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Byron, Paul; Newton, James D.A.; Hanson, Olivia; Oviedo-Trespalacios, Oscar; Saliba, Bernard; Demant, Daniel

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FULL PAPER

Social media, self-pornography, and gay/bisexual/queer men's psychosexual wellbeing

Soziale Medien, pornographische Selbstdarstellung und das
psychosexuelle Wohlbefinden von schwulen, bisexuellen und
queeren Männern.

*Paul Byron, James D. A. Newton, Olivia Hanson, Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios,
Bernard Saliba & Daniel Demant*

Paul Byron (Dr.), University of Technology Sydney, School of Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 235 – 235 Jones Street, NSW 2007 Ultimo, Australia. Contact: Paul.byron@uts.edu.au. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6591-3060>

James D. A. Newton, The University of Queensland, School of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, St Lucia QLD 4072, Brisbane, Australia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3814-0434>

Olivia Hanson, University of Technology Sydney, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health, 235 Jones Street, NSW, 2007, Ultimo, Australia.

Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, Delft University of Technology, Department of Values, Technology and Innovation, Jaffalaan 5, 2628 BX Delft, Netherlands. Contact: O.OviedoTrespalacios@tudelft.nl. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5916-3996>

Bernard Saliba, University of Technology Sydney, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health, 235 Jones Street, NSW, 2007, Ultimo, Australia. Contact: bernard.saliba@uts.edu.au. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8752-4242>

Daniel Demant (Dr.), University of Technology Sydney, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health, 235 Jones Street, NSW, 2007, Ultimo, Australia; Queensland University of Technology, School of Public Health and Social Work, Faculty of Health, GPO Box 2434, QLD 4001 Brisbane, Australia; Contact: Daniel.Demant@uts.edu.au. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3330-2972>



Social media, self-pornography, and gay/bisexual/queer men's psychosexual wellbeing

Soziale Medien, pornographische Selbstdarstellung und das psychosexuelle Wohlbefinden von schwulen, bisexuellen und queeren Männern.

Paul Byron, James D. A. Newton, Olivia Hanson, Oscar Oviedo-Trespalacios, Bernard Saliba & Daniel Demant

Abstract: Despite the internet's historical significance for LGBTQ+ identities and communities, contemporary public health research overlooks how gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ+) men utilise online spaces for sexual expression and connections. This study explores the role of pornographic content creation and sharing on social media among Australian GBQ+ men, addressing the gap in understanding its implications for health and wellbeing. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among $N = 596$ men ($M_{age} = 36.1$ years; $SD = 11.4$) in Australia, allowing us to investigate their practices of producing and sharing pornographic content on social media. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed to explore demographics, psychosexual wellbeing, and motivations for content creation. It was found that 71.3% of participants reported producing sexual self-representations, and 15.1% shared this content publicly on social media, without commercial interest. Participants who produced content (either for sharing privately or publicly) exhibited higher sex positivity and sexual self-esteem than those not producing content. There was no significant difference regarding age or sexual orientation. Qualitative analysis revealed the key motivations for sharing sexual content on social media were for arousal, connection, and validation. These findings underscore the multifaceted motivations behind GBQ+ men's engagement with pornographic content creation, emphasising its role in social connection and personal validation. Recognising these practices within health frameworks is crucial for understanding and accommodating GBQ+ men's digital sexual cultures.

Keywords: pornography, sexually explicit media, social media, gay community, self-representation

Zusammenfassung: Trotz der historischen Bedeutung des Internets für LGBTQ+-Identitäten und -Communities wird in der aktuellen Public-Health-Forschung häufig übersehen, wie schwule, bisexuelle und queere (GBQ+) Männer digitale Räume zur sexuellen Ausdrucksform und zur Knüpfung sozialer Beziehungen nutzen. Diese Studie untersucht die Rolle der Erstellung und des Teilens pornografischer Inhalte in den sozialen Medien unter australischen GBQ+ Männern und schließt damit eine Forschungslücke bezüglich der Im-

plikationen für Gesundheit und allgemeinem Wohlbefinden. Eine Onlineumfrage unter $N = 596$ australischen Männern ($M = 36,1$ Jahre; $SD = 11,4$) wurde durchgeführt, um Praktiken zur Produktion und Teilens pornografischer Inhalte in sozialen Medien zu analysieren. Quantitative und qualitative Analysen wurden angewendet, um zu erforschen wie demografische Merkmale, psychosexuelles Wohlbefinden und Motivationen sich auf die Erstellung pornografischer Inhalte auswirken. Der Großteil aller Teilnehmer (71,3 %) gaben an, sexuelle Selbstrepräsentationen zu erstellen, und 15,1 % teilten diese Inhalte ohne kommerzielle Absicht öffentlich in sozialen Medien. Teilnehmer, die solche Inhalte produzierten (privat oder öffentlich), zeigten eine höhere Sex-Positivität und ein stärkeres sexuelles Selbstwertgefühl als Teilnehmer, die keine Inhalte erstellten. Es gab keinen signifikanten Unterschied hinsichtlich des Alters oder der sexuellen Orientierung. Die qualitative Analyse zeigte, dass die Hauptmotive für das Teilen sexueller Inhalte in sozialen Medien sexuelle Erregung, soziale Verbindung und Fremdbestätigung waren. Diese Ergebnisse verdeutlichen die facettenreichen Motivationen hinter dem Engagement von GBQ+ Männern in der Erstellung pornografischer Inhalte und betonen deren Rolle in sozialer Verbindung und persönlicher Bestätigung. Die Anerkennung dieser Praktiken im Rahmen von Gesundheitskonzepten ist entscheidend, um die digitalen sexuellen Kulturen von GBQ+ Männern zu verstehen und zu berücksichtigen.

