

Universiteit Utrecht



PORNOHEALING

Pornography as a healing process for individuals with a history of sexual violence

Master of Arts & Culture in Gender Studies
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¹ During the 1980's, pornographic content in video cassettes was sealed using a blue tape, hence people used to refer to pornographic films also as "blue films." The title of this chapter is a play between the color blue, signifying erotic films, and pink (politics) as a reference to the feminist, ethical, and queer aspect of the films discussed in the second chapter.

Introduction

It was almost two years ago, when I discovered a British project named “My Body Back.” This project offers to sexually assaulted women medical examination after the sexually violent incident they have faced and additionally, group therapy sessions in order to provide them with psychological support. Furthermore, every woman who desires to do it, can join Café V, which organizes seminars that assist women to learn how to appreciate their bodies again after traumatic violent experiences. Apart from all these useful and necessary activities, “My Body Back” also owns a pornographic database, which includes porn material addressed to women with a history of sexual violence, whether the violent incident was a harassment or an assault. This specific project is called “The Clit List” and as they state on their own website they provide information regarding “erotic media that might help them explore their sexual desires while staying informed about potential triggers.”²

I found this pornographic database remarkably interesting and innovating, as I was already interested in alternative uses and aspects of pornography. This project was troubling my mind for a long time, and as a result it laid the foundations of this MA research. Can pornography take the form of a healing process for individuals with a history of sexual violence? For my MA thesis, I aim to answer this research question by exploring alternative uses and aspects of pornography, and additionally focusing on porn as a healing process. My goal is to examine whether people who experienced sexual harassment(s) and/or assault(s) watch feminist, ethical or queer non-triggering porn films, like the ones included in “The Clit List,” so as to make themselves feel sexually aroused again after a traumatic event, redefine their approach to sexual activity in general, or just embrace body positivity. In the process of addressing that main research question, other sub-questions also emerged: do those women find mainstream porn to be triggering? do they search for feminist, ethical, or queer porn that is not triggering? And do they manage to find erotic material that they enjoy or is all the accessible material not satisfying?

In order to answer these questions, I begin this pornographic journey by recalling in the first chapter the contemporary history of pornography; the etymological

² For more information regarding the “My Body Back” project see: <http://www.mybodybackproject.com/> (accessed June 25, 2017).

origin of the very term “pornography,” the golden era of porn, and the so-called sex wars taking place in the 1980s between radical feminists opposed to pornography and the pro-sex feminists defending its liberating potential. Subsequently, I engage with both Queer Theory by discussing queer feminist approaches to porn, but also Affect Theory by sharing queer feminist approaches to trauma and the potential healing that an (erotic) film can induce in the spectator. By using as my theoretical tools Paul Preciado’s *Testo Junkie* (2013), Linda Williams’s *Porn Studies* (2004) anthology, *The Feminist Porn Book* (2013) a collection of essays written by feminists in the porn industry, the *Archive of Feelings and Trauma* (2003) by Ann Cvetkovich, *Pornography: Structures, Agency and Performance* (2015) written by Rebecca Sullivan and Alan McKee or *The Pornography Industry* (2016) by Shira Tarrant, to name a few, I do not simply intend to provide a critical pro-sex view by positioning myself into the pro-sex feminist camp, but also to display other options regarding pornography; how porn can be a productive media by actually forming part of the solution to rape culture.³

In the second chapter, I will discuss three different porn films in order to give some examples of what feminist, ethical, and queer porn is and to answer how and why these films can be characterized as healing tools. To be more specific, the films *Much More Pussy* (2010), *Silver Shoes* (2015), and *Authority* (2009), will provide three different examples of alternative types of pornographic filmography and the potential healing aspect of each film will be analyzed.

Finally, the third chapter includes an analysis of the results of a web-based survey that I created for this specific research, which addresses the general awareness of feminist porn, but also the problem of the accessibility to it. The survey and its results is accompanied by three interviews that I conducted, that narrate the stories of those people who experienced sexually violent incidents and their quite different preferences regarding porn, but also indicate the similarities regarding the political aspect of those preferences. Because this is a very sensitive topic of discussion, initially I thought of creating a questionnaire as a method of collecting information instead of conducting interviews for several reasons with time being one of the most significant ones. Nevertheless, some respondents to my survey were also willing to give an interview, thus I decided to conduct and focus on the interviews of three different

³ Emilie Buchwald (1993), author of *Transforming a Rape Culture*, defines rape culture as a set of beliefs, which promote sexual aggression and violence by men against women, in a society that actually normalizes this behavior.

individuals, because I believe that every personal experience provides situated knowledge and valuable partial truth on every research topic.

Regarding the methodology, I chose a mixed method research because qualitative and quantitative research methods can answer different types of research questions. Furthermore, quantitative research and especially surveys have been criticized as a positivist research method by feminist scholars. Positivism has received a lot of criticism due to the simple fact that one cannot “conduct completely bias-free research” (Miner and Jayaratne, 2014, p.301). Through a mixture of research methods, with a survey consisted of mostly open-ended questions and anonymized responses that examines and covers a larger part of the population, and the three interviews as personal stories who focus on specific experiences, I aim to produce feminist knowledge that can be partial and situated.⁴

At this point, I would like to refer to my own position and participation in the pornographic world, as I intentionally situated myself within this industry. As part of my Gender Studies MA program, I chose to work as an intern for The Blue Artichoke Films, a feminist porn production based in Amsterdam. Jennifer Lyon Bell, a U.S. filmmaker, is the producer and director of this feminist porn production, which dedicates itself to making artistic and erotic films that aim to portray a realistic female sexuality. From the first day of my internship, Bell provided me with a list of several tasks and projects that I could get involve with, but most importantly, she introduced me to feminist, ethical, and queer filmography more coherently. Additionally, I attended and participated as Bell’s assistant in two events, related to erotic and feminist cinema: the “Modern Erotic Cinema,” a six-hour workshop on how to create erotic films, which Bell herself gave at Studio K for the students of the Film Academy of Amsterdam on 27 February, 2017, and “The Female Gaze in Cinema,” an event consisting of speeches on feminist cinematography that took place again at Studio K on the International Woman’s Day. As a result, because of the tasks that I had to fulfill, the events which I attended, and Bell’s contribution, I did not only gain valuable knowledge regarding the feminist/alternative porn industry, but I also became part of it in my own way. Subsequently, I chose to conduct research on this specific subject

⁴ “Situated knowledges” is a term introduced by Donna Haraway (1988). Haraway critiqued positivism in sciences by arguing that science is partly historically made and that the “truth” is not one, but the scientist/researcher produces many truths because of their partial perspective. As a result, Haraway accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and that of the object of study.

because this research topic, first and foremost, was actually a genuine question that I posed to myself. To me queer, feminist, ethical porn that can help the viewer explore their sexual desires while staying informed about potential triggers is a whole new aspect of this sexual media, which proves that not only can pornography be alternative through different genres of porn but it can also be productive.

In effect, this thesis aims to contribute to the field of Porn Studies by displaying alternative genres of pornography and by examining whether these genres can actually help sexual violence survivors or not. In this paper, I intent to prove that porn is not just a method of finding solutions to our sexual arousals, but a media that can help the viewer feel positive about their body, feel desirable, feel emotional, feel safe.

Chapter 1: A Biography of Porn

1.1 Porn: The Golden Years

The etymological origin of pornography comes from the Greek word *pornographos*. This term is actually a combination of two words: *porne* which means prostitute and *graphein* which means to write. Thus, the word *pornography* in Greek refers to the writings of prostitutes. According to Debbie Nathan, “the word pornography first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1857, the same year that England passed a law banning the sale and distribution of sexual materials considered ‘obscene’ (quoted in Wosick, 2015, p.414). The definition of this word has changed dramatically through the ages as a result of the different status and prestige that *porne* gained in contemporary societies. As Betty Dodson (2013, p.24) states in *The Feminist Porn Book*, an anthology of texts written by feminist porn producers and feminist porn scholars:

-if society treated sex with any dignity or respect, both pornographers and prostitutes would have status, which they obviously had at one time. The sexual women of antiquity were the artists and writers of sexual love. As a result, knowledge of the esteemed courtesans was lost, buried in our collective unconscious, suppressed by the authoritarian organized religions that consistently excluded women.

