

Men's pornography use and its impact on intimacy

2 December 2016, by Kim Thomas

The more frequently men use pornography the less sexually intimate they are with their partners, latest University of Otago, Christchurch, research shows.

The research by Master's student and family therapist Anne Martin is one of just a few New Zealand studies on [pornography](#), though the industry is growing worldwide.

Martin surveyed 136 New Zealand [women](#) on pornography usage, their attitude towards it, and their experiences of intimacy. The women were aged 18 to 78. Seventy one per cent were European, with 16 per cent identifying as Maori.

Almost two-thirds of women surveyed said their partners had used pornography in the past year. Almost 18 per cent said they estimated their partner used it once a week or more.

More than 38 per cent of women reported using pornography themselves in the past year, as did 22 per cent of couples.

The following table shows the frequency of pornography use across groups:

| | Frequency of pornography use in past year | | |
|----------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|
| | Partners (n) | Women's (n) | Couples (n) |
| Not at all | 35.3% (48) | 61% (83) | 77.9% (106) |
| Once a month or less | 31.6% (43) | 29.4% (40) | 18.4% (25) |
| 2 or 3 times a month | 15.4% (21) | 5.9% (8) | 2.9% (4) |
| Once a week a week or more | 17.6% (24) | 3.6% (5) | 0.7% (1) |

Intimacy was divided into five areas (from an internationally-recognised score): 1) Emotional

intimacy, experiencing a closeness of feelings; 2) Social intimacy, the experience of having common friends and similarities in social networks; 3) Intellectual intimacy, the experience of sharing ideas; 4) Sexual intimacy, the experience of sharing general affection and/or sexual activity; 5) Recreational intimacy, shared experiences of ideas and hobbies or mutual participation in sporting events.

Martin's study found women whose partners did not use pornography reported greater levels of emotional, sexual, intellectual and recreational intimacy. Maori women experienced significantly more social intimacy in their relationships. As women aged, they experienced less sexual and [emotional intimacy](#) and tended towards more social intimacy. The variables of religion and raising children did not impact on the women's experience of intimacy with their partner.

Martin says pornography is a global growth industry but statistics for its use in New Zealand are limited.

"The study found many women have a positive attitude about pornography but for about 10 per cent of women pornography is a specific concern in their relationship. There is a correlation between increased pornography use and decreasing levels of all types of intimacy in relationships."

Martins hopes the research will be helpful for New Zealand therapists working with couples.

She was supervised in her work by clinical psychologist and addiction specialist Associate Professor Simon Adamson.

He says the study reveals a diverse range of attitudes and levels of pornography use for New Zealand couples.

"While some women described positive or neutral aspects to pornography use within their

relationships, many did not. It was not possible in this study to determine if pornography use reduced intimacy or if men in relationships with lower levels of [intimacy](#) in turn used pornography more. But there is certainly a clear enough picture here to indicate that this is something couples would benefit from talking about, either within their own relationships or in the context of couples therapy."

Provided by University of Otago

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