go for it.

It's a well-known fact in this industry. Many begin as amateurs who photograph and film themselves and then post online. Maybe she earns a bit of money, gets some followers, and then she usually gets tons of offers, like, "You would earn this much if we met in person for a few hours," "I'll pay you so-and-so if you do this." Most who enter into this industry, especially those who start at Scandalbeauties and need the money, see this as some sort of drug. If you are already in a poor financial situation, and you receive these kinds of offers, you're pretty much forced to accept them. "I can't pay my rent...I don't earn much, so if I meet this guy, it will at least give me an extra 2,000 SEK."

These results provide further evidence of the clear overlap between all arms of commercial sexualized exploitation, as women transition in and out of different online and offline venues (Farley, 2020). The overlap is especially evident in the case where the woman's pimp ran a website where he sold images and films of prostitution-buyers raping her—featured as "gangbang" videos on the website. As researcher Melissa Farley explains, "Women don't stay in one location, they move from one physical and online location to another—wherever the sex buyers are located or where the pimps send them" (Farley, 2020). Researchers have observed that prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation have by and large transitioned online (Jonsson et al., 2015; Månsson, 2018; Svedin et al., 2012). Women engaged in strip-ping, prostitution or other forms of offline commercial sexualized exploitation are driven to create an online presence. Now, as strip clubs, brothels, and other pimping-operations have (allegedly) shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of online sexualized exploitation has only increased (Farley, 2020) further revealing the flawed separation of different forms of commercial sexualized exploitation.

### The Unique Harm of Filmed Commercial Sexualized Exploitation

There is similar exploitation and violence in all forms of commercial sexualized exploitation, including escort prostitution, girlfriend experience ("sugardating") prostitution, webcam pornography, studio produced pornography, street prostitution and striptease (Farley & Donevan, in press). That said, pornography production results in some harms that are different from non-filmed commercial sexualized exploitation (Farley & Donevan, in press). Meagan Tyler (2015) notes that pornography production may last longer hours and generally requires more extreme sexualized acts than traditionally recognized forms of prostitution. What is more, these acts are documented, and infinitely circulated online. The threat of pornographers refusing to take down images from their websites, or of having ones' images downloaded, pirated, uploaded, and sold elsewhere, is imminent. When one of the participants tried to delete her images on her profile online, she was informed that if she removed the images, she would lose all her earnings in the form of credits, since porn buyers had bought access to those images. This means that even if a woman ceases to actively upload and sell her images, pornographers can retain her images and continue to profit off of them without her consent.

There may come a day when you really want to leave this life. The problem is that all the images are still online. You want them removed, but you have absolutely no power to do so. That's when it feels really difficult.

Many girls experience that even though they've quit, their blogs aren't taken down when they should be, and sometimes the owners block the girls so that they can't contact them.

They block your account if they find out that you have gone to another site or if you want to leave. They get to decide a lot. Even if you have money on your account, they block your account so you can't get your money.

There is unique harm when one's humiliation, abuse and exploitation is documented. Earlier research has found that the filming of one's prostitution resulted in significantly greater psychological and emotional distress (Farley et al., 2003), suggesting that pornography is a particularly brutal form of prostitution, carrying specific and additional forms of harm (Tyler, 2011). Most women in commercial sexualized exploitation plan to obtain urgently needed money and get out as fast as they can (Farley & Donevan, in press), but the difficulty of exiting is magnified when one's exploitation is documented. The fact that there is a record of what occurred creates a strong barrier to exiting the industry. Participants discussed the anxiety over anyone—employers, friends, future partners, or their children—stumbling upon and viewing their images. There is “a well-founded fear of being recognized and found out by others, even after exiting the industry” (Tyler, 2015). This fear seemed sufficient to prevent some women from even considering exiting the pornography industry. Young women in particular may not understand the ramifications of entering the pornography industry until it is “too late.” Once they are met by the harsh reality that their pornographic images are distributed completely outside of their control, they may feel trapped within the industry.

I think that many who want to exit the industry don't feel like they dare to because all the images are online for the entire world to see, and you must always defend that, even later on in life.

I think it can also be that you can't really stand for what you've done. When you try to live another life and try to move on from your past life, you go around all the time worried, thinking “someone can look this up,” you know? My god, like the one girl who joined the police, she must have had a hell of a time. Because you never know what is going to happen in your future. You can get a job where it's really strict, and maybe you don't tell them what you've done in your past. You go around constantly worrying, “What will happen if they find out?” And it can happen at any point in time.

The perception I have, mostly from Scandalbeauties, is that most girls have had the same attitude as I had in the beginning—that this is something fun, you get some attention, some kind of response, and, well, it's a bit new and exciting. Then I know that many get stuck in it because they may feel anxiety over “This might not be anything I actually wanted to do.” The images are uploaded online, so you can never remove them. Employers, parents, family can stumble across them. I think many people feel they cannot leave because, it's like, the damage has already been done, so to speak. Since they are stuck, they think that they may as well try to make a real career out of it, and that is when they are easily pressured and manipulated. If you stop, you don't have much to go back to, and if you continue, you're already damaged goods.