In fact, there is no consensus on how to explain the stigma on pornography. Organized religions might be just one of the factors that historically contributed to the stigmatization of porn. Moreover, there is not even consensus on how to define pornography in the first place; something perceived as pornographic material by one individual can be just sensual, erotic, or even artistic to another. Feminist scholar of gender and sexuality Shira Tarrant (2016, p.3) offers a rough definition of pornography: “visual depictions that are intended to sexually arouse the viewer, such as still photos, magazines, adult cable television channels, or VHS movies. Today, pornography is more likely to mean online video; and, in the future, technological changes may again shift how these visual depictions are delivered to the consumer.” Though quite comprehensive, this definition lacks some forms that pornography can take as well, such as written pornographic material, audio, or VR porn.⁵

⁵ (VR) porn constitutes a “realistic and immersive simulation of a three-dimensional environment, created using interactive software and hardware, and experienced or controlled by movement of the

Where new technologies go, the porn industry is quick to follow. A quick look at the history of pornography can assure the reader that porn has always been related to technology. According to Nathan, “when photography was invented in 1827, some of the first pictures taken were of people naked or having sex, which were subsequently printed on post cards for mass consumption” (quoted in Wosick, 2015, p.416). The fact that some of the first photos ever taken were depicting naked bodies signifies the raw appetite of human individuals to catch a glimpse of the naked flesh of others. After the first pornographic post cards, pornography started to take its contemporary form:

-The early 1900s in America brought the first hard core “stag” films for men’s consumption. Publications showing explicit comics, nude photos, and pinup photos were popular by the middle of the twentieth century, especially men’s magazines like Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* (1953), Larry Flynt’s *Hustler* (1974), and Bob Guccione’s *Penthouse* (1969). “Peep shows” were originally shown in private booths and adult bookstores for customers (men) to watch short, looped films and masturbate. By the end of the 1960s, Hollywood was producing widely distributed films with explicit sex scenes like *Midnight Cowboy* (1969). Pornographic feature films were shown in public theatres, such as *Deep Throat* (1972), *Behind the Green Door* (1972), *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973), and *Debbie Does Dallas* (1978), which drew both male and female audiences. (Wosick, 2015, p.416)

By the 1980s, video replaced film. In fact, the urban legend has it that VHS became the main standard of video cassette basically because the porn industry, which was already booming during the 1980s, adopted it and thus influenced the whole market. But, as a result, “high-value quality generally declined as more people made more porn more quickly — and often on a low budget. For this reason, the high-value period prior to video production is known as pornography’s golden era” (Tarrant, 2016, p.23).

According to film scholar Linda Williams, there are two broad types of pornographic media; “stillimage” (print/ photography) and “movingimage” (film/video) (quoted in Wosick, 2015). Nowadays, in terms of production, mainstream

body.” (see <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/virtual--reality>, accessed on 5 July, 2017) With that being said, Virtual Reality porn is the latest achievement of porn media and consists of two main categories: the first one provides adult photos and videos (animated or with actual porn performers) that have been captured or filmed in 360- degree; the second category is called VR porn livestreaming. As in any other form of live-streaming, in VR porn live-streaming porn actors/actresses perform (stream) in real time.

heterosexual pornography is roughly divided into three categories: professional, pro-amateur, and amateur porn. Kassia R. Wosick in “Pornography,” included in the *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities*, reports the assessment by Anne G. Sabo, an academic and public educator on sexual health and empowerment, that “porn is either high gloss (big production) or amateur, which can also be considered either professional or homemade porn” (quoted in Wosick, 2015, p.415). Pornographic films can be distributed to consumers who may rent or purchase content through adult stores, video on demand, Internet and so forth.

During the 1950s and 1960s, when conservative beliefs regarding gender and heteronormativity were dominant, as well as today, some neo-Freudian arguments for “normal” sexual behavior started to become quite popular in public, as Rebecca Sullivan and Alan McKee argue in their book “Pornography.” Furthermore, as Eva Illouz states: “Freud’s work on sexuality transformed the way that people thought about sex, especially in the mid-twentieth century when the American sexual revolution took hold of the Western imagination” (quoted in Sullivan and McKee, 2015, p.76). But one of the most influential parts of his theory was:

-“his suggestion that the individual subconscious struggles between Eros — the life principle where desires are properly fulfilled — and Thanatos — the death drive or aggression principle that leads individuals on futile quests to have immature or downright deviant desires fulfilled in ways that are ultimately destructive to the psyche as a whole. For Freud, sex and violence were intimately related.” (Sullivan and McKee, 2015, p.76)

Subsequently, neo-Freudian theories started to portray heterosexuality as the normative/natural sexuality which leads to reproduction and thus life/Eros, while every other form of sexuality is considered to be abnormal as it would lead the human species to Thanatos. Furthermore, the gender roles that accompany this heteronormative sexual model demand a male/female binary in which the male archetype has to be perceived as masculine, an active and aggressive male, whereas the female has to remain feminine and passive.

As Sullivan and McKee (2015, p.76) state: “with such assumptions at the core of public policy debates on sexuality, and growing concern that media and popular culture were not fitting this model, it is not surprising that pornography became a major

subset of media effects research. The search was on to prove that pornography was the apotheosis of violence and Thanatos.” According to them, 1970 was the year that this interest in pornography and its violent effects intensified. Consequently, the same year the US President’s Commission on Obscenity and Pornography released a report regarding pornography and the repercussions of it on American citizens. After the conduction of numerous empirical researches, the Commission’s report found “no evidence to date that exposure to explicit sexual materials plays a significant role in the causation of delinquent or criminal behavior among youths or adults” (Lockhart quoted in Sullivan and McKee, 2015, p.75). But even though the findings of the Commission did not conclude that there was a link between pornography and violence, Jon Lewis observes that “the very fact that the question was posed cemented the link in the public’s mind” (quoted in Sullivan and McKee, 2015, p.77). These anti-pornographic sentiments found space also within feminist theories and politics, but not without generating internal conflicts. In this context, the so-called ‘sex wars’ within feminism took place.

1.2 The Sex Wars and Beyond

During the 1960s, the 1970s, and especially the 1980s, a heteronormative frenzy based on neo-Freudian arguments, along with the research conducted by the US President’s Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, contributed to the emergence of two sharply contrasting feminist camps: the anti-porn feminists and the pro-sex feminists. Patrick Keilty (2012, p. 2) writes:

-In questioning the fundamental power relations within sex, anti-pornography feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, argued that the pornography industry exploits women and is complicit in violence against women in its production, dissemination, and consumption. They believe that pornography actualizes or enacts the real conditions of women’s subordination. Others, such as Diana Russell, argued that there exists a causal relation between heterosexual pornography and rape.

Consequently, anti-porn feminists such as Dworkin, MacKinnon, and Russell declared that pornography is harmful to women, and that there is a strong causality between porn and violence against female individuals. Their critique on porn, especially mainstream

hardcore porn, was quite fruitful and accurate regarding the (hetero)normative stereotypical roles of male and female porn performers, which actually reflect the societal gender binary and the (re)production of it. However, extremely radical ideas such as the principle that women are oppressed by penetrative sex in general, or that there exists a causal and direct relation between pornography and rape, emerged a response, which has been expressed through the pro-sex movement. Pro-sex feminists such as Linda Williams, Drucilla Cornell, and Lara Kipnis stand against Dworkin's and MacKinnon's understandings of pornography. They argue that pornography "inhabits a realm of representation," according to Keilty (2012, p.2). The pro-sex feminism camp was actually a response to those radical anti-porn feminist critiques. Lesbians who were practicing penetrative sex with their partners or were enjoying either a more masculine or a feminine gender profile, females who were engaging in BDSM⁶ sex, or heterosexual women who did not perceived themselves as victims just because of having sex with their male partners, constituted the pro-sex camp. These feminist debates that first took place from the middle of the 1970s through the 1980s are known as "the sex wars."⁷

To be more specific, during the second half of the 1970s, as Ingrid Ryberg (2012, p.22) states: "pornography came into focus as epitomizing male violence against women and degrading notions of women as passive objects of male desire." Anti-porn radical feminists argued that pornography (re)produces gendered power relations, promoting the heteronormative binary of men as sexual predators and women as passive sexual objects. In *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam⁸ (1998, p.136) argues that:

-Instead of the antipornography position, developing into a call for sexual education or for the fostering of sexual diversity, it fed into moralistic fears of perversity and a religious right to legislate against certain forms of sexual expression.

⁶ BDSM stands for bondage and discipline (BD), dominance and submission (DS), sadism and masochism (SM).

⁷ For more information regarding the sex wars, see also the work of Heather Butler (2004), Drucilla Cornell (2000), Betty Dodson (2013), Jack Halberstam (1998), Patrick Keilty (2012), Lara Kipnis (1999), Gayle Rubin (1984), Ingrid Ryberg (2012), or Linda Williams (2004). For more information regarding the anti-porn feminist camp see Andrea Dworkin (1989), Catharine MacKinnon (1993), Robin Morgan (1982), or Diana Russell (2000). For a more contemporary view on anti-pornography feminism see also Gail Dines (2010) and Robert Jensen (1997).

⁸ *Female Masculinity* was published in 1998 by Judith Halberstam. But since 2012, Judith Halberstam goes by the name Jack Halberstam. Thus, in order to respect Halberstam's gender identification I will be referring to him as Jack. However, you will find a citation of the book under the name Judith Halberstam in the list of references.

In the beginning of the century, in relation to first-wave feminism, sexual purity and moralism became a feature of lesbian feminism⁹.

Indeed, quickly after the anti-porn feminist critiques that were addressing pornography's sexist and misogynist representations, focus was given on heterosexual intercourse and penetration, as an enactment of subordination of women. Bisexual women, women who were engaging in BDSM practices, or even lesbians who were enacting feminine/masculine roles and penetrative intercourse with dildos, were excluded, perceived as victims of patriarchy, or even enemies of the antipornography movement — and, by extension, of feminism itself.

The Spring of 1982, Betty Dodson along with her friend Dorothy, both members of a support group of lesbian and bisexual women participating in consensual S/M practices, joined a conference organized by Women Against Pornography (WAP). The two of them attended the conference wearing black leather outfits and boots, holding hands. Dodson (2013, p.27) narrates the event in her “Porn Wars” essay for the *Feminist Porn Book*: “the women glared at us, signaling that we were out of place, while we wore our political incorrectness like a badge of honor.” The WAP conference had multiple female speakers sharing personal stories of sexual violence. The speakers were blaming incest and rape acts almost entirely on pornography, arguing that because their fathers, husbands, and bosses had those pornographic images in their minds they were enacting those scenes against them.