Schlagwörter: Pornografie, Sexuell explizite Medien, Soziale Medien, Gay Community, Selbstrepräsentation

1. Introduction

Research into the wellbeing of gay, bisexual, and queer (GBQ+) men has typically focused on traditional health measures, with some attention to community connectedness (Frost & Meyer, 2012). Research has highlighted the importance of digital and social media in forming LGBTQ+ networks and facilitating peer and community connections, including friendships, sex, and relationships (Robards et al., 2021). However, public health research has given less attention to the intricacies of how particular digital spaces, sexual practices, and online communities may be experienced as supportive to the health and wellbeing of GBQ+ men.¹

From early scholarship on GBQ+ men's online dating to today's hook-up apps, as well as HIV/sexual health research and health promotion initiatives from the 1990s onwards, there has been strong recognition that the internet, and subsequently social media and dating/hook-up apps, have been central to queer identities, communities, and relationships (Campbell, 2004; Miles, 2018). Given the prevalent use of social and digital media, there is a need to consider how GBQ+ men's everyday digital media practices offer access to community connection and support. Community connection has long been a factor of social research into GBQ+ men's health and wellbeing, despite disagreement on what community means to LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2022). Sexual health and substance use research, alongside health promotion, has particularly recognised the benefits of community connectedness for the circulation of peer-based support and health information (Demant et al., 2018; Veinot et al., 2013).

1 For simplicity, we use GBQ+ men throughout this paper, though this acronym is limited. This study includes trans men and transmasculine participants who identify as gay, bisexual and/or queer.

The present study reports on data from a survey of GBQ+ men (cisgender and trans) in Australia who use pornography, with a particular focus on participant practices of producing and sharing pornographic content on social media for non-commercial purposes. While porn research typically situates pornographic content as *consumed* media, attention to the production and dissemination of pornographic content, as well as the audiences and communities involved (or imagined), necessarily expands current research discussions of ‘porn use’. The practice of sharing self-made pornographic content with personal networks and strangers on social media is especially pertinent to understanding how porn use impacts GBQ+ men’s health and wellbeing. Research has indicated that this practice likely influences various dimensions of psychosexual wellbeing such as sexual self-esteem or sex positivity. Receiving positive feedback and validation from online audiences can boost sexual self-esteem, helping individuals to feel more confident and positive about their sexual identities (Miller, 2022; Roig-Mora et al., 2024). This feedback loop of sharing and receiving responses contributes to a more affirming and accepting view of one’s own sexuality, which is linked to higher levels of sex positivity. Moreover, the erotic gratifications obtained through these practices are not merely about sexual arousal but expand deeper into the area of sexual wellbeing through the experience of control and agency over one’s sexual expression (Hakim, 2019). This is particularly relevant for GBQ+ men, who often navigate stigmatised and marginalised sexual identities.

Research has highlighted that GBQ+ men’s use of porn is near ubiquitous (Downing et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2020). Gay porn offers a key site of sex education, in lieu of heterosexual-focused education from schools and through the informal education of much popular culture (Kubicek et al., 2010; Stout et al., 2023). Beyond its use for sexual arousal, gay porn is not only educational and informative but offers the potential benefit of social connection. While there is a growing body of literature on DIY porn communities (discussed below), this is yet to be considered in relation to GBQ+ men’s wellbeing and social connection.

2. Literature review

We note that terminology of related studies shifts between ‘gay’, ‘queer’, ‘LGBTQ+’, and other terms, and we adopt the terminology used by the original authors where possible. While this literature reports on diverse settings beyond the Australian context of our participants, it also reflects global trends and is suggestive of trans-cultural expressions of gender and sexuality (Yue, 2017) within GBQ+ men’s wider social practices of digital sexual communication.

2.1 Digital media’s influence on pornography

Gay, bisexual, and queer men were early adopters of digital media for sexual and social connection (Grov et al., 2014), and research has highlighted their use of these media for accessing sexual information, sexual partners, friendships, and community. The safety of digital media use for connecting to support and communities is well

documented, as is the digital promise of expanding sexual and social worlds in otherwise unavailable ways (Byron et al., 2019; Grov et al., 2014; Miles, 2018).

Men's use of digital and social media spans a range of sexual expressions and connections, including producing and sharing content traditionally described as pornographic. Ashton et al. (2019) argue that digital media has complicated previous definitions of pornography and notes common disagreement about which sexual media constitute pornography. For Ashton et al. (2019), this depends on the intention of producers, and they define pornography as "material deemed sexual, given the context, that has the primary intention of sexually arousing the consumer, and is produced and distributed with the consent of all persons" (p.163). Attention to consent is uncommon to definitions of pornography among current leading scholars (see McKee et al.'s (2020) Delphi panel survey of porn researchers). This reflects a tendency to not include sexual self-representations and their dissemination in porn research. However, the below literature brings digital sexual culture research into the fold of porn studies. Much like Ashton et al. (2019), this scholarship demonstrates that sexual media extends from traditional understandings of pornography to community-level cultures of producing and sharing content with the intention to arouse.

Sexualities researchers have long discussed gay male culture as 'pornified' (Maddison, 2017; Mowlabocus 2007), with digital and social media playing a significant role in this. Mowlabocus (2007), discussing Grindr, argued that porn "is written into the code of gay men's everyday lives" (p. 61), and Maddison (2017) explores this claim further, ten years later, analysing how "porn consumption in gay cultures produces particular kinds of subjectivity" (p. 139). Citing over 30 years of research on gay pornography, Maddison (2017) notes that "gay porn has provided images of our desires, and ones associated not with shame and disgust but with pleasure and transcendence" (p. 141). More recently, Ding and Song (2023) adopt this pornification thesis for their study of Chinese gay men's use of porn for learning about their sexuality. Discussing DIY gay porn culture on Twitter (now X), they bring a more contemporary and global focus to how gay men's understanding of themselves and their sexualities are informed by seeing and reproducing themselves in pornographic contexts (2023). As Kane Race (2018) argues, it has become commonplace for sharing sexual self-representations on gay sexual networking platforms, and "digital media are involved in the emergence of new forms of literacy, articulation and mediated activity" (p. 1327). Race builds on Tim Dean's statement that "Now anyone with a phone and internet access can become a pornographer" (2014, p.6; cited in Race, 2018, p. 1325).

