

Stepping Out from Behind the Lens: A Qualitative Analysis of Erotic Photographers

Jocelyn J. Wentland · Amy Muise

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Abstract Pornography and erotica have a long history in society. According to anecdotal evidence, erotic photography has been gaining popularity in recent years (Latimer, Mommy's been very, very naughty, 2007). In order to gain a fuller understanding of erotic photography and the type of clients that participate in erotic photo shoots, qualitative interviews were conducted with eleven photographers who specialize in erotic photography. A descriptive analysis of the typical erotic photo shoot was conducted, as well as a thematic analysis of the role of the photographer. Four main themes were identified including the changing nature of erotic photos, the relationship between the photographer and the client, the erotic photo shoot experience, and motivations. Interviewing the individuals who are actively involved with the production of erotic photography provides a unique opportunity to learn more about how this type of photography and how it can be seen as a reflection of the changing nature of sexuality in our society.

Keywords Erotica · Eroticism · Pornography · Erotic photographers · Qualitative analysis

Introduction

Pornography and erotica have a long history in society and can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks through the arts, namely poetry and sculpture (Sobel 2009). Helmut Newton, a German-born photographer was one of the first to extend erotic images to a commercial arena. In the 1930s, he took nude and erotic photographs of women for

J. J. Wentland (✉)

School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Canada
e-mail: jocelyn.wentland@uottawa.ca

A. Muise

University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada

fashion magazines and presented erotic images in mainstream society that were neither exclusively artistic nor exclusively pornographic in their origin (See Betterton 1987 for a review). There are notable difficulties in distinguishing pornography from erotica (e.g., Rea 2001). However as Kuhn et al. (2007) indicate, these seem to be conceptually different and, thus, worth distinguishing. Clearly any distinctions between pornography and erotica must be placed within the context of changing societal and cultural values (Attwood 2002).

The definitions of both pornography and erotica involve a certain level of subjectivity due to the inclusion of the intent to arouse or titillate the viewer. What is arousing to one individual may not be arousing to other individuals. Similarly, many things that may not have been intended to be pornographic or erotic may be deemed as such by the viewer (Kuhn et al. 2007). The inclusion of intimacy is a notable distinction between pornography and erotica (Kovetz 2006; Rea 2001). Erotica is regarded as including an intimate or seductive component, while pornography is regarded as being sexually explicit with the specific intent of sexually arousing the viewer. The current research will follow the definitions of pornography and erotica provided by Kuhn and colleagues (2007). Pornography is defined as “material provided for the purpose of sexually arousing or gratifying a user” (p. 4) and is often viewed in isolation of others. Erotica is defined as “material provided for the purpose of arousing or titillating individuals” (p. 5).

Pornography has been extensively researched in regards to sexual aggression (Kingston et al. 2008), attitudes towards women (McKee 2007), and child pornography on the Internet (Dombrowski et al. 2007). However, there exists a paucity of research on the use of erotica (i.e., photography, literature, film) in current society outside the context of sexual arousal studies (e.g., Brody 2007; Toledano and Pfau 2006). Kleinplatz (1996), who defines eroticism as the intent to arouse, posits that the value of eroticism has been overlooked. As a result, we have limited research on the role that eroticism plays within the context of romantic and/or sexual relationships or as a tool to increase sexual self-esteem or body confidence. The current study is an exploration of modern trends in erotic photography and how these relate to the changing nature of sexuality. Based on the definition of erotica, erotic photography is considered to be photography with the intent to arouse or titillate. The term erotic photography will hereafter be used to refer to all types of this style of photography, ranging from boudoir to more explicit photographs.

Literature Review

Media portrayals of sexuality have changed in recent years, specifically women’s sexuality. In television shows such as *Sex and the City*, highly sexual women are portrayed in a positive light. In fact, Markle (2008) suggests that common cultural beliefs regarding ‘appropriate’ sexual desires and behaviors for women are being challenged by *Sex and the City*. While the sexual scripts of the characters on *Sex and the City* may differ from the behaviors that women actually report participating in Markle’s (2008) study, television shows like this have provided an image of women engaging in more recreational sexual activity and have incorporated candid discussions of women’s sexual desires. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* recently featured

an episode titled “Why Millions of Women are Using Porn and Erotica” (Winfrey 2009). The premise of this show was to explore women’s use of pornography and erotica, including a discussion of how erotica is considered as qualitatively different from pornography. Also discussed was the ever increasing industry of women-centered pornography that is created ‘by women, for women.’ Clearly, changes to women’s sexuality are infiltrating popular media outlets in ways that would have been deemed inappropriate in the past.