All these conflicting arguments stigmatized lesbian, bisexual, and generally queer women, who were enjoying forms of sexual intercourse considered to be “non-politically correct.” But, as already mentioned, these radical feminist critiques on pornography were not left without an answer. The latter officially came during the 1980s. As Heather Butler (2004, p.178) reports, in 1984 a group of pro-sex feminists “published the first issue of a lesbian-centered erotica magazine called *On Our Backs*. The title of the magazine is both a play on and explicit challenge to its radical feminist predecessor, *Off Our Backs*, a feminist journal that began in 1970.” Apart from being a tangible counteraction, *On Our Backs* also strengthened lesbian visibility to a great extent, not only within the feminist movement but also in the society as a whole.

⁹ For more information, as Halberstam suggests as well, see Sonja Ruehl (1982) and Jean Radford (1986).

Additionally, lesbian and dyke porn films started to being produced.¹⁰

In conclusion, both sides contributed to generate a fruitful discourse regarding heteronormative pornography and its problematic aspects, but in no way can we compare these two movements equally; or to use Gayle S. Rubin's (1984, p.167) words, they cannot be characterized as "equally extremist." Apart from making reasonable arguments regarding the contribution of heteronormative pornography to the objectification of women and the promotion of certain gender roles, the antipornography movement expressed by radical feminists has been trying really passionately to link pornography with rape until the present time.¹¹ As Rubin (1984, p.167) argued: "trying to find a middle course between WAP and Samois is a bit like saying that the truth about homosexuality lies somewhere between the positions of the Moral Majority and those of the gay movement."

Even if the confrontation between radical anti-porn and pro-sex feminists continues in part to this day, new approaches to these debates in general, and to the issue of pornography in particular, have emerged in both theoretical and activist spaces. Feminist sex radicals like Rubin represent an important genealogy for queer theories and politics that would develop from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Such queer perspectives, offer a way to look at pornography differently and not to condemn it in total. The answer to mainstream heterosexual/heteronormative pornography might not be to forbid this erotic media in its entirety but to create alternative porn genres that could and should portray more inclusive and diverse sexual acts as well as reconceptualize penetrative sex itself. A queer approach introduces a type of porn with a distinct focus on the political. Queer porn differs from lesbian or dyke porn because

¹⁰ There is a differentiation between lesbian and dyke porn films. Lesbian porn, filmed between the 1970s and the 1980s, was characterized mostly by a softcore aesthetic and not penetrative sexual intercourse; *The King* (Looney Bear, 1968), *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann* (Radley Metzger, 1975), or *Erotic in Nature* (Cristen Lee Rothermund, 1985) are examples of such lesbian porn films. On the contrary, dyke porn was appropriating sex acts that were considered to be heterosexual such as penetration, rough sex, or role-playing. A great example is the film *Suburban Dykes* (Debbie Sundahl, 1990), the first one to contribute to the pro-sex feminist dyke legacy.

¹¹ To give a contemporary example, during the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001), Catherine MacKinnon wrote an article in 1993 for *Ms* journal in which, according to Williams (2004, p.11), "she argued that the Serbian rapes of Muslim and Croatian women in Bosnia constituted an unprecedented policy of extermination caused by pornography. (...) Reports by Muslim women that some of the rapes had been videotaped, transformed ordinary rape, MacKinnon believed, into a historically unprecedented atrocity. The real culprit in these rapes was, for MacKinnon, not the Serbian rapists, but the supposed saturation of Yugoslavia with pornography. Such an argument encourages us to shift attention from the real crime of politically motivated rape to the supposedly more heinous crime of filming it. Instead of concentrating on how Muslim and Croatian women became the targets of sexual crimes, MacKinnon preferred to blame pornography as their cause. We come away from her article with the impression that it is pornography that we must fight, not rape."

it does not only offer to the spectator screened sexual acts that once were deemed to be non-visible, abnormal, or even not feminist. This specific type of porn intends to thematize concepts of gender and racial identity, sexual orientation, body positivity. With that being said, queer pornography might enable a healing mechanism by promoting and making visible bodies and identities considered to be non-normative. Consequently, queer porn can be characterized not only alternative because of a dyke imagery that is being offered for example, but also productive as the representation of those bodies operates as a healing tool, something that distinguishes queer porn from its pro-sex feminist genealogy.

Another way that queer perspectives on porn prove the productiveness of this media lies in its DIY¹² possibility. New technologies allow people to carve spaces of power in the production of porn. Paul Preciado¹³ (2013, p.37) makes this argument in *Testo Junkie*¹⁴ by introducing the “autopornographic body,” which constitutes as he asserts a new force in the world-economy: “today, any user of the Internet who has a body, a computer, a video camera, or a webcam, as well as an Internet connection and a bank account can create a porn site and have access to the cyber market of the sex industry.” Though Preciado refers to this autopornography industry mostly from an economic perspective, as a potential sabotage to the monopoly of the big porn-corporations, the autopornographic body could also express a positively sexualized body as a plethora of amateur performers create their own erotic films and consequently can potentially contribute to a body positive image. An example of this pornographic resistance which combines both the expression of a different type of porn and the sabotage of big porn-corporations as it was financed by the Swedish state, is the feminist porn film collection *Dirty Diaries: Twelve Shorts of Feminist Porn* (Mia Engberg, 2009),¹⁵ a series of feminist porn shorts created by a group of artists, activists, and filmmakers.

Nevertheless, while amateur porn production could indeed represent one way in which different body images are circulated and the very profits of porn are

¹² Do It Yourself.

¹³ Paul Preciado published *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* in 2013, as Beatriz Preciado. But in 2014 Preciado announced that he was transitioning and, in January 2015, he changed his first name from Beatriz to Paul. As a result, I am referring to him as Paul but you can find the book in the list of references under the name Beatriz Preciado.

¹⁴ The book was first published in 2008 in Spanish, with title *Testo Yonqui*.

¹⁵ I analyze *Dirty Diaries* more at length, as well as other feminist, ethical, and queer porn films in the second chapter.

redistributed outside the circuits controlled by porn-corporations, this thesis focuses on a different way in which porn — whether amateur or not — might prove productive: that is, its potential contributions to healing processes. In the next section, the potential role of specific types of pornography as healing tools especially for people with a history sexual violence will be discussed.

1.3 Pornography as a healing process

Up until this point, the causal relation between porn and rape was one of the core claims of the anti-porn radical feminist camp, and projects like the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in the U.S. which examined the relation between pornography and violence, were taking place during the 1970s. However, nowadays activist, scholarly, and cultural projects such as the London-based “My Body Back” project, with its “The Clit List” porn database aimed at sexual violence survivors, not only work to undermine the causal link between pornography and rape posited by radical feminists as well as rightwing conservative critics of porn but, further, they suggest that pornography could work as a healing tool for people who experienced sexual violence. Can really pornography take the form of a healing process for women who experienced such violent incidents? How? And if this is the case, could even mainstream hardcore pornography have such effects, or should we focus only on alternative forms of porn, considered to be non-triggering, such as feminist, queer, or ethical porn?

Before proceeding, however, a definition of the term “sexual violence” must be given. Sexual violence can take the form of either sexual harassment — from a catcall on the street to a person holding a powerful position asking people of lower positions for sexual favors with the promise of rewards in exchange, usually in working environments — or sexual assault — from non-consensual sexual touching to someone forcing another person to engage in a sexual act against their will. But the distinction between these two terms can usually become quite blurry. Professor of sexualized violence, Liz Kelly has been working with women who have been sexually abused for decades. In her book *Surviving Sexual Violence*, the interviews that she conducted during her research indicate three key elements of sexual abuse: “that most women have experienced sexual violence in their lives; that there is a range of male behavior that

women experience as abusive; and that sexual violence occurs in the context of men's power and women's resistance" (Kelly, 1988, p.1). This female resistance to male power, according to Kelly, results in (sexual) violence addressed to women. Following Susan Griffin, Kelly (1988, p.33) argues that "rape is not a sexual crime but a violent, political act." Consequently, the threat of rape functions as a form of social control.

This violence can cause both physical and psychological pain and damage, and potentially negative effects on one's sexual expression; a sexual harassment and/or assault can be a very *traumatic experience*. Griselda Pollock (2013, p.2) writes:

-Originating in the Greek word for what pierces the body, *trauma* originates as a medical term. Adopted by psychology at the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of trauma was needed to convey the shattering experiences typical not only of modern life in the city and the railway age but, notably, of warfare — shell-shock in the First World War, for example — that 'pierced' the psychological mechanisms established to shield the psyche from excessive external stimuli. Events and assaults that cannot be processed, or 'digested' by the psychic apparatus are thus considered traumatic.

Though trauma until the 1970s was a term used to address mostly posttraumatic stress disorders in men who experienced war, Judith Herman, one of the most prominent feminist experts on trauma, argues that "the most common posttraumatic stress disorders are those (...) of women in civilian life. The real conditions of women's lives are hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life." (quoted in Cvetkovich, 2009, p.32)

However, as Ann Cvetkovich (2009, p.33) claims, Herman's perspective on trauma "reflects the tendency of clinical psychology to medicalize psychic pain, another exemplary case of which is the contemporary zeal for pharmacological treatment of depression."¹⁶ Following Cvetkovich's assertion, trauma should not just be treated from a sterilized pharmacological perspective. Trauma does not constitute a disorder or a form of disease, but entails experience and memory. As Pollock (2013, p.1) states, "trauma possesses and inhabits us." As a result, trauma is not seeking for a cure, yet it

¹⁶ Furthermore, not only does Herman approach trauma from a medicalized perspective, but she also genders it by making distinctions between private (female) and public (male) trauma, which results in a *traumatic binary*.

calls for a confrontation.