2.2 Social media and sexual communities

The increased use of social media platforms has supported LGBTQ+ community-building and sexual self-exploration in safe environments (Cao, 2021; Wignall, 2017). For GBQ+ men, social media offer vital connection with, and insight into, a range of sexual practices and communities (Ding & Song, 2023; En et al., 2013). In recent years, queer men have appreciated more seemingly authentic displays of sexuality and pornographic content (Ashford & Longstaff 2022; Wang 2021) that

is easily available through social media. Alongside Race's (2018) observation, increased accessibility to porn production has encouraged more self-created pornographic material for commercial and non-commercial purposes, including participating in what's colloquially known as 'alt Twitter' (Ashford & Longstaff, 2022). Such sharing can foster or anticipate connections to others, including potential hook-ups and relationships (Race, 2018). Similarly, this digital environment has exacerbated what Wang and Ding (2022) refer to as 'the sexual platform economy' which, they argue, "incorporates users' erotic online activities becoming an indispensable part of digital media's success" (p. 824). While popular social media platforms typically prohibit sexually explicit content (Paasonen et al., 2019), platforms with liberal content policies have become key sites for distributing self-pornography – notably Twitter (now X) (Cao, 2021; Wang, 2021; Wignall, 2017), Reddit (Robards, 2018; Watson, 2021) and, before its 2018 porn ban, Tumblr (Byron, 2019; Tiidenberg, 2014).

For Reddit use, Watson (2021) highlights the value of content tagging within sexual communities, through which new sexual terms and classification systems have developed and are useful for locating interest – or identity-based communities. Discussing gay sexual representations on Reddit, En et al. (2013) argue that personal identities of community members are strongly informed by the collective sexual identities of such groups, and social and subcultural norms are reflected in subreddit interactions. This likely includes sexual self-representation norms – as part of a 'queer sexual literacy' (Ding & Song, 2023) and its ongoing development (Race, 2018). Laurin (2019) similarly describes how the amateurism of personal sexual content posted by gay men creates new sexual representations that do not simply mimic commercial porn. This amateurism reflects and reproduces intimacy through which 'everyday selfies' can feel proximate, relatable, and more authentic than other pornographic content (Cao, 2021; Laurin, 2019; Paasonen et al., 2019). Social media provide GBQ+ men with opportunities to widen practices and performances of intimacy and can be used to generate or suggest intimate proximity to others (Tziallas, 2015), and this can support psychosexual wellbeing (Miller, 2022). In his discussion of Grindr and similar apps, Tziallas (2015) also argues that such proximity connotes sexual potential – emphasising that other queer men are always "within your reach" (p. 761).

Cao (2022) highlights that among Filipino gay men who share amateur porn on Twitter, production and displays of sexual content overlap with more everyday social media use. He found an integration of sexual self and identity within users' everyday social media interactions and self-presentations, fostering the ability to express oneself and feel validation, and this likely reflects sexual self-expressions that are fostered globally, through social media that have a wide reach and can thus support the development of more global or transcultural practices of queer expression (Yue, 2017).

2.3 Self-esteem in sexual self-representation

Building self-esteem is another factor found to be influencing sexual self-representations online (Miller, 2022), as per supportive feedback and reactions from community members (Tiidenberg, 2014). Sharing sexual self-representations on Tumblr has been considered a form of collective therapy, providing access to supportive and encouraging comments from peer creators (Tiidenberg, 2014). Corneau et al. (2017) discuss how porn use can serve as a gay affirmative mechanism, promoting sexual exploration and self-acceptance among gay men.

Although there is limited literature on the relevance of gay pornography for sexual self-esteem among GBQ+ men, one study provides valuable insights. An online survey of 477 Norwegian gay and bisexual men by Kvale et al. (2015) found that internet pornography use was associated with body ideals and sexual self-esteem. Their study suggests that self-perceived attractiveness, having an ideal body type, and viewing internet pornography in longer sessions each are associated with higher self-esteem as a sexual partner. Moreover, the preference for watching pornographic actors with ideal bodies was not related to sexual self-esteem. These findings highlight the importance of recognising the potential links between pornography as a form of sexual self-representation and individual self-perceptions, emphasising the complex dynamics involved in sexual self-esteem.

3. Current study

In the present study, we explore key aspects in relation to GBQ+ men producing and publicly sharing their own pornographic content on social media. This paper is part of a broader research project with an epidemiological study design with the overall purpose of understanding associations between pornographic media and GBQ+ men's social, emotional, psychological, sexual, and physical health and wellbeing (Demant et al., 2024).

This paper addresses significant gaps in the literature regarding the production and sharing of sexual self-representations among GBQ+ men. Previous research has primarily focused on traditional health measures and the consumption of pornography, often neglecting the practices of creating and distributing sexual content. By considering both quantitative and qualitative data, this paper seeks to explore the nuanced digital sexual cultures of GBQ+ men and their implications for psychosexual wellbeing.

Our research is significant in that it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how GBQ+ men use social media to share sexual content and how these practices relate to their wellbeing. By examining the motivations behind content creation and the impact on sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and community connectedness, this study contributes to a more holistic view of pornography use among GBQ+ men. The findings have the potential to inform future research and health promotion initiatives, recognising the positive aspects of these practices while considering their broader social and cultural contexts. From these data, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are gay, bisexual, and queer men engaging in sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

RQ2: What are the motivations of gay, bisexual, and queer men who share sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

RQ3: How do practices of public sharing of sexual content complicate current understandings of pornography use among gay, bisexual, and queer men?

RQ4: How do social media practices of sharing pornographic self-representations relate to gay, bisexual, and queer men's wellbeing?

4. Methods

4.1 Participants and recruitment

Men who self-identified as gay, bisexual, queer or another non-heterosexual orientation participated in an anonymous cross-sectional online survey in January and February 2023. Adult men (18 years or older) living in Australia were eligible to participate in the survey, regardless of their sex recorded at birth. Only men who used pornography within the past 12 months before commencing the survey were eligible to participate, regardless of producing pornography themselves.

Recruitment for the study took place online, utilising private and public special interest groups on social media platforms (Facebook/Reddit) that are highly frequented by sexual minority men from Australia, such as the 'Australian Gay Social' group on Facebook or the subreddit 'r/Ausgaybros' on Reddit. Additionally, advertisements were placed on Grindr. As an incentive, participants were offered to enter a prize draw of twenty retail vouchers valued at AU\$25 each. Ethical approval was granted through the University of Technology Sydney's Health and Medical Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: ETH22-7691). Informed consent was sought from each participant before commencing the survey.