Recent research suggests that some women are interested in pursuing sexual pleasure and being sexually adventurous both inside and outside the context of relationships (Wentland et al. 2009). Additionally, activities that were once relegated to strip clubs, such as pole dancing and stripteases, have now moved to dance and workout studios. Growing numbers of women are participating in striptease aerobics and pole dancing classes (Killingbeck and Powell 2009). Whereas there is a great deal of academic research focused on professional stripping and sex work in general, there has been very little research focused on mainstream participation in striptease aerobics and pole dancing classes (Whitehead and Kurz 2009). Having professional erotic photos taken is an activity that has traditionally been part of a commercial business (i.e., pornography) or done for artistic purposes, but like pole dancing and striptease aerobics, erotic photography is now becoming much more mainstream.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that erotic photography has been gaining popularity in recent years (Latimer 2007). The Canadian news magazine *Maclean’s* (August 13, 2007) featured an article on women who had erotic photographs taken by professional photographers. The women in this article had the photographs taken in an effort to explore a new side of their sexuality. The erotic photo sessions generally involved a makeover and dressing up in lingerie or fantasy outfits, such as the ‘Naughty Nurse,’ ‘Sexy Santa,’ or the ‘French Maid.’ The women described participating in the erotic photography to surprise their male partners, to feel sexy again, and/or to add an element of fun and fantasy to their lives as working wives and mothers. Currently there is no research on recreational participation in erotic photography. However, Whitehead and Kurz (2009) explored women’s participation in pole dancing classes and found that recreational pole dancing can be constructed as empowering because it allows women the opportunity for ‘choice’ and ‘control’ over a sexual activity and provides a means for women to resist traditional notions of femininity, such as passivity or modesty.

Thus far, researchers have not studied erotic photography from the client’s perspective nor from the photographer’s perspective. The current study, which involved interviewing erotic photographers, was proposed as a simultaneous complement of another study where female clients who have had erotic photographs taken were interviewed. Erotic photographers offer a unique perspective as they have interacted with numerous clients and have been involved in several photo shoots over time.

The main objectives of the current exploratory study were to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of erotic photography from the perspective of a convenience sample of commercial photographers. The specific motivations that women report themselves are reported elsewhere (Muisse et al. 2010). The findings

reported here are directly from the photographers. One of the main purposes of the following study was to detail what a typical erotic photo shoot looks like. Photographers who produce this type of photography are strategically placed to provide specific detail on this phenomenon. In addition, a thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted in order to highlight the most salient components that photographers discussed.

Method

For this study, qualitative interviews were conducted with photographers who specialize in erotic photography as part of their commercial photography business. The focus of this study was on photographers whose clients have photographs taken either for a gift for their partners or for the experience of participating in an erotic photo shoot, not for clients' commercial reasons, such as having pictures taken to advertise escort services.

Measures

A detailed interview guide was created based on the interview questions that were used in the study on women who have had erotic photographs taken. See the appendix for the interview guide. The interview was semi-structured; photographers were invited to share as much detail regarding their own experiences with erotic photography whenever/wherever they deemed relevant.

Participants

A convenience sample of photographers who produce erotic photography was identified through online business advertisements or in online telephone directories in Vancouver and both Hamilton and Ottawa areas. Not all participants advertised that they participated in boudoir or erotic photography (to be discussed in more detail later). However, in order to be contacted photographers needed to include some type of inference to boudoir or erotic photography, such as advertising glamour, fashion, or intimate photography.

Photographers were emailed a detailed explanation of the study and asked to contact the researchers by phone or email if they wished to participate or if they wanted more information. It was important to use a purposive sampling technique such as this to ensure that people who possessed the specific characteristics of interest (i.e., photographers who participate in erotic photography) were selected (Mays and Pope 1995). However, due to the exploratory nature of this study, it is not possible to predict the prevalence or accessibility of this type of photography.

The female researcher contacted a total of 15 photographers. A total of 11 photographers were interviewed. None of the photographers who contacted the researcher were excluded from participating. Participants were predominantly heterosexual ($N = 9$). The average age of participants was 41.9 years (range = 26–57 years). Participants had been photographers for an average of 15.6 years

Table 1 Demographic breakdown of participants

Participant number	Gender	Age	Length as photographer	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Current percentage of business of erotic-related	Estimated lifetime number of erotic clients
P1	M	36	11	Heterosexual	Single	75	100+
P2	M	42	22	Heterosexual	Married	80	100+
P3	F	26	6	Heterosexual	Married	10	50
P4	F	37	10	Bi-comfortable ^a	Single	50	200+
P5	M	45	7	Heterosexual	Married	5	20
P6	M	37	10	Gay	Single	30	300+
P7	M	55	34	Heterosexual	Married	30	200+
P8	F	37	15	Heterosexual	Single	30	200+
P9	F	57	20	Heterosexual ^b	Married	100	30
P10	F	39	16	Heterosexual	Married	30	250+
P11	M	50	21	Heterosexual	Married	10	30

^a Predominantly Heterosexual

^b Self-described as a “Heterosexual swinger”

(range = 6–34 years). Photographers had difficulty providing specific estimates for the percentage of business that erotic photography made up of their entire business and the total number of clients that had taken erotic photographs of. See Table 1 for these estimates and the demographic breakdown of participants.