Furthermore, there is a link between the pathologization of trauma and non-normative sexual orientations. Cvetkovich (2013, p.43) argues:

-I am especially wary of the pathologization of trauma because of its similarity to the pathologization of sexual perversity and sexual identities in the name of constructing normative identities. The shared origins of trauma and sexual identity in discourses of psychoanalysis suggest the links between the two. The history of gay and lesbian identity formations has shown that medical diagnoses have wide-ranging social and political consequences, in addition to their immediate practical effects; a landmark in gay and lesbian history was its removal from classification as a disease by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973.

Even fetishism, BDSM practices or cross-dressing were considered to be signs of mental illness and were included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 2013.¹⁷ Cvetkovich addresses this specific problem of the pathologization of certain non-normative sexualities and sexual practices by linking it to the pathologization of trauma which leads to social and political consequences, as she states. Consequently, a homosexual individual or a person who carries a trauma, requires drastic socio-political and institutional change, rather than medication. Especially regarding trauma, the key is to confront it rather than treat it as a disease. In that sense, though Herman's approach to trauma is quite clinical, she argues, however, in favor of collective and social forms of recovery. The political and social aspect of trauma can be confronted through collective approaches, which can take the form of a group therapy, the engagement and participation in feminist activist movements and groups, or acts like the "My Body Back" project.

Ann Cvetkovich refers to another form of therapeutic confrontation of trauma in her book *An Archive of Feelings*. In 1994, the dyke punk band, Tribe 8 performed during the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Some of the band's members identified as survivors of sexual abuse. Tribe 8 members used their music to confront the problem of incest survivors' trauma among themselves and also with the audience. For example, "Leslie Mah's 'Mom Gone Song' is about her mother's failure to deal with her own

¹⁷ For more information regarding the fifth and revised edition of the DSM, see: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm> (accessed on 6 July, 2017)

history of sexual abuse” (Cvetkovich, 2009, p.73). Cvetkovich (2009, p.73) writes:

-Their performance blurs the distinctions between pro-sex practices, sexual violence, and incest survivorhood in order to reveal that their intimate connections may be productive rather than a cause for alarm. Sexual abuse and incest were frequently broached in the workshop the group held following their performance. Many workshop participants testified to having undergone a conversion experience when they saw the band in action and realized that the performance was about addressing violence, not promoting it. Like a professional workshop leader, Breedlove gave the group instructions on how to find cheap dildos to sacrifice and eloquently testified to the therapeutic power of mock castration.

In an intense and violent live performance, sexually abused survivors can express their anger and confront their traumatizing experiences. Acts like a public castration of a dildo or a mosh pit can help release physical tension and suppressed feelings. Consequently, these acts are no longer perceived as violent expressions but they deal with internalized violence through therapeutic rituals.

Can pornography obtain similar effects as the performance of Tribe 8 recalled and analyzed by Cvetkovich? Author and pro-sex feminist, Donna Minkowitz “advocates of pro-sex lesbianism and S/M, and posits relations of dominance and submission as a mechanism for healing from incest rather than as its perpetration by other means” (Cvetkovich, 2009, p.75). Minkowitz argues that specific sexual practices might stimulate healing processes. Thus, pornography, as the ultimate form of erotic media and adult entertainment, could play a crucial role in confronting traumas related to sexually violent experiences. However, the question that arises is: could pornography as a whole contribute to the healing process of a sexual violence survivor? Or we should focus only on specific porn categories considered to be non-triggering? I aim to answer this question first by analyzing examples of feminist, queer, and ethical porn movies and their potential healing effects in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Blue Filmography/ Pink Politics

2.1 Too much pussy? Much more pussy!

Several films will be discussed in this chapter, in order to give concrete examples of what a feminist, ethical, or queer porn film constitutes. Additionally, the goal is to examine whether these erotic films can take the form of healing tools for individuals with a history of sexual violence or not. Due to the “sex wars,” the feminist debates that took place during the 1970s and the 1980s mostly, the need for inclusive and diverse sexual acts and the reconceptualization of penetrative sex in porn has been expressed by the pro-sex feminist movement. Additionally, concepts like the “male gaze”¹⁸ introduced by Laura Mulvey in 1975, gained in popularity. A need for better and inclusive pornographic films but also visibility of non-normative sexualities, expressed to a great extent from the magazine *On Our Backs*, resulted in the creation of alternative types of porn such as feminist and lesbian or dyke pornography. But what is exactly feminist, lesbian, and queer pornography?

Ryberg (2012, p.26), for example, claims that:

-the political and aesthetic heterogeneity of queer, feminist and lesbian pornography builds on legacies of feminist film critique and practice as these intertwine with multilayered discussions and debates about sexuality and pornography since the second wave feminist movement. Drawing from Teresa de Lauretis, queer, feminist and lesbian pornography is discussed as characterized by a tension between affirmation and critique, constitutive of the women’s movement and cinema as such.

When I asked Jennifer Lyon Bell, a U.S. feminist erotic filmmaker based in Amsterdam and internship provider of mine, what does feminist porn mean to her, Bell replied that it is the “message of the movie and the theme of the movie that reflect something in line with female sexuality whether it is the way female sexuality actually is or the way women would like to be revealed, but it is very much created with a woman’s perspective in mind. Also, feminist porn is based on principles of production and creation that are supportive towards all the people involved in a film production and

¹⁸ The male gaze: is a concept that has been introduced by Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). Mulvey argued that the controlling gaze in cinema is always male, which means that the male spectator is depicted as the agent of the look, while the female as the object of spectacle through mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism.

especially women.” Furthermore, well known queer porn performer Jiz Lee (2015, p.41), addresses the issue of consent and feminism in commercial porn films: “A performer’s sexual agency and ability is queried multiple times throughout the production process. Such query and validation exist to ensure performer safety as well as adhere to legal business practices. Many forms of consent can appear throughout the production process: implied consent (...) informed consent (...) or expressed consent.” Thus, a film that is considered to be feminist or queer expresses certain political beliefs influenced by the feminist movement, protects the porn performer, and aims to include individuals such as people of color, individuals with non-conforming/non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations, people with functional diversity, or people with bigger bodies, scars, body hair and so forth. In this way, different types of bodies, sexualities, and gender identities gain visibility and people outside of the heteronormative context can finally identify with a non-normative porn performer.

Example of such feminist, queer, and lesbian porn are the films *Too Much Pussy: Feminist Sluts in the Queer X Show* (2010) and *Much More Pussy* (2010), both directed by the French filmmaker Émilie Jouvét. Seven female performers, from Europe and the U.S., were travelling around Europe during the Summer 2009, performing their burlesque show called *The Queer X Show*. Jouvét documented this tour and created the two films mentioned above. However, not only do these documentaries portray the burlesque performances of this group, but they also depict sexual intercours between the members of the group along with other queer individuals as well as their engagement with other feminist, queer, and lesbian groups.

I watched *Much More Pussy* for the first time during the 5th *Berlin in Athens Porn Film Festival*, which took place in January 2011. It is quite difficult to describe how liberating this night was for me, as I was only eighteen years old, accompanied by three male friends. To see a truly queer porn world screened on the stage of Gagarin 205, a live music space located in the center of Athens, was a mesmerizing experience. This film affected me both mentally and bodily, by introducing me to a queer world of which I was not even aware of back then. Consequently, I experienced myself a form of healing function which queer porn can provide the spectator with, and that this thesis aims to explore further and conceptualize.

Both films are exceptional examples of the form that a porn film can take, but here I will focus on *Much More Pussy*, especially on one particular scene of this film. In the eight minute of the film, Sadie Lune, performer and sex educator, introduces

herself and announces that she is going to show us her cervix. She spreads her legs and with the help of a vaginal speculum and a mirror she presents quite effortlessly her cervix to the rest of the female group and the camera. Lune practiced the cervix examination also during her staged performance in *The Queer X Show*. By this practice of auto-cervix examination, Lune aims to demedicalize this process. As she states in the film, “I want to see what’s going on inside of me and know what’s going on. (...) Sex-positive means that we are working conceptually from a place where sexuality is not seen as dirty or shameful or something to be guilty about” (*Much More Pussy*, 2010).

As Jane Gerhard clarifies, “the discourse on sexual pleasure as the key to liberation in second wave feminism involved a new perspective on women’s bodies and sexual organs, not least the clitoris, which was regarded as a ‘distinctively feminist body part’ and came to signify authenticity and liberation” (quoted in Ryberg, 2012, p.84). The practice of cervix examination was made famous by Annie Sprinkle’s “Public Cervix Announcements,” staged through the 1990s, where “she invited members of the audience to her show *Post Porn Modernist* to look at her cervix through a speculum. In the case of *The Queer X Show*, explicit reference was made to 1980s sex radicals such as Sprinkle” (Ryberg, 2012, p.84). By embracing the practice of self-examination, and the exculpation of menstruation and female masturbation, a body and sex-positive movement arose during the 1980s, declaring the autonomy and the self-determination of the (female) body.

Can this body and sex-positivity, which infiltrates both *Too Much Pussy* and *Much More Pussy*, provide a therapeutic function for those women who have been sexually harassed and/or assaulted? Can this type of erotic films result into the creation of a pornographic safe space, where every individual is encouraged to express their sexuality and get to know their own bodies? As Ryberg (2012, p.34) states: “the interpretive community of queer, feminist and lesbian pornography is characterized by activist struggles aiming at constructing a safe space for sexual empowerment”; further, she explains “how this interpretive community functions both as an *intimate public* and as a *counter public*.”