Out of a total of 747 participants who provided their consent to participate in the survey and initiated the questionnaire, 54 individuals were excluded due to their failure to meet at least one of the eligibility criteria. Specifically, 26 did not identify as part of a sexual minority (and therefore exited the survey), 16 resided outside of Australia, 11 did not identify as men, seven had not used any pornography in the past 12 months, and five were below the age of 18. Among the remaining 693 participants, 35 were excluded for not responding to essential demographic questions. Lastly, 26 participants were excluded for not answering any questions related to their porn usage and 36 for not answering questions about creating pornographic content, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 596$ participants.

4.2 Variables and concepts

4.2.1 Demographics

Participants were asked about their age in years, their gender, their sex assigned at birth, and their sexual orientation. Available sexual orientation responses were gay, bisexual, queer, 'don't know', or 'another term' that respondents were invited to share. Respondents were also asked about their ethnicity, relationship status, first language, and the Australian state in which they live.

Almost 80% of these participants were from the three largest Australian states: New South Wales (31.0%, $n = 185$), Victoria (26.8%, $n = 160$) and Queensland (21.8%, $n = 130$). The mean age in the entire sample was 36.1 years ($SD = 11.4$). Most participants identified as gay (71.0%, $n = 423$), followed by bisexual (21.6%, $n = 129$) and queer (5.0%, $n = 30$), and a small minority were unsure or used other terms – most commonly, pansexual (2.3%, $n = 14$).

Most participants identified as European/Anglo-Saxon (63.8%, $n = 380$), followed by Asian participants (14.8%, $n = 88$), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (7.2%, $n = 43$), and multiethnic participants (5.0%, $n = 30$), while all other ethnicities made up 9.3% ($n = 55$) of the sample. More than half the participants were in a relationship with one (44.3%, $n = 264$) or more than one regular partner (12.8%, $n = 76$), while 246 (41.3%) were not a relationship, with 10 being unsure (1.7%).

4.2.2 Psychosexual wellbeing

To assess psychosexual wellbeing, we focused on five variables: sex positivity, sex negativity, sexual self-esteem, LGBTQ+ community connectedness, and importance of porn. Positive and negative perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality (often also referred to as 'erotophilia and erotophobia' respectively) were assessed using the Sex-Positivity-Negativity Scale, developed and validated by Hangen and Rogge (2022). This instrument comprises 16 items designed to gauge respondents' sentiments concerning sex and sexuality, using descriptive terms such as 'Fun', 'Enriching', and 'Annoying'. Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert Scale (1 – Not at all, 2 – A little, 3 – Somewhat, 4 – Quite a bit, 5 – Very much, 6 – Extremely), resulting in two scales measuring sexual positivity and negativity, each ranging from 1 to 7.

Sexual self-esteem was quantified using the Sexual Self-Esteem Scale, originally developed by Snell et al. (1992) and adapted by Lammers and Stoker (2019). This scale comprises five statements, for instance, "I am better at sex than most people," with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Agree) to 5 (Disagree).

Connectedness to the LGBTQ+ community was assessed using Demant et al.'s (2018) adapted version of a scale originally created by Frost and Meyer (2012). The scale comprises eight statements that evaluate participants' connections to the LGBTQ+ community, with responses on a defined Likert scale ranging from 1 (Agree strongly) to 4 (Disagree strongly), resulting in scores ranging from 8 to 32.

In addition, participants were asked about the importance of porn use for their general sex life as a single global item on a scale from 1 (Not important at all) to 10 (Very important).

4.2.3 Production of pornography

Prior to the first items concerning porn, participants were provided with the following working definition: *“For the purpose of this study, porn is defined as any material aimed at creating or enhancing sexual feelings in the person using it by showing genitals and sexual acts, such as oral or anal sex, masturbation, fetish play etc.”* This is one of many possible definitions in a field where there is little agreement (McKee et al., 2020), and it differs from Ashton et al.’s (2019) cited earlier definition, which includes attention to consent. Our definition reflects existing social science definitions (McKee et al., 2020) and our initial anticipation of a more traditional focus on porn consumption.

Concerning the creation of pornographic content, this was broadly defined for participants as *“images or videos that show your genitals or yourself in a sexual act”*. Participants were asked *“In the past 12 months, did you produce sexual content of yourself regardless of their purpose?”* with four single-choice options: 1) No; 2) Yes, but only images; 3) Yes, but only videos; and 4) Yes, images and videos. Those who produced any sexual content were then asked: *“What was the general purpose of producing these?”* with three multiple-choice options: 1) Private WITHOUT commercial intentions (e.g., for partner, hook-up app, etc.); 2) Public or behind paywalls WITH Commercial intentions (e.g., for OnlyFans); and/or 3) Public WITHOUT commercial intentions (e.g., to post on Reddit or Twitter). Finally, participants who indicated that they share pornographic content on social media without commercial intentions had the opportunity to answer the following qualitative question: *“Please say more about how you publish sexual content online. What do you enjoy about this?”*

4.3 Analysis

No aspects of this study were pre-registered. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics v28. Descriptive statistics are reported as frequencies and percentages for categorical variables and as means with standard deviations (*SD*) for continuous variables. Differences between content creation groups were analysed using chi-square analyses for categorical variables and independent samples *t*-tests for continuous variables. The internal reliability of scales was interpreted using Cronbach’s α with an acceptable cutoff set at $\alpha > .7$. All scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency with Cronbach’s α between .883 and .941.

Qualitative data was initially reviewed by the three primary authors who, taking a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), generated a working list of key themes for first pass coding by Author 3. As an inductive analysis, codes were cross-checked by Author 1 and followed by an iterative discussion of coded statements until agreement was met for the themes within each participant response.

This process also produced agreed upon descriptions of key themes and subthemes (see Table 3).

5. Results

5.1 Quantitative results

Out of 596 participants, 71.3% ($n = 425$) had produced personal sexual content in the preceding 12 months, for any reason. These 425 participants were then asked a multiple-choice question about their intention for producing this content, with three options offered. For this paper, we focus on non-commercial production of self-pornography and the motivations for sharing this. This led to a three-category variable to differentiate between (a) those *only* producing for private sharing; (b) those producing for non-commercial public sharing on social media (regardless of whether they also share privately or commercially), and (c) those not sharing non-commercial sexual content. The latter group includes participants not sharing any sexual content, whether privately or publicly, and the small number of participants only sharing for commercial reasons. The 596 participants are therefore categorised into one of these groups, with a view to more closely consider those who produce and share non-commercial sexual content publicly on social media.