The understanding I have is that many people stay in the industry because that don't have a choice; they can't quit. It's the fear of applying for a new job—and knowing that, if anyone googles me, images of my boobs will come up directly. Some bloggers have done things that they regret, that they can't stand for, and then you have to defend yourself, in order to get a normal job. It's discouraging.

There is an added and monumental burden of having one's commercial sexualized exploitation filmed, spread outside of one's control, and remain online indefinitely. This is a harm that must be acknowledged and addressed by support service providers when developing and offering services for this particular population, as well as by the justice system when documenting and combatting the harms incurred by survivors of pornography.

The past experiences and fear of shaming and victim-blaming by family, friends, employers, colleagues and other members of society is significant, and presents a considerable barrier to exiting the pornography industry. Women in pornography, like women in prostitution, should be seen and treated as victims of a criminal offense who are in harm's way, and where the shame is placed back where it belongs—with the men who exploit them. Clearly, there is need for a "radical reconsideration of men's responsibility" within the realm of pornography, just like what has occurred in the case of prostitution in Sweden (Månsson, 2017). Alongside nationwide educational interventions targeted at law enforcement officers and the general public, the current prostitution legislation in Sweden should be applied (Waltman, 2014, 2016) or else updated to clearly include pornography and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation in order to correctly place the onus of responsibility on the perpetrators, not the victims.

### Prerequisites for Exiting Pornography and Accessing Real Alternatives

Even with the significant barriers to exiting the pornography industry, the women shared a common understanding that sooner or later, faced with the realities of the age hierarchy, the ever-changing nature of the industry, and the mental and physical toll of pornography production; the need to exit was inexorable.

#### VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

With most women entering pornography production at a young age, many lack the necessary education and professional experience that could lead to alternative sources of income, allowing them to break away from pornography and reintegrate into society. Several participants discussed how exiting pornography was only a viable option if women received help in accessing the labor market through further education and vocational training.

It's really difficult to leave this job because most of us have children and pets to provide for, and other bills and expenses every month, like a car and so on. A regular job, like at a restaurant, doesn't cover these expenses, which is probably why many don't want regular jobs, because the money wouldn't be enough.

Women would need help finding a job, since many do this for the money. Helping women access the labor market would be important...

It has a lot to do with money, but even education I think...This isn't a job you can work in for the rest of your life; at some point you have to move on. And at that point you have to have some other way to survive.

I really think education or finding another job is important. Because then, the brain has something else to focus on. When you study, you think about something totally different...There aren't very many who are highly educated in the industry. And I think many could absolutely use more education...because then, they would have a chance to do something else.

Over time, a woman may lack or lose the skills necessary for other income-generating opportunities, pushing her further away from the labor market. “In effect, they get stuck in coercive circumstances from which they cannot escape” (Waltman, 2014, p. 58). This coincides with earlier research findings showing the overwhelming majority (89%) of individuals in commercial sexualized exploitation wished to exit, but were unable to do so because of a lack of alternatives to survival (Farley et al., 2003). The longer a woman remains in commercial sexualized exploitation, the more difficult exiting and finding alternatives becomes (Baker et al., 2010). With older women facing the realities of the age hierarchy, their situation becomes increasingly precarious over time. This is why participants emphasized the importance of reaching out and offering support to young women in particular.

Especially young girls. They should get help to leave early on, before they...Before they lose all self-respect and feel that they no longer matter. It doesn't take long before the girls become exploited, and then it can be too late...

It's a lot easier to turn to something else when you are still young. Like in your 20's. But once you have worked with this for 10, 20 years, well...I know a woman who must have worked in this industry for about 30 years. She is 55 now, and still works as a stripper. She can't do anything else now. It's been too many years, so she feels that she is stuck there.

#### PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

All of the participants emphasized the need for psychosocial support, such as individual therapy or a support group with other survivors of pornography production. During her time in pornography, a woman likely experiences a narrowing of her social network, and thus a lack of informal and formal support systems (Baker et al., 2010). Once her social network consists primarily of other individuals involved in pornography production (e.g. pornographers, other women performing in pornography, and porn buyers), leaving the industry becomes increasingly disenchanting. This is why psychosocial support, not least supportive relationships, are vital to successfully exiting commercial sexualized exploitation.

When you actually leave this industry, you're very alone. In the beginning, you thought, “This isn't anything I'm going to regret,” “I'm going to stand for everything I do,” and then you end up losing a lot of people around you who say, “You don't have self-respect” or “You're going to regret this.” So, you lose a lot of the people around you, and when you actually leave the industry, you have no one left, because when you were in the industry you only had contact with photographers, other models, other companies. When you leave this world, you don't have anything left. That's why it's important that girls know that there is support they can access, like women's shelters, or that you have a stable friend you can vent to, “now it feels tough.” You need to know that there is support around you that you can access.

You always need someone to talk to. I think it's most important a woman can get all her feelings out, like why she's feeling poorly, and to really have support around her to have the energy. Because when you exit, you really hit rock bottom—you feel completely horrible and you can't see a way out—and that's when you need others to help lift you up.