Following this concept, feminist, queer, and lesbian pornography might function as a safe space, where marginalized individuals, especially the female ones, can finally share a sense of belonging. When Sadie Lune spreads her legs, shows her cervix to the public, and declares that she desires to know herself what is going on

inside her and that sexuality is not something to be ashamed of, she potentially helps every girl who has been sexually harassed and/or assaulted, from daily cat calls to actual rape, to realize that it is not her body which attracts those acts, but these are the results of a patriarchal society which ails.

2.2 Silver Shoes

But of course feminist porn is not only about politicizing our sexual arousals. According to Williams (2006, p.272), “as even the most cursory reading of Freud shows, sexuality is by definition perverse. The ‘aims’ and ‘objects’ of sexual desire are often obscure and inherently substitutive. Unless we are willing to see reproduction as the common goal of the sexual drive, we have to admit, as Jonathan Dollimore has put it, that we are all perverts.” Can feminist, lesbian, and queer porn draw the political and the arousing together? And if so, should it turn exclusively toward non-normative sexual identities and practices, or could acts as heterosexual penetrative sex be screened as well? I will answer the previous question by referring to a sex scene from Jennifer Lyon Bell’s *Silver Shoes* (2015) as a representative example of feminist heterosexual porn.

In *Silver Shoes* three explicit erotic stories take place. During the third one, Liandra, a bi/pansexual woman, is having a sexual intercourse with her friend's male friend. This male friend is portrayed as a queer guy: he is the only guy in a female company, he seems to be very gentle, he talks about fashion, and during one of the scenes he is wearing a pair of silver high heels while making a small catwalk for the amusement of his female friends. So, when the sexual encounter between these two performers takes place, Liandra is on top of her partner who looks like a young delicate boy, mesmerized by her. Although the sexual intercourse is a heterosexual one, Liandra seems quite powerful and dominant; she is offering and receiving pleasure at the same time to/from a male individual without being objectified. In this particular scene, who can say which body is the active and which the passive one? Bell manages to blend these two identities and to offer an alternative representation of this intercourse that we call heterosexual sex. This blurring of the “roles” is one of the main concepts on which feminist, ethical, queer porn focuses. In doing so, it reconfigures or even extinguishes the active/passive binary.

Furthermore, the act of “topping”¹⁹ itself can be quite therapeutic. For example, Cvetkovich summarizes Minkowitz’s interesting argument regarding this sexual act by reporting that she “characterizes her playful response to trauma as avoiding what she describes as the masculine pattern of passing on abuse by becoming a perpetrator. Topping, moreover, represents an alternative to the traditional ‘female’ response of adopting the position of ‘victim,’ which she identifies as the Dworkinite *via negativa* of refusing all association with anger and aggression” (Cvetkovich, 2009, p.75). Following Minkowitz, through the act of topping, the female partner puts aside the passive role, which is usually correlated to the bottom position, and as a result she adopts a more powerful one. Thus, by watching a film that offers a different approach to heterosexual intercourse as Bell’s *Silver Shoes* does, women who experienced sexual violence, might find a way to reconceptualize the act of penetrative sex. Sex, and consequently porn, do not constitute just the simplistic act of a male predator penetrating the female prey. Sex and pornographic films can be sensual, complex, spiritual, or romantic. During our interview, Bell stated:

- “There are some kinds of mainstream porn that I do like, but the ones I like least they show an immutable series of acts between two people, who do not seem to have any control, particularly the female character. (...) I hope that by working with actors and actresses to figure out plots and sexual activities that they genuinely enjoy, we can show to all the viewers that sex is very different for every person, male or female, and these are not two interchangeable bodies in a film, but rather these are two unique humans who have particular desires and ways of interacting emotionally and physically with their partner.”

Consequently, feminist, ethical, and queer porn introduces a new perspective on sexual pleasure and the portrayal of it, while also declaring that each body is unique and expresses its own needs and desires. However, queer or feminist porn does not always portray sex through a “softer” aesthetic. In the last part of this chapter, I focus on the *Dirty Diaries: Twelve Shorts of Feminist Porn* (Mia Engberg, 2009), particularly on the film *Authority* (Marit Östberg, 2009). The *Dirty Diaries* collection, funded by the Swedish Film Institute, was a project, made by the filmmaker Mia Engberg, with the participation of other filmmakers, artists, activists, and even scholars, to create their

¹⁹ To sexually dominate someone.

own erotic short films using only mobile phone cameras. As stated by Ryberg (2012, p.83): “the *Dirty Diaries* call for participants echoes [the] articulation of the importance of learning to define our sexuality *on our own terms*.”

The *Dirty Diaries* collection includes films that portray, for example, heterosexual sex, in *Skin* (Elin Magnusson, 2009), lesbian sex in *Phone Fuck* (Ingrid Ryberg, 2009), or female masturbation in *Come together* (Mia Engberg, 2006) — all of them reflecting a feminist approach on pornography. However, I decided to focus on *Authority* for two main reasons: on the one hand, this film introduces obvious power relations regarding dominance and submission performed by the individuals who engage in BDSM; and, on the other hand, though this might be a controversial choice of queer porn with a potential healing aspect, I find it quite interesting to engage with more hardcore forms of queer pornography and examine what they can offer. Feminist erotic films as *Silver Shoes* can empower their audience by screening sexual acts like female topping, but can consensual violent sex acts contribute the same way? What can S/M practices offer to a sexual violence survivor? The next film which is going to be discussed, voices a kinkier sexual expression and sets light to queer BDSM practices and porn.

2.3 Dirty Diaries

Authority is a story of lust, which escalates progressively from the police’s pursuit of a cop/graffiti painter to a sensual BDSM sexual intercourse. To be more specific, the film begins with a girl making a graffiti on a wall. A policewoman is chasing the graffiti girl because of her illegal action. After the pursuit, they both end up in an industrial area inside an abandoned building, where the graffiti girl manages to tie the policewoman to a chair. The girl kicks the chair with the policewoman on it until it falls. But later, the girl lifts the chair up and unties the policewoman, who chooses to stay and, as a result, the erotic play between the two begins. Consent and trust are emphasized as a crucial aspect of BDSM role-play, two elements that are obviously respected in this film because of the policewoman’s decision to stay when she is finally untied.

This film is characterized by a certain complexity. First of all, it challenges the nature of the public space in relation to sex, as the whole BDSM session and the sexual intercourse take place in an abandoned building, and thus makes a clear reference to the

demands of pro-sex activists during the sex wars regarding visibility. Furthermore, the two performers, a policewoman, who holds an authoritarian position and the graffiti girl, who vandalizes public space, challenge each other's positions regarding dominance and submissiveness by engaging in a BDSM sexual intercourse. Finally, the film strongly undermines prejudices about female sexuality, which is usually perceived as soft and romantic, by portraying a violent sexual play between two women.

In an interview that I conducted with Östberg, she mentions that one of the reasons why she continues to create queer feminist porn films is rooted in her own background; she describes the first time that she watched queer feminist porn as a very important experience, as she had the chance to see bodies like hers not being shamed. The performers in this film were free to "enjoy themselves and to be proud." As she states, even the simple fact of watching "bodies having sex can be empowering." However, she believes that queer feminist porn films like *Authority* can be quite triggering for some spectators. She argues: "In different contexts, it has super different meanings." Furthermore, she addresses the fact that BDSM porn can be created in right and wrong ways. Regarding her own film *Authority*, she states: "what I wanted to do, was to turn power structures upside down, this was a comment to my past as an activist. (...) So, the story in itself it is not healing, but it is political. You can read it in different ways and it does not put an answer on you." Östberg shared with me her activist background and how she herself perceived the authority which stems from the police. Therefore, she wanted to play with these power structures by portraying a BDSM sexual intercourse between a policewoman, a person of authority, and the graffiti girl, a person who violates the law. Following her own words, one can understand that there are distinctions lying between the intentions of the director and the impact that their creation(s) can have upon the audience. However, what Östberg created as an answer to the power imposed by the police can be perceived as a reenactment of a traumatic experience that challenges the person in authority and alters the roles, but in a consensual way.

Keiko Lane, a Japanese American psychotherapist who specializes in working with queer people of all genders, wrote an essay on the psychotherapeutic potential of queer pornography. In this essay, Lane shares the story of one of her first clients, a butch-identified dyke with a history of childhood sexual abuse. This butch dyke had dominant sexual fantasies. The porn that she preferred, made by and for men as she stated to Lane, was simultaneously turning her on and making her feel guilty about that.

When Lane informed her clinical supervisor about the progress of this specific client, the supervisor was not pleased, and expressed extremely kinkphobic concerns. As Lane (2013, p.166) states “she [the supervisor] was concerned that my client’s interest in kink and BDSM was indicative of an unconscious desire to reenact the abuse” and “she thought that my client was identifying with her abuser and desired to play out her abuse on another woman.” In the end, after a few more sessions the client decided to stop. Lane (2013, p.167) argues: “In believing my supervisor, I shamed my client in the ways in which she had been shamed by others.”