Within the three categories, most respondents indicated producing sexual content for private use and sharing only (51.8%, $n = 309$), such as on Grindr, or with partners. Following this, 15.1% ($n = 90$) indicated publicly sharing sexual content on social media without commercial intentions. The remaining 33.1% did not produce content for non-commercial public sharing (28.7% [$n = 171$] did not produce any sexual content and 4.4% [$n = 26$] produced and shared content for commercial reasons). We herein focus on the 15.1% of participants who publicly share sexual images and videos online, for non-commercial intention.

There was no significant difference in age between the three sexual content groups (see Tables 1 and 2). Significant differences were found between ethnic backgrounds, with participants with an Asian, European, or 'Other' background being significantly more likely to share non-commercial sexual content than other ethnic groups. No significant difference in relationship status was found between those who only shared non-commercial content privately, those who shared non-commercial content publicly, and those not sharing non-commercial sexual content.

Table 1. Chi-square tests comparing sexual content groups by demographic variables

Variable	Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing only (N = 309)		Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)		Not producing sexual content for non-commercial sharing (N = 197)		Chi-Square Test
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Relationship	One regular partner	148	47.9	42	46.7	74	37.6
	More than one regular partner	35	11.3	11	12.2	30	15.2
	No	122	39.5	36	40.0	88	44.7
Ethnicity	Unsure	4	1.3	1	1.1	5	2.5
	European/Anglo-Saxon	197	63.8 ^a	73	81.1 ^b	110	55.8 ^a
	Asian	42	13.6 ^{a,b}	5	5.6 ^b	41	20.8 ^a
	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	24	7.8 ^a	3	3.3 ^a	16	8.1 ^a
	All other	34	11.0 ^a	2	2.2 ^b	19	9.6 ^{a,b}
Sexual Orientation	Multicultural	12	3.9 ^a	7	7.8 ^a	11	5.6 ^a
	Gay	224	72.5	65	72.2	134	68.0
	Bisexual	62	20.1	16	17.8	51	25.9
	Queer	19	6.1	5	5.6	6	3.0
	Any other	4	1.3	4	4.4	6	3.0

Notes. Significant chi-square tests were followed up with column proportions tests. No Bonferroni correction was applied when carrying out these tests. In each row, proportions with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

Table 2. ANOVAs comparing sexual content groups by demographic and psychosexual wellbeing variables

Variable	Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing only (N = 309)		Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)		Not producing sexual content for non-commercial sharing (N = 197)		ANOVA
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Age	35.6	11.2	36.2	10.9	38.0	12.0	$F(2, 593) = 2.690, p = .069; \eta^2 = .009$
Sex Positivity	5.0 ^a	0.7	5.1 ^a	0.8	4.8 ^b	0.8	$F(2, 552) = 5.888, p = .003; \eta^2 = .021$
Sex Negativity	2.5	1.2	2.2	0.9	2.6	1.3	$F(2, 544) = 2.963, p = .053; \eta^2 = .011$
Sexual Self-Esteem	4.2 ^a	4.6	4.6 ^a	4.6	2.8 ^b	5.3	$F(2, 579) = 6.436, p = .002; \eta^2 = .022$
LGBT Community Connectedness	18.2	5.5	17.2	6.2	18.5	5.7	$F(2, 551) = 1.450, p = .235; \eta^2 = .005$
Importance of porn	6.0	2.4	5.9	2.7	6.0	2.5	$F(2, 625) = .104, p = .902; \eta^2 = .001$

Notes. Significant ANOVA tests were followed up with post hoc testing (Tukey adjusted). In each row, means with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level

Statistically significant differences were detected for some psychosexual constructs, with participants who produced non-commercial content for private sharing and participants who produced non-commercial content for public sharing both being significantly more sex positive than those not engaging in these behaviours. Both of these groups also had higher sexual self-esteem than those who do not share non-commercial sexual content. No statistically significant differences were found for sex negativity, connectedness to the LGBTQ+ community, and the perceived importance of porn.

A Chi-Square test (see Table 3) showed that participants who publicly shared non-commercial sexual content were significantly less likely to only share images and were significantly more likely to share both images and videos compared to those who shared non-commercial sexual content privately.

Table 3. Characteristics of production

Variable		Producing non-commercial sexual content for private sharing <i>only</i> (N = 309)		Producing non-commercial sexual content for public sharing on social media (N = 90)		Chi-Square Test
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Type of content	Only images	96	31.1 ^a	11	12.2 ^b	$X^2 (2, N = 399) = 15.533, p < .001$; <i>Cramér's V</i> = .197
	Only videos	12	3.9 ^a	1	1.1 ^b	
	Images and videos	201	65.0 ^a	78	86.7 ^b	

Notes. Significant chi-square tests were followed up with column proportions tests. No Bonferroni correction was applied when carrying out these tests. In each row, proportions with different superscripts are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

5.2 Qualitative results

The 90 survey participants who indicated sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial intentions were given the opportunity to say more about this, and most did (*n* = 54). Responses ranged from one or two words to a paragraph of text, and we report on these to illustrate a range of self-reported practices and motivations in GBQ+ men’s non-commercial pornographic self-representations on social media.

Through inductive coding of these 54 responses, we arrived at three key themes relating to practices and motivations of arousal, connection, and validation. While the three major themes will be presented and analysed separately, many responses crossed two or more themes. The following is an example response that include all three key themes:

I enjoy the exhibitionism of it. I enjoy positive feedback on my body. I enjoy showing off small cocks in a sexual manner since I see it so rarely. I enjoy engaging with other queer men. I enjoy the creativity of it. [P12]

The following sections give specific attention to the key themes of arousal, connection, and validation, including subthemes within each theme (see Table 4 for subtheme descriptions and quantities).