You need to feel like you aren't judged. That the person understands that I didn't choose this, that someone else chose it for me. Someone who listens

without showing any shock or disgust...No one should have to be alone; you need someone you can count on, someone who you can talk with.

It's important to know that support is available, like women's shelters...or if you have a stable friend you can open up to...Someone you can go to when you feel that now it's really difficult. But you really have to know that there is support around you, that it's available...It's great that there's a lot of places you can turn to in Sweden.

The emphasis on having "someone to talk to" aligns with previous research demonstrating the importance of supportive relationships in the breakaway process from prostitution (Hedin & Månsson, 2004). Supportive relationships allow women to work through traumatic experiences, repair previously close relationships, and build new social networks. These supportive relationships can take the form of informal social networks or formal professional relationships with therapists.

Several women discussed the need for authorities and service providers to take their situation and needs seriously, and to respond in a way that communicates respect and understanding. Their previous experiences of being disregarded, disbelieved, or even blamed for the violence and abuse they were exposed to made them justifiably hesitant and wary about reporting a crime and seeking out professional help.

The police need to take you seriously if you report a crime, and not just close the case without even investigating whether a person is in a bad relationship or is being abused. Many are dependent on their boyfriend...

When you quit—there's often a lot of men who become stalkers and look up where you live, your phone number. They follow you on social media and know everything about what you do, and that often continues even after you've quit. And often—you don't really know how to deal with that. If you say, "I have a stalker from when I sold nudes," they aren't going to take you seriously. "It's your fault, you know what they've done." These kinds of attitudes are common...

From the moment a woman first considers exiting and confides in someone about her need for help, positive social responses that communicate understanding, respect and dignity are essential for a woman to continue on the path to exiting pornography and building a new life for herself.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to further elucidate the situation faced by women involved in pornography production.

### Limitations of Study

Despite being a small sample size and thus limiting generalizability, the study still offers important insights into antecedents to entrance, the risks and violence women face within the pornography industry, and their current needs and barriers to exiting pornography production. It is worth noting that the request for interview distributed online was only sent to the accounts where women provided their contact details. In this sense, the majority of the participants were likely not the most vulnerable women within the industry. Moreover, many of the women who participated in the study had

uploaded and sold self-produced masturbation material, and thus may not have been subject to the most extreme forms of violence characteristic of studio-produced pornography (Tyler, 2015).

## Findings

Albeit some limitations, the results provide further evidence of the significant harms that pornography has on the women exploited in its production. Regardless of its form, pornography involves the selling and purchasing of women's bodies, and is thus inherently violent, exploitative, and harmful to women.

The in-depth interviews corroborate earlier research showing that that women in pornography production come from the same adverse background factors as women in other forms of prostitution. They are typically young, financially strapped, suffering from poor mental health, and victims of sexualized abuse during their childhood or young adult years, most often by an intimate partner. This highlights the importance of violence prevention initiatives, but also support and protection directed at young women and girls suffering from intimate partner violence. Not only the violence itself, but also the social responses surrounding that violence, directly contributed to the woman's entry into the pornography industry.

Pornographers recruit and groom young women and girls into the pornography industry by using terms like "blogging" and "glamour modelling," reflecting the prevailing "likes" and influencer culture, all the while disguising the exploitative nature of the industry. Once the women enter the pornography industry, exposure to men's systematic violence not only persists, but most often amplifies. Pornographers target marginalized women and girls who are more easily groomed, manipulated, controlled, silenced and exploited. The women's vulnerability and lack of bargaining power allow pornographers and porn buyers to breach their personal boundaries. In order to sustain themselves financially over time, many women are forced to produce content more frequently, and content that contains greater levels of violence and humiliation. They must pretend to enjoy the harassment porn buyers subject them to—harassment which can advance into stalking behaviors, threatening the woman's personal safety and psychological wellbeing even after she has left the pornography industry. Many women have experiences in prostitution and striptease, confirming that pornography is simply one of multiple arms of commercial sexualized exploitation.

When discussing the factors facilitating or hindering a woman's opportunity to exit the pornography industry, many emphasized the distress of knowing that one's pornographic images are circulated online, and will most likely remain online indefinitely, outside of their control. The knowledge that anyone could stumble across those images, and fear of the ensuing victim-blaming, was a reality that left many feeling trapped and unable to exit the pornography industry. For those considering exiting, vocational training, further education and psychosocial support were identified as crucial pre-requisites to successfully breaking away from pornography. These results offer important insights and direction for service providers when implementing and offering services to this vulnerable population, who deserve protection, support and real alternatives.

The study provides further evidence that pornography production is not separate from prostitution and other forms of commercial sexualized exploitation; rather, there are undeniable similarities when it comes to antecedents to entry, violence from pimps and buyers in the industry, as well as service needs. In the Swedish context and in other abolitionist legal frameworks, buying sexualized acts should be considered



and treated as a crime regardless of whether it occurs online or offline, and pornographers ought to face identical consequences to other pimps and traffickers. And most importantly, women in pornography should be granted the same rights to protection and support as other survivors of prostitution.

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