From the supervisor’s perspective, reenactments are always pathological. However, during the first chapter by displaying the approach of Cvetkovich regarding collective confrontation and reenactment of trauma through the performance of Tribe 8, Pollock’s argument that trauma “inhabits” us, or Minkowitz’s support of S/M practices that through dominant and submissive acts can function as a healing mechanism, it becomes clear that the confrontation and reenactment of trauma can be an option. The reenactments of traumas can be actually therapeutic, because the traumatic experience is finally being faced in a conscious and controlled process. As Lane concludes at the end of her essay, queer pornography can have psychotherapeutic impacts on individuals who deal with their gender identity or their sexual orientation or generally struggle with issues regarding their sexualities and the traumatic incidents that they have experienced. The challenging part is to find images of who those people “could imagine being” (Lane, 2013, p.173). In other words, by identifying with a non-normative porn performer in a feminist, ethical, or queer film, through sexual acts which considered to be non-conforming such as female topping, BDSM practices, gay sex, female ejaculation, and so forth, people who carry traumas related to their sexual expression can finally experience those covert fantasies and confront or reenact their stories through a liberating pornographic screening.

To conclude, the three feminist/queer films that have been discussed in this chapter are simultaneously similar and different. While films like *Silver Shoes* portray an emotional type of erotic films by avoiding aggressive sexual acts and leaving space for feelings, and thus can be classified as a softer genre, *Authority* engages with BDSM practices and shows how queer BDSM porn films can be productive, as they allow for a reiteration of violence but in a safe consensual context. Queer lesbian porn can be even educative, as the porn performers of *Much More Pussy* teach the audience how to perform a cervix examination. But do individuals who have experienced a form of

sexual violence actually search for feminist, ethical, or queer porn? Do these persons find alternative types of pornography therapeutic? And to what extent is this type of porn accessible in the first place? In the next chapter, the results from the web-based survey along with the interviews that follow will allow for answers to these questions.

Chapter 3: Pornohealing: From theory to practice

3.1 Porn Taste: A Web-Based Survey

After the examination of the potential healing aspect of pornography from a theoretical perspective — especially of feminist, ethical, and queer porn — along with a cinematic analysis of three different films that represent these types of pornography, it is crucial to pass from theory to lived experiences. In this final chapter, space will be given to express the stories of people with a history of sexual violence, their pornographic preferences, and to finally conclude if alternative types of porn can function as healing tools for those individuals. Through an extended analysis of the web-based survey and the interviews that I conducted, this thesis aims not only to provide theoretical arguments, but also to give an opportunity to sexual survivors of speaking on their own terms.

To begin with, the survey had a duration of 27 days. During this period, I received 61 responses in total, 39 from individuals that who were born between 1990 and 2000, and 22 from individuals who were born between 1979 and 1989. This can be explained due to the fact that the survey has been posted in several Gender Studies and feminist groups on Facebook, addressed mostly to Dutch and Greek young people, because of my own identity as a Greek student in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, as these groups are open to every individual who is interested in feminism, LGBTQAI+ politics, and relevant news and events, people from different countries all over Europe responded to the survey. To be more specific, 32 persons live in the Netherlands, 17 in Greece, and the rest in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, New York, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Regarding their gender and sexual orientation, 77% of the individuals identify as cis females, while 19.7% out of the total chose the answer “other” with responses

that vary from queer to non-binary. Three cis males, a trans²⁰ and an intersex person have also answered the questionnaire. In addition, 44.3% of the individuals define themselves as bi/pansexuals, while 31.1% of the total define themselves as heterosexuals, 11.5% as queers, and 8.2% as homosexuals. Regarding the 27 individuals who replied that they identify as bi/pansexuals, we have to take into consideration a key factor, in order to explain this notable number: the vast majority who answered this questionnaire identify as cis females interested in feminism and gender politics. Consequently, the combination of their own sexual orientation with their political views, which can be characterized as more open and non-normative, results in a more open sexuality.²¹ A cis female stated that she is asexual, another one that she identifies as queer, bi, and pansexual, and finally, a person replied that they do not know their gender but they are attracted to women.

When it comes to education and employment, 98.4% state that they own BA or MA diplomas, and two of them are conducting PhD research. Only one person replied that she is a high school student. Additionally, 52.5% out of the total are students. The rest of them have full or part time jobs or they are unemployed. As I mentioned earlier, this can be explained by the fact that the survey has been posted in several Gender Studies and feminist groups on Facebook, in which the vast majority are students. The educational and professional background is of importance because later in my analysis I discuss the issue of accessibility to pornography, especially feminist, ethical, and queer porn, in order to make a link to people who are willing to pay for those types of pornography and people who are not, along with their own socio-economical background.

In the question regarding whether the individuals experienced sexual

²⁰ In the question regarding the gender identification, I gave the options of “cis female,” “trans,” “intersex,” and “other.” I chose not to divide the “trans” option between trans man and trans woman because I wanted to include also transgender individuals, people in transition who might not identify as one of the options mentioned above, or trans feminine/trans masculine individuals. However, if one desired to give a more specific answer they could choose the option “other” and write their own answer.

²¹ As a pansexual myself, I believe that certain types of sexual orientation require some form of awareness and knowledge regarding other gender identities, for example. To call oneself pansexual requires an awareness of the fact that gender is not binary. And this is exactly why I stated that women who are attracted to more than one genders, through their studies or feminist beliefs can be more open towards their attraction to individuals with a non-conforming gender identity because they acknowledge these gender identities in the first place. As a result, the fact that the majority of the cis female individuals who answered this questionnaire, and who are also members of feminist groups, identify as bi/pansexual is a quite reasonable percentage.

harassment or not, 96.7% replied affirmatively, while only two cis women gave a negative answer. In any case, this percentage is extremely high. When it comes to sexual assault, affirmative answers are fewer in comparison to sexual harassment; but, still, people who experienced sexual assault(s) represent the 73.8%, which means that 45 people have been sexually assaulted out of the 61 respondents. Furthermore, 8.2% chose the “other” option because they were not sure whether a groping, a kiss, or caresses without their consent constitute a sexual assault. Thus, only 11 persons gave a negative answer to this question.

This is not an unexpected result. In a patriarchal heteronormative society, females and/or feminine individuals and non-heteronormative people have to deal with sexual harassment almost on a daily basis. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States, 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. Additionally, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) released in 2014 the results of an extensive survey with focus on violence against women across the 28 EU Member States, based on interviews with 42,000 women. According to this report, one in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 has been raped.²²

After the questions regarding sexually violent experiences, I considered it reasonable to ask the respondents about their masturbation habits in order to examine whether they are facing difficulties or not, and later compare the results with their pornographic preferences. So, when the individuals were asked if they used to masturbate before the sexual harassment(s) and/or assault(s) take place, 48 of them responded affirmatively, while 12 persons gave a negative answer and only one specified that she was too young when she got sexually assaulted, thus she was not yet sexually active and therefore did not use to masturbate. However, some of the negative answers might indicate the same age factor, even if not specified. The following question was if they continued to masturbate after they experienced a form of sexual violence. 56 of them replied with a yes, while three said no, and two of them chose the option “other”; one of them, the same cis female individual who specified that she did

²² For more information regarding both surveys, see: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report> (accessed on 7 July, 2017) and Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) <https://www.rainn.org/> (accessed on 7 July, 2017).

not use to masturbate before the sexual assault because of her age, answered again that she was too young to masturbate even after the sexual assault(s) that she experienced. The second individual gave a similar answer.

Only 3 persons said that they did not continue to masturbate after the sexually violent incident that they experienced. In one case, it is clear that the respondent did not use to masturbate before or after the sexual harassment(s) and assault(s) that she experienced probably because of her age, as later in the following questions she answered that she watches porn and masturbates or has sex while watching adult movies. The second individual is an asexual cis female, and by taking into consideration other answers that she gave one can assume that she generally does not masturbate nor has sex, but she watches porn. And the third person stated that she used to masturbate before the sexual harassment(s) that she experienced but she did not continue to masturbate after that. However, in the following questions she answered that, while watching pornographic material, she sometimes masturbates. Consequently, maybe she felt the need to stop masturbating for a certain period after the sexual harassment(s) but later she continued to do so.

When it comes to pornographic preferences, 41% out of the total replied that they usually watch mainstream heterosexual or gay porn²³ and 26.2% chose the option “other”; most of these replies state that they watch all kinds of porn mentioned — mainstream heterosexual and gay porn, BDSM, and feminist, ethical, or queer porn. Three persons out of this percentage answered that they do not watch adult films. The 23% represents people that watch only feminist, queer, or ethical pornography, while the results indicate also a 9.8 percentage of people, who prefer exclusively BDSM porn. People were also asked whether they are aware of feminist, ethical, or queer pornography in general and the 78.3% of them replied with a positive answer. But in order to understand whether there is a causal relationship between sexual violence and the preference of specific kinds of pornography or not, we have to examine the responses individually.

Regarding the 23% of people who prefer only feminist, ethical, or queer porn 10 out of 14 have been sexually harassed and assaulted, three of them have been sexually harassed and only one answered negatively to both questions regarding sexual violence. Additionally, 5 out of 6 persons who stated that they prefer BDSM porn have

²³ Both lesbian and male gay porn.

been sexually harassed and assaulted, and one cis female who replied affirmatively to both questions regarding sexual violence said that she watches only ethical BDSM porn. Consequently, the vast majority of people who prefer exclusively feminist, ethical, or queer porn and/or BDSM porn have experienced sexual assault(s) or another form of sexual violence. These numbers indicate that the preferences in porn of the respondents who experienced a form of sexual violence and those who did not, vary. But all the persons who answered that they prefer exclusively feminist, queer, ethical porn or BDSM erotic films apart from one, do have a history of sexual violence. Only from this survey, one cannot be sure about the meaning of this preference. Speculations regarding the non-triggering nature of these alternative types of porn or the play on power dynamics in BDSM porn can be made, but of course further research on this topic is required, in order extract solid conclusions.