Table 4. Qualitative response themes, subthemes, quantities, and subtheme descriptions

Themes (<i>n</i>)	Subthemes (<i>n</i>)	Subtheme descriptions
Arousal (32)	Self-pleasure (20)	The pleasure received from sharing one's sexual content
	Pleasure of others (16)	The pleasures other people receive from participants' shared sexual content
	Fetish/exhibitionism (12)	Statements about self-exposure and exhibitionism or mention of other fetishes
Connection (23)	Sharing oneself (16)	Sharing one's sexual self-representations in anticipation of responses
	Sex partners (8)	Connecting with sex partners or hook-ups, both real and potential
	Community and/or friends (7)	Connecting with community (specific or general communities) and/or friends
Validation (21)	Positive feedback (12)	Receiving positive feedback from viewers
	Self-esteem (9)	Gaining confidence in one's own sexual appeal, often described as 'self-esteem'
	Body positivity (5)	References to feeling more body positivity
	Attention (4)	Explicit mention of attention-seeking

Notes. Themes and subthemes generated through qualitative analysis of open survey responses (*n* = 54) regarding motivations for sharing non-commercial sexual content on social media.

5.2.1 Arousal

The most common theme was arousal. From these data, we located three dominant subthemes of self-pleasure, the pleasure of others, and fetish/exhibitionism. Statements in which self-pleasure was connected to the pleasure of others were common, demonstrating reciprocal pleasure practices. Fewer responses solely related to self-pleasure or the pleasure of others. The reciprocal aspects of pleasure/arousal can be seen in the following responses:

Like to show my cock on the internet, it gives me pleasure to read other people's comments and to hear how they would pleasure me [P33]

It's kinda fun to show off. Good question tho[ugh]. I don't know why I do it. I'm not particularly vain, but it's nice to know I can make other people horny. [P39]

I have sent nudes and videos of me both by myself and getting fucked to others via WhatsApp and Snapchat... I enjoy the attention that you get from posting nudes and videos. It feels good to know that others get turned on by me, and I get turned on by seeing myself in the content too. [P42]

Specific focus on self-pleasure often involved simple statements about the fun or pleasure that participants personally felt or references to this being ‘exciting’ (e.g., “I find it exciting to put myself out there” [P14]). In some cases, having an audience was key to the pleasure or excitement discussed:

I like being seen to enjoy my sexual activities. It makes me happy to be able to share how much I enjoy having sex [P17]

Many accounts of self-pleasure reference exhibitionism, crossing over with the subtheme of fetish/exhibitionism discussed below. In relation to the pleasure of others, often this was about exciting or enticing people who respondents were attracted to (e.g., “for people I want to fuck” [P41]). Some focused more on the sexual pleasure of others, and in the below example, this relates to pleasing strangers in similar ways to pleasing partners.

In my sex life I get a lot of enjoyment from getting my partner/s off and so this translates to creating and publishing content in a similar kind of way. [P23]

In responses relating to fetish/exhibitionism, participants often explicitly mentioned exhibitionism, with others referring to the enjoyment of being watched (e.g., “I find it hot to show myself and get nudes in return” [P15]). Across all responses relating to arousal, and overlapping subthemes of self-pleasure, the pleasure of others, and fetish/exhibitionism, there was mention of the reciprocal benefits of sharing sexual content, with a common experience of receiving sexual content in return.

5.2.2 Connection

Many participants referred to connection as key to the practice and motivation for sharing sexual content online. This further highlights the reciprocal and relational aspects of sharing sexual content, which can be for partners, friends, and strangers alike. Data reflect different intended audiences, and how these orient certain forms of sharing. Responses were further coded into subthemes of ‘sharing oneself’, sex partners, and community and/or friends, with each of these explored below.

Statements about the value of sharing oneself through sexual content reflected a range of audiences, whether direct recipients, a perceived community, or an imagined viewer who may be a potential sex partner. In addition to the pleasure of being seen (as discussed above, regarding exhibitionism), is the pleasure of the risk of being recognised.

I do not show my face but that doesn't really hide my identity. I have tattoos that are very identifiable. I think maybe it's the partial anonymity/partial

recognition that makes it exciting. Not knowing if people who follow me recognise me or not but they potentially can. [P21]

This response reflects that participating in anonymous practices of sharing sexual content can be accompanied by an awareness of a lack of control and knowledge over who is seeing this content and that unintended viewers may recognise the people featured. For this participant, this was a key aspect of the pleasure of sharing sexual content, and this was noted by other participants too.

[On] twitter and reddit, [it] just feels fun to be exposed and helps me find people to trade with [P51]

This 'sharing self' subtheme has much crossover with the subtheme of sex partners, as sharing oneself was seen as a useful lever to meeting others, sexually, whether online or moving to an in-person encounter. In fact, many participants were interested in meeting others who lived nearby.

It also helps with finding partners who are not on apps like Grindr. [P14]

It makes me feel attractive and has often lead to real life hook ups. [P28]

For some, social media platforms such as Twitter (now X) were specifically seen as useful for facilitating hook-ups, suggesting that social media offers hook-up potential that is more 'traditionally' associated with Grindr and similar apps – arguably offsetting limits of a geolocative grid and that platform's prohibition of public photos that are sexually explicit.

To meet guys they want to see photos and video clips. I am also meeting people via Twitter after they have seen my Twitter account. [P49]

Others also indicated different practices (and platforms) used for private and public sharing of sexual content (free or commercial), and how these fostered a range of different connections.

Private, for people I want to fuck and to share on sex apps. Public Free, on twitter and occasionally fetlife. Public Paid, when I work for production companies or for porn film festivals. [P41]

A sense of community in public and private sharing of sexual content on social media is commonly mentioned or alluded to. Sometimes this relates to specific Twitter (now X) or Reddit communities, or more general 'social media communities.'

The Ego boost from comments on social media. The sense of community with other nsfw² accounts and the excitement of potentially hooking up with these other people [P46]

For one participant, it was specifically about "Getting validation from friends and gay men in the Melbourne community" [P8]. In total, four participants explicitly

refer to sharing content with friends. Whether these are sexual friendships is not always clear, but this blurred aspect of friends and sex partners (and a likely overlap), is resonant with discussions of the intimacy of social media sharing.

Sharing my content online tends to lead to others sharing with me, which I enjoy. I sometimes share with a few of my friends (and they do the same in return) [P43]

Enjoy showing off and the attention it garners... probably more when friends/people I think are attractive respond or interact with me based on it. [P40]

5.2.3 Validation

Many participants shared sexual content on social media for validation. These data were categorised into subthemes of positive feedback, self-esteem, body positivity, and attention.