Procedure

A female interviewer met with the photographer at a location of the photographer’s choice. The majority of interviews took place at the photographer’s studio. This was due to the sensitivity of the material being discussed given that not all photographers actively advertise this aspect of their photography business. Participants were given a detailed information sheet which outlined the study and provided more detail as to how their identity would be protected. If participants were still interested, both the participant and the interviewer signed the consent form and the interviews were conducted. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 min and were recorded on digital voice recorders. The digital voice files were transferred into electronic audio files at which point they were transcribed and then analyzed by two female researchers.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was used for the qualitative analysis of the interviews. Thematic Analysis can be broken down into six steps: (1) transcribe data, re-read data, and note initial ideas; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search for specific themes; (4) review themes; (5) define and name themes; and (6) select key extracts and analyze these extracts related to the research question. Both researchers

analyzed the transcripts and discussed themes that were identified until both researchers reached 100% agreement.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of the Typical Photo Shoot

Although each photographer discussed the uniqueness of each particular photo shoot, there were a number of common elements across photo shoots. These elements are broken down into the following: (1) Initial Contact; (2) Pre-consultation; (3) Location and Environment; (4) Beginning the Photo Shoot; (5) Sexual Explicitness of the Photo Shoot; (6) Professional Relationship Between the Photographer and the Client; (7) Concluding the Photo Shoot; and (8) Viewing the Photos.

Initial Contact

Photographers reported a number of different avenues by which clients contacted them. Most photographers mentioned a referral system. The referral system was the most commonly mentioned method due to the subtlety in how photographers advertised this piece of their business due to concerns about how the photography would be viewed.

Obviously, I'm not super comfortable with it because I don't advertise any of this type of photography so I don't like it. I know one thing I've learned from doing this type of photography from myself that I am more conservative than I thought. I thought I was super open-minded, didn't care what other people thought, until I attached the business to it. Then I realized that it's not just for business purposes. I don't want someone looking at me thinking "pervert." Because I don't know where the line is of what people think and even though it's not just that it's my business, it's also I don't want to hear weird comments about it and that kind of stuff. (P5, male, age 45)

One female photographer stated that she no longer publicly advertised this piece of her business because she was concerned how this would affect her business in terms of her other clients (families and wedding clients):

Yeah, I mostly do portraits, weddings, beauty. I do a bit of everything. But I am totally happy to take erotic photos, it was just that advertising for it and making it a part of the business was becoming a problem. I do shoot a lot of families and sometimes I worry about how that will affect my other business which is a larger part. Because not everybody is comfortable with that [erotic photography]. (P3, female, 26).

As a result, many photographers mentioned that many of their clients were referrals from previous clients. When asked if his female clients share the experience with others, one of the male photographers stated: "Yes, always with their girlfriends

because then they call. Then I get a sudden flood of hits on the website” (P5, male, 45). Another photographer stated: “Actually most of the erotic, sensual photography is a referral from a client. In fact, often the clients have never thought of doing this... ‘But my friend did it. This looks like fun’” (P6, male, 37).

Pre-Consultation

Many of the photographers discussed the importance of meeting with the client before the day of the shoot (i.e., a pre-consultation meeting). The main purpose of these meetings is to collaboratively discuss what the client wants to create in the photography session. These meetings also provide an opportunity for the client to become more comfortable with the photographer and to discuss who will be present during the actual photo shoot, both in terms of the photographer and assistants, as well as the client and additional individuals to be included in the photo shoot. A female photographer stated the following:

I actually go through that process of discovery with the client before we do the shoot. It’s an advanced consultation. It’s to get to know people. They get to know me. We talk about it [the photo shoot]. I ask them about what they are looking for. (P9, female, 57)

Although not all photographers met the client(s) in person before the shoot, discussing what the clients wanted from the shoot beforehand, either via telephone or email, was mentioned by all of the photographers. In other cases, the photographer and client discuss what the client wants when they meet on the day of the shoot.

Well they come in and we will go over some photos and we will look at some nice shots and we will look at books. And I will get a sense of what they are looking for, what kind of lighting they like. Like what they want to do with the shoot and how far they want to go. (P3, female, 26)

One photographer used the time while she was applying make-up before the shoot to help her clients feel more comfortable.