Moreover, most of the respondents answered that they found about feminist, ethical, or queer porn on the Internet, through online magazines or through blogs. Also, a 40% answered that they watch feminist, ethical or queer porn for other reasons than masturbation, such as for the artistic aspect of it, because of political views, or just because “the cinematography is often better,” as stated by a film student. Last but not least, I asked the respondents to mention some film titles, websites, magazines, directors or porn film productions that they follow. Erika Lust was undoubtedly the most popular feminist porn director, while Jiz Lee was the most preferable queer porn performer. Also, many individuals enjoy films produced by the Pink and White Productions such as the *Crash Pad Series*.²⁴

The following questions concerned the frequency of watching porn and masturbating or having sex while watching adult movies. 20 persons said that they masturbate every month, 17 every week, and the rest of them are divided between people who masturbate on a daily basis and people who do it a few times per year or not at all. Most of them do watch porn while they are masturbating, 57.4% to be exact, but 75% of them replied that they do not have sex before, during, or after watching porn. Thus, pornography is closely related to masturbation, at least according to the results of this specific survey.

²⁴ Pink and White Productions is a U.S. pornographic company based in San Francisco, the main director and producer of which is Shine Louise Houston. Houston became well known because of the *Crash Pad Series*. The *Crash Pad* (2006) was also Jiz Lee’s first pornographic film, while they still continue to work with Pink and White Productions and collaborate with Shine Louise Houston.

A crucial question of the survey is the one asking whether the respondents started to prefer feminist, queer, or ethical porn after they experienced a form of sexual violence or not; they were also asked to provide specific arguments in relation to their choices. The 65.6% said that they did not switch their preference to feminist, queer or ethical porn after the experience of a form of sexual violence, while the 18% answered affirmatively. Finally, 16.4% chose the option “other” and argued that their interest in this type of porn is not linked to their history of sexual violence, or that they were not interested in mainstream porn even before the sexual harassment(s) and/or assault(s). However, the negative answers include also some persons who did not experience any form of sexual violence at all, the ones who experienced only sexual harassments, and also people that they were not interested in feminist queer porn in the first place because they are heterosexuals or they do not find this category “hot.” Others were not even aware of feminist, ethical, and queer porn, and some of them enjoy watching alternative types of pornography but they did not switch to these genres in the wake of a sexual violent incident. On the other hand, almost all of the individuals who started to prefer feminist, queer, or ethical porn, have been both sexually harassed and assaulted. These results might be just a coincidence, but they nonetheless suggest that the conscious switch to feminist, ethical, or queer porn is linked to the severity of the sexually violent incident(s) that took place. After all, a catcall cannot be compared to a rape. Sexual assault survivors might prefer this type of pornography because they find it non-triggering, they are pleased from the fact that only consensual sexual acts are portrayed, they might feel the need “to watch something ‘enjoyable,’ in which women are genuinely feeling pleasure and not being treated as a moving sex doll,” or they see it as a “political choice and answer against the hegemonic heteronormative male gaze,” to quote some of the answers that the respondents gave.

But another interesting aspect of this question were the arguments about the accessibility of this type of pornography, which became clearer with the responses to the following question. The next question asked the respondents if feminist, ethical, and queer pornography is easily accessible to them. 36.1% replied with a no, 34.4% replied with a yes, and 29.5% chose the option “other” and said that either they know where to find feminist, ethical, and queer porn, but they have to pay in order to get access or they are not aware of this genre. As a result, if we combine the negative answers with the ones that argue that they know where to find it but cannot afford it, the vast majority have limited or no access to feminist, queer, or ethical porn. Consequently, these people

turn back to mainstream heterosexual or gay porn, because they cannot afford a genre that they might find to be of a better quality but also expensive. More specifically, only a 4.9% of the respondents buy feminist, ethical, and queer porn while almost 95% is composed of people who copy, download pirate torrents, watch free gifs on Tumblr, or manage to find some shorts for free. Of course, the majority of the respondents were students, but almost all of them have access to higher education and many of them already own a BA or MA diploma. Additionally, 27.9% out of the total has a full or part time job and others are conducting a PhD research. Thus, we are talking about people with a substantial socio-economic status. But even those people state that cannot or are not willing to pay in order to be able to watch some quality porn.

On the one hand, the question of accessibility is important to address. On the other hand, Jiz Lee argues, in one of the articles that they regularly compose and post on their own website, that “ethical porn starts when we pay for it” (Lee, 2015). Lee provided me with several articles written or co-written by them together with feminist scholars on the matter of porn labor. As Lee argues, without paying for pornographic films you cannot be sure that basic labor rights have been respected during the production of the film. Certain principles have to be taken into consideration, such as the consent of the porn performers, the age of them, STD tests and so forth. With that being said, Lee focuses not only on ethical porn, but also on ethical porn consumption. Consequently, ethical porn does not concern only the porn performers or the porn industry, but also the spectator plays a crucial role.

In the first chapter, I introduced two radically different feminist camps. Especially during the 1970s and the 1980s the troubling matter regarding porn, was porn itself. Anti-porn feminists were addressing the problematic aspects of this media, portraying it as unethical per se, while pro-sex feminists were fighting against sexual moralism. However, as the history continues, the “ethical” leaves behind the debate of whether is moral to have sex on camera and receiving a salary for that or not and focuses on how can one have sex on camera, and being a respected employee. Lee for instance, while discussing the matter of ethical porn, focuses not only on what we watch but also on the fact that in order to watch a porn film of good quality, produced by a company that respects its porn performers and their rights, the spectator must realize that they are also a consumer, and as a consumer they have to pay the price of what they demand to watch. Furthermore, Bell states in her interview that when she herself produces an erotic film, in order to coin it as feminist, she follows specific principles, respects her

performers and gives them the opportunity to express their own opinion, and choose their partner or what kind of sex would they like to have on camera. Consequently, ethical porn is a spectrum of principles accompanied by a certain mentality, which respect porn performers and treat them as employees, not only on set but also within the market. Of course, the vast majority of the population would prefer to use their money for other more crucial consumption needs, but even people who actually do earn a considerable amount of money do not conceptualize masturbation along with ethical porn as a necessity regarding their sexual activity. However, consumers embrace fair-trade goods for example, by choosing to pay more for a product considered to be harmful to animals. So, what if high-quality ethical, feminist, or queer porn, starts from the consumer in order to become more higher-quality and accessible as well?

3.2 Interviews: sharing three stories

Although a considerable number of respondents corresponded to my web-based survey, the quantitative research has specific limitations. As mentioned in the introduction, quantitative research and especially surveys have been criticized as a positivist research method by feminist scholars. Furthermore, a survey does not allow the researcher to delve into the questions nor to deal with every person individually on a more coherent level. However, some of the respondents replied to my call for interviews,²⁵ so I decided to focus on the stories of three different individuals in order to provide this thesis with actual situated knowledge and partial truth.

To begin with, when I initially engaged with this research topic, I was focusing on the potential healing aspect of feminist, queer, and ethical pornography on women with a history of sexual violence. But to my surprise, a few cis male individuals responded to my survey and one of them was willing to give me an interview. My first interviewee was a 32-year-old Greek cis man, living in Groningen, the Netherlands. He stated that he is heterosexual, but he would be open to engage in sexual acts with other male individuals. I will name him X. His sexual harassment occurred when he was twenty years old. During a home party, a few friends gathered in a room. This specific group used to play regularly a game in which they would challenge each other to take out their clothes while drinking, and probably they had sexual pretensions to each other.

²⁵ All of the interviews have been conducted through Skype in English.

X had never participated in this game before, but during this party he was challenged by the others to take off his shirt. Eventually he responded to this challenge, but because he was feeling quite uncomfortable he locked himself in the bathroom of the house, with his shirt missing. As X told me, he had also consumed a lot of alcohol that day. Dragged by other people, he was taken out of the bathroom and undressed by them. They left him standing naked in front of the rest of the group, with his clothes taken away. Then he started to receive body shaming comments. After these harsh comments, he got his clothes back and half an hour later he left the party.

The most peculiar part of this story is that this action was not perceived as a sexual harassment by the others. X recalls: “They were trying to [induct] me in this game, I think that this was the most important motivation. The other, was the possibility of this to become something like an orgy, so they could benefit as well.” I do not wish to focus further on the sexual harassment that X experienced, but it is important to state that sexual violence does not only take the form of rape, nor is it addressed specifically from male strangers to women walking down a street. Violence can take the form of a “game” among friends too, as X’s story shows.

Regarding his pornographic preferences, X mentioned that he has watched almost every porn genre. Nevertheless, after he experienced his first sexual encounter at the age of twenty-one, he realized that people in adult films, mostly in mainstream pornographic material, perform all these roles and he gradually started to look for more realistic or amateur porn. One of his first experiences with feminist porn was when he found out about Erika Lust on Vice magazine, and downloaded one of her films for free from her official website. When I asked him what he thought about Erika Lust’s film, he replied: “I was a bit happy because... it reminded me how I used to imagine being with a girl while not having a girl... when I was sixteen. What was happening was closest to how I used to set my mind (...) back when I [did not have] any computer.” Erika Lust’s film seemed like a teenage fantasy to X, something that could be described as more innocent and pure, and he felt happy about that.