Receiving positive feedback was heavily associated with the key theme of arousal, with many of these responses mentioning exhibitionism. Those who shared personal sexual content via social media seemingly found arousal in self-exposure alongside their appetite for positive feedback from friends, strangers, and community. The desire to be observed and to evoke sexual arousal in others was also a desire for viewer comments and appraisal that could empower creators and assist in developing aspects of their self-worth and self-image.

I've had a complicated relationship with self image for most of my life which has recently changed, so it's enjoyable to know that people like my content even though I often feel unattractive. [P23]

Others expressed pre-established body confidence where sharing sexual content was a form of self-expression for which positive feedback was not the key motivation, but an added benefit of public sharing.

I'm hot af, have a giant dick, and a banging body so it seems unfair not to share it with the world and I'm a narcissist so I enjoy getting compliments. [P29]

For others, the act of receiving positive feedback from viewers via comments and appraisals allowed improvements in self-esteem – e.g., “It’s nice when someone reminds you that there’s always someone who will think your sexy” [P32]. This link between positive feedback and developing self-esteem also highlights the interlinking theme of connection, given that positive feedback had led to real life hookups, and an awareness of this potential.

The Ego boost from comments on social media ... and the excitement of potentially hooking up with these other people. [P46]

Positive interactions that improve a sense of participants’ own attractiveness and result in a confidence boost further highlight the underlying links to improved wellbeing through pornographic content sharing. It is also notable that some par-

ticipants' development of self-esteem was fostered through creating and sharing sexual content, not necessarily in the resulting feedback or interactions.

I enjoy posting content online both for the exhibitionism aspect of it but also the self-esteem/body image boost I feel by putting myself out there. [P10]

The interconnectedness across different aspects of validation and the other key themes of arousal and connection, with the concept of vitality becoming increasingly more evident within responses, shows how these practices can positively influence social wellbeing. As one participant states: "It is indispensable in my life. Without it, life feels like it's missing something important" [P27].

Within the subtheme of body positivity, participants specifically mention that creating and sharing sexual content online generated body positivity. For some, sharing such content supported them processing trauma or adjusting their insecurities, linking the theme of validation to improved wellbeing and self-acceptance.

It feels sexually liberating, also helps with body confidence and self-acceptance [P26].

As a survivor of sexual assault I found that my sense of sexual autonomy and comfort expressing my sexuality in real life felt dismissed and/or unsafe. Sharing content expressing my sexuality online has been a step towards regaining the sense of control lost. I've also found it's been beneficial for body positivity and acceptance. [P2]

Lastly, the subtheme of attention is explicitly linked to the theme of arousal and its fetish/exhibitionism subtheme. While the pleasures of exhibitionism – along with pleasure of the risk of recognition – are associated with attention, in the context of validation, this offers something more specific. In these responses, receiving attention can also operate as a tool to recognise and solidify one's self-confidence.

[I] Enjoy showing off and the attention it garners. [P40]

I enjoy the attention that you get from posting nudes and videos. [P42]

6. Discussion

Together, the quantitative and qualitative data presented above indicate that practices of producing and sharing non-commercial pornographic content are relatively common among participants and are meaningful. Such practices reflect shared motivations for sexual arousal, community and sexual connections, and personal validation. As existing literature demonstrates, the production and sharing of digital sexual content are ever-changing, reflecting a constantly evolving landscape of social media and their affordances for producing and sharing such content, alongside cultural practices (whether localised or more global) of sex and sexual expression. Our survey sought to elicit a current snapshot of Australian GBQ+

men's use of social media for sharing such content, with findings demonstrating recurring sentiments and motivations. Below we respond to each of our research questions.

6.1 RQ1: To what extent are GBQ+ men engaging in sharing sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

The survey results indicate that a large proportion of respondents had produced personal sexual content for sharing in the past 12 months (71.3%). Among participants, most only had shared sexual content privately (51.8%), often on platforms like Grindr or with partners. Notably, a smaller proportion of this sample (15.1%) shared non-commercial sexual content publicly, using social media platforms such as Twitter (now X), Reddit, and Snapchat (this includes some participants who also shared sexual content privately and/or with commercial intentions). Our focus on the 15.1% who share non-commercial content on social media revealed a complex landscape of sexual self-expression and reciprocal interactions.

Despite the robust data, these figures alone may not fully capture the complexity of producing, sharing, and swapping self-pornography across various social media platforms. The practices involved in these activities are further understood through our qualitative data, which reveals a shared language and common engagement that extend beyond mere statistics. For instance, while quantitative results show that self-pornography creators are significantly more sex-positive and have higher sexual self-esteem compared to non-creators, qualitative insights suggest these behaviours are embedded in broader cultural practices.

6.2 RQ2: What are the motivations of GBQ+ men who share sexual content on social media for non-commercial purposes?

For participants, arousal was a principal motivation for sharing sexual content on social media – both for self-pleasure and the pleasure of others. This also includes experiencing arousal through witnessing or hearing about the pleasure their content elicits in audiences. This highlights the value of reciprocity in these pleasure experiences – as something more collaborative or communal (where wider networks are involved). Alongside our findings about the association with higher rates of sex positivity and sexual self-esteem, pornographic content creation may serve as a mechanism to support the development of sexual communities and sexual exploration. This is reflected in many participant statements about sharing sexual content to connect with communities, friends, and potential partners. In addition to these motivations are experiences of self-validation through sexual exploration that producing and sharing content enables, along with audience feedback that was experienced by many participants as particularly validating and a positive influence on self-esteem.

Participants who were motivated by arousal also described subthemes of exhibitionism and fetishes, suggesting that sharing sexual content could enable self-exploration and experimentation in an online environment perceived as safe (Cao,

2021; Wignall, 2017). This is consistent with previous research showing that porn can serve as a catalyst for community building among GBQ+ men, providing a platform for shared interests and connections.

Pornography also offers opportunities for sexual education, allowing GBQ+ men to learn about different sexual practices and identities (Kubicek et al., 2010). The theme of connection as a motivation for sharing self-pornography underscores the social dimension of porn for many GBQ+ men. Participants leverage social media platforms not only for broad community engagement but also to facilitate online and offline interactions with others. Consequently, sharing sexual content serves as a conduit for expanding opportunities to meet potential sex partners. Grov et al. (2014) emphasise the pivotal role of social media platforms in shaping the online experiences of gay and bisexual men, providing spaces for sexual expression, community engagement, and the formation of social networks. This facilitates the construction of GBQ+ identities and fosters a sense of belonging within the community. Stout et al. (2023) reaffirm the enduring reliance of adolescent sexual minority men through the use of Google, online porn, and social media, in the absence of adequate mainstream sources. Considering our findings, it is plausible that this reliance extends to fulfilling sexual partner needs as well.