The sexual harassment that X experienced might not be linked directly to his porn preferences, nor did he state that he sees a therapeutic aspect in alternative types of porn. However, he romanticizes feminist pornography, or at least Erika Lust’s work. As Jennifer Lyon Bell mentions during our interview:

- “There are a lot of men, much more than I have ever realized, who did buy porn and

do buy porn of a more mainstream style but they desperately wanted something more alternative as well and they have been really attracted to Blue Artichoke. (...) There's a lot of positive potential in embracing anybody who wants to discover this kind of alternative pornography."

Cis men born and raised in a heteronormative patriarchal society, can find feminist porn to be quite liberating for their stereotypical masculine identity, and this liberation from a set of macho rules and practices can be in itself therapeutic. But when it comes to crueller forms of sexual violence, like rape, can pornography really function as a therapeutic process? The stories shared by two cis female interviewees²⁶ will allow the reader to pass from the theoretical arguments to actual personal experiences, while I aim to answer the previous question as well.

Both of the girls I interviewed live in Greece, are BA students, and one of them also has a job. Y, twenty-three years old, identifies as a bisexual woman while Z, twenty-two years old, mostly feels like a lesbian but she can have sex with cis males under specific circumstances. Both of them experienced childhood sexual abuse. Y's assaulter, was a sixteen-year-old boy who also happened to be her neighbor. Because of the friendly relationship between the parents, he was spending a lot of time at Y's place. Y was around seven years old when the abusive behavior of the teenage neighbor started. According to her, it was an escalating practice, starting with kisses and touches. Then the boy started to demand sexual favors. When Y refused, he told her that he would hit her if she did not please him. Eventually, Y explained to her mother the abusive practices that were taking place, but she never shared with her the whole truth because she was too ashamed of it.

Z experienced similar abusive behaviors, first from her little cousin and later from a sixteen-year-old teenager as well, the son of some friends of Z's parents. In the first case, Z was six and her cousin was nine years old. Again, the boy was asking for kisses and touches in the genital area. Because of this small difference in age it was difficult for Z to perceive it as a sexual assault. Later, when she was eight, the abusive behavior of the teenage boy started. Again, it was an escalating process, which resulted in Z's rape. However, Z never shared these experiences with her mother because she

²⁶ Both of the interviewees are familiar faces. In this case, I consider it an advantage that both of them are known to me because of LGBTQAI+ and feminist circles in Athens, but our relationship would not be characterized as a friendship. As a result, a mutual trust was already present, but also a certain distance between myself and the interviewees allowed me to be a more objective feminist researcher.

felt quite ashamed and partly guilty. She says: “As a child, I was feeling totally responsible and because I thought that... something like that happened before, this incident with that guy my cousin, I was thinking that ok... something is wrong with me like... I do something (...) it’s my fault too.” It is very difficult for both of them to share these stories. Z shared parts of these experiences with her mother some months ago, for the first time. Y’s mother knows, but they barely talk about this incident.

Regarding their pornographic preferences, Z does not watch pornographic films often. She prefers to fantasize and recall sexual acts that she experienced herself. She also states that she cannot be aroused by mainstream porn films because of their structure and because “feelings” do not have a place in those films. As a feminist, she analyzes constantly these heteronormative stereotypes and structures and this functions as a “turn off” for her. She is aware of feminist, queer, and ethical porn; nevertheless, she cannot access most of those films because she is not willing to pay. However, she would definitely prefer it if she could watch a feminist porn film for free. As she mentions, “I would find myself [into] that. I wouldn’t think that ‘oh here’s the male gaze now,’ who is trying to create lesbian sex and... the man behind the camera that organizes how things will go. I think that many times, when the director, if it is a man you can feel it and understand how the things will flow inside the porn film.” Z has watched only parts of feminist or queer porn films. When I asked her if she could find a therapeutic aspect in this genre, she gave me the following answer: “My answer would be hypothetical, but I think yes. I base this on how feminism and generally queer [theory] offers tools and analysis about sexual stuff and trauma, and I have seen from my experience, involving in this kind of politics that I feel much better, safe.”

Though Z has never watched an entire feminist, ethical or queer porn film, from the parts that she has watched and because of her involvement in feminist political groups, she argues that this type of pornography could take the form of a healing process for her. She finds herself feeling “better” and “safe” because of the safe space that is being offered in those political groups. Respectively, the body and sex positivity which arises in films like *Too Much Pussy* and *Much More Pussy*, can provide such a safe space on a pornographic level and operate as a therapeutic medium.

Although Z has a clear preference for feminist porn that stimulates emotions, but it is difficult for her to afford it, Y is attracted mostly to BDSM and male gay porn. Usually she uses Tumblr to watch porn. She is also aware of feminist porn, but she has not had the chance yet to watch a feminist porn film. Regarding gay porn, she prefers

this genre because she does not enjoy watching female porn performers; lesbian porn “just sucks” she says, and she is aware of all the sexploitation of women in the porn industry, something which turns her off. It is quite interesting that a person who identifies as bisexual, enjoys watching mainstream gay male porn but not heterosexual or lesbian. It is highly possible that this preference indicates a choice based on gender. Because Y herself is a ciswoman, she cannot watch those heteronormative genres because subconsciously she identifies with the female performer, something that she despises because of the treatment that women receive. On the contrary, gay male porn is performed from a man to another; as a result, Y feels alienated from those characters and consequently she can enjoy the sexual acts between them.

When it comes to BDSM, Y refers to this kind of porn and practices as a role-play between two persons where “things are clear.” Consequently, violence is not negative per se. When the individuals involved consent to each other’s desires and acts, violence in fact can be quite liberating. Nevertheless, she admits that even BDSM is quite hard to watch sometimes. Of course, BDSM can take different forms; one can watch mainstream BDSM movies or search for queer or ethical BDSM films. But the most intriguing part is that Y also expressed a type of guilt regarding her BDSM preference because as she said, “I also sometimes think that I may want to be dominant because of the sexual assault.”

In the previous chapters, I examined the potential healing aspect of BDSM porn and practices from a theoretical perspective. For Cvetkovich and Minkowitz it is quite clear that there is a causal relation to sexually violent experiences and the release of the suppressed emotions that result from them, by confrontation and reenactment through erotic practices in which acts of power and control are strictly defined and consensual. Additionally, Lane’s patient expressed the same feeling of guilt expressed by Y regarding her BDSM porn preference. Lane advocates the psychotherapeutic impacts that queer pornography can have on people with a history of sexual violence, but the key is to find the right type of pornography for them.

Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, a considerable number of people stated that they prefer exclusively either alternative types of pornography or BDSM erotic films. The main result of these responses is that almost all of the individuals who started to prefer consciously feminist, queer, or ethical porn, have been both sexually harassed and assaulted. If we combine the results of the survey along with the arguments of the interviewees, especially Y and Z, we can see a pattern regarding

the severity of the sexual violent incident(s) that those persons experienced and their switch to or conscious preference in feminist, queer, and ethical porn or BDSM. Though the stories of Z and Y share a very similar experience of childhood sexual abuse, they have very different preferences when it comes to pornographic films, regardless of the similarities of the sexual assaults and their common political beliefs. However, both of them express the two sub-categories that appear also in the survey of people with a heavy history of sexual violence who also tend to prefer feminist or BDSM porn. Consequently, I conclude that indeed for a considerable number of people the severity of the sexual violence that they experienced was the decisive factor regarding their present pornographic preferences, which seem to be expressed through feminist, queer, and ethical porn or BDSM erotic films and practices.

Conclusion

This thesis explored alternative forms of pornography, and aimed to answer a research question regarding the potential healing aspect of pornographic media, with a particular focus on feminist, ethical, and queer porn. My intention was to prove that porn is not just a cheap method of finding a solution to our sexual arousals, but a media that could affect and liberate our sexuality; a media that not only can take alternative forms such as feminist or queer adult films, but can also be productive.

To summarize, the responses to the survey and the interviews that have been conducted, show that especially people who experienced some form of sexual violence would prefer to watch feminist, queer, or ethical porn but financial exchanges that are almost always required for this specific kind of porn, operate as a limiting factor. However, paying for the porn that we watch might be actually a way of consuming ethically, something that would result to a more qualitative as well as ethical porn industry. Additionally, many of the women who have been sexually assaulted such as Z or many cis females who responded to the web-based survey, argued that they could see themselves in this type of pornography, something that potentially could function as a healing process for them. One cannot give a *straight* answer to the question of whether feminist, ethical, or queer porn can really take the form of a healing process for people with a history of sexual violence, but it definitely aids in the effort to eliminate toxic normative stereotypes and rape culture. It is also quite positive that most of the respondents to the survey along with the three interviewees knew about feminist,

ethical, and queer porn already, either because of their feminist political identity or due to articles on online magazines. This is a proof that feminist, ethical, and queer porn gains in popularity, which can result in a lot of positive potential regarding the image and the perception of our bodies, and the expression of our sexuality.

At this point, I would like to state that all of the interviews required emotional effort from both parts — the one that narrates and then one that listens — and I am greatly thankful to all of my interviewees. I cannot express anything else but my admiration for their bravery to share their experiences not only with me, but with every potential reader of this MA thesis.

Finally, this research topic could and should be further discussed, but space limitations do not allow for further analysis. However, in the future I desire to examine this topic from a more intersectional perspective by including categories such as race and ability in relation to the subject of sexual violence and the potential healing aspect of pornography.

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