6.3 RQ3: How do practices of public sharing of sexual content complicate current understandings of pornography use among GBQ+ men?

Current research on 'porn use' often only considers porn consumption, neglecting attention to practices of creating and distributing sexual content. As a result, porn research findings often reflect pre-digital understandings of porn – as a product of media industries, used for private consumption and individualised arousal. The definitions and parameters of 'porn use' have shifted due to digital media platform affordances that support individual production and distribution of personalised sexual content (Ashton, 2019), both widely or within specific sexual communities or networks.

The predominance of sexual content creation among participants speaks to increased technologies and opportunities for creating and sharing one's own pornographic content. This includes the rise in popularity of OnlyFans (van der Nagel, 2021), alongside GBQ+ sexual cultures of sharing self-pornography on social media platforms including Twitter (now X), Reddit, and Snapchat.

Porn research typically measures and highlights the sexual arousal aspects of porn use. Our data demonstrates that while this is central to porn use, attention to practices and motivations of porn creation and sharing tells a more complex story of the relationship between porn and GBQ+ men's digital cultures of connection, belonging, and self-knowledge. That 15.1% of participants shared sexual content on social media without commercial interest, suggests that 'online pornography' extends beyond private use for acts of arousal for many, to include participating in 'digital sexual publics' (Song & Ding, 2023). Here, the creation and sharing of pornographic content is reciprocal and responsive to community members and forged within historical practices of cruising, hooking up, friendship, and

more. As Race (2018) argues, digital sharing of sexual self-representations among queer men does not simply operate as a form of seduction but can generate many possibilities. For many participants, these practices exceed motivations for arousal, and as well as facilitating a range of social and sexual connections, can offer personal validation in relation to self-esteem and self-acceptance.

6.4 RQ4: How do social media practices of sharing pornographic self-representations relate to GBQ+ men's wellbeing?

Our findings extend on Corneau et al.'s (2017) discussion that porn can operate as an affirmative mechanism for gay men, promoting sexual expression and greater self-acceptance. Statements from our participants further illustrate the role that creating and sharing sexual content may play in both personal pleasure and communal experiences. This finding implies that non-commercial sexual content creators (and their audiences) may, in turn, experience greater sex positivity, sexual self-esteem, and potentially general wellbeing. Sharing and creating pornographic content may play an important role in the empowerment and validation of GBQ+ men. Participant narratives revealed that by sharing their self-representations, they received external validation, which is deeply intertwined with internal feelings of self-acceptance and self-esteem. This process not only boosted their confidence but also helped cultivate a strong sense of belonging and identity within LGBTQ+ communities. These insights suggest that different forms of media, including porn, might similarly influence self-esteem and potentially strengthen community connections among GBQ+ men, which in turn may support identity formation and affirmation.

By examining sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and community connectedness, we provided a holistic view of how practices of creating and sharing sexual self-representations may be linked to GBQ+ men's psychological and social health. Higher levels of sexual self-esteem and sex positivity among GBQ+ men creating and sharing non-commercial sexual content on social media suggest that these activities may enhance one's self-perception and attitudes towards sex (Kvalem, Træen, & Iantaffi, 2015). Furthermore, the strong sense of community connectedness indicates that sharing sexual content can foster deeper ties within the LGBTQ+ community, offering social support and validation.

7. Limitations and future research

Several limitations are worth considering. The present study design, whilst providing rich insights, was cross-sectional and using self-report data. Thus, we cannot draw causal inferences, and the data may be subject to biases (e.g., memory recall and strong sampling bias of the self-selection sample). Future research should consider alternate study designs (e.g., longitudinal) to enable causal/temporal inferences. While many respondents referred to social media 'communities', it is important to note that this is a slippery term that can have many meanings, especially for LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2022), and there is a need for further exploration of how community is perceived by those who refer to their participation in online sexual

communities. Moreover, GBQ+ men's current practices of pornographic self-representation warrant further attention within broader pornography scholarship, to ensure that porn use is not misunderstood as merely a practice of consumption but can encompass wider practices of media use and production for sexual arousal, connection, and validation.

8. Conclusion

Gay, bisexual, and queer men's digital sexual cultures, including the production and sharing of self-pornographic content, are continually evolving. These changes reflect the dynamic landscape of social media, which facilitates the creation and dissemination of sexual content. Our survey aimed to capture a current snapshot of Australian GBQ+ men's use of social media for sharing such content, revealing that creating and sharing sexual content is common and encompasses both private and public audiences. This trend is linked to a longstanding history of 'gay culture', wherein digital technologies have significantly fostered connections to communities, sex, and relationships.

Our findings indicate that a substantial proportion of GBQ+ men engage in producing and sharing non-commercial sexual content. Notably, 15.1% of respondents publicly shared their sexual content without commercial intentions on platforms like Twitter (now X) and Reddit. These practices are driven by motivations such as personal arousal, reciprocity, and the desire for connection, suggesting that sharing sexual content serves as a conduit for expanding social and sexual networks. These practices have significant implications for GBQ+ men's wellbeing. Creating and sharing sexual content can enhance sexual expression, self-acceptance, and a sense of belonging within LGBTQ+ communities. Participants reported receiving external validation, which bolstered their self-esteem and self-acceptance, highlighting the positive impact of these practices on sexual self-esteem, sex positivity, and overall wellbeing.

It is essential not to stigmatise these forms of expression without understanding their potential positive impacts. Our findings emphasise the importance of considering psychosexual wellbeing as a multifaceted construct when studying GBQ+ men's engagement with pornographic content creation and sharing. These activities can significantly contribute to wellbeing by reinforcing positive self-images, fostering supportive community networks, and providing opportunities for sexual exploration and community engagement.

In conclusion, the digital sexual cultures of GBQ+ men are rich and multifaceted, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in shaping their sexual self-representations and overall wellbeing. Future research should continue to explore these practices, recognising the potential benefits and diverse experiences of individuals involved.

Data availability statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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