[Doing make-up] also gives you a chance to chat with the person. A lot of the people who come in I have never met. They walk in for their photos and it’s our first meeting. So yeah, make-up is important aesthetically, but it also gives you a window of time to chat. And also, I am in their comfort bubble, touching their face and that is something that is going to increase their comfort with me. (P4, female, 37)

The gender of the photographer and the gender of the client were important elements that were discussed during the interview (discussed in more detail within the thematic analysis). Every photographer reported having photographed male clients in the context of a female and male partner coming in for couple sessions. However, some of the photographers varied in their comfort regarding photographing male clients individually. This was mostly due to the goal of those types of photo shoots with men. One of the female photographers (who previously photographed men

individually) stated that men predominantly wanted photographs of their erections and ejaculation shots. Other photographers also echoed the idea that men who contact the photographers for their own individual pictures are mostly interested in masturbating. Female photographers discussed not feeling comfortable being one-on-one with men in these types of situations. The following excerpt was from a female photographer:

I used to have nudes on my website, but I was getting a lot guys calling me and being a woman I just felt a little bit uncomfortable shooting guys. I never know what to do with the penis in the room because it doesn't look good flaccid. So there is that whole like they have to get aroused for it to look good and I am a part of that. It is just a little bit weird because there were definitely some characters that were calling me and I had to consider whether I was comfortable doing this and being alone with them in my studio. If I interview a guy and they want to do some hot hard-on photos or whack-off for the camera, I will just say I don't specialize in this kind of photography and I will refer them elsewhere. Also a lot of the phone calls come from a payphone and that always sends alarm bells off in my head. (P3, female, 26)

One of the male photographers stated that he will not shoot male clients even though he receives a lot of requests to shoot males. When asked why he would not photograph men, he said:

I can only photograph subjects that I have a strong interest in, that I can already see beauty in, and I can tell they [the men who contact the photographer] are good looking and I really don't know what it is that makes me not do it, but I am just not interested in men in any sexual way. And I don't mean in a homosexual way, I mean, I'm not interested in portraying it. I don't like it from a vulnerabilities side or a sensual side at all, I just don't like that. I don't know why. (P2, male, 42)

Safety was another issue that was raised by the female photographers. One female photographer tells all her clients, even though she only shoots males within the context of couples, that her husband will be home during their session. Another female photographer clearly states in her online advertisements that she always photographs with a male assistant. However, after meeting a female client in person, this particular photographer (P9) will sometimes allow the client to decide if she wanted an assistant present or not. However, this photographer always brought a male assistant along when photographing couples in order to counterbalance the number of men and women in the room. None of the photographers reported being in situations where they felt fearful or uncomfortable, which attests to them feeling their clients out before the photo shoot, at least by a telephone conversation.

Location and Environment

The location of the photo shoot varied between the photographers. Many of the photographers used their photography studio for the majority of the shoots.

However, photographers were open to using other locations, such as the client's home, hotels, or outdoor settings. One photographer stated:

Often the trend of late for me has been to go on location to the women's homes. Then they are feeling more comfortable in their own environment. It's sexy as well to be in their own environment and I think that also correlates to it not being something so taboo anymore. You can have a photographer over to your place and do your thing as opposed to going to the studio. (P2, male, 42)

Another photographer conducted "marathon" sessions where she rented 2 adjoining hotel rooms. The photographer uses the one hotel room for the photo shoot and the other is used for women to get dressed and apply make-up. Clients are scheduled at staggered times and never see one another. The purpose of these marathon sessions was to offer the unique backdrop of a hotel (i.e., city skyline, high class hotel room furnishings) for many clients at a more reasonable price.

Most photographers offered some background props, such as satin or velour bed coverings, feather boas, and/or other small pieces to create a sexy environment. The majority of photographers encouraged their clients to bring their own lingerie or clothing items to the photo shoot. One of the photographers had an extensive selection of bustiers and lingerie that clients were free to use. Only one of the photographers offered specific costume pieces, such as a pirate outfit, that women could use for an additional fee. If the photographs were for a partner, photographers encouraged their clients to bring in props that reflected their interests.

So I say think of something that reflects your partner, a sport, a hobby, a job. I've had fireman's outfits, police outfits, I've had pets come in. I had one lady who brought tires in. I don't like to tell clients to go buy lingerie that's not them. I tell them you can have this, you can have nudes, you can lingerie, you can have something that reflects your partner. (P10, female, 39)

In general, photographers encouraged clients to bring various outfits, but the decision as to what to wear was at the discretion of the client.

Beginning the Photo Shoot

In general, photographers also discussed the importance of creating an environment that was relaxing and comfortable for the women, such as offering the women a satin bath robe between poses and making sure the heat was turned up high in the studio so the women would not be cold. Regardless if there had been a pre-consultation meeting, many photographers mentioned that the women were often still nervous and worried.

Before the shoot, everyone is concerned. They're terribly concerned before the shoot. And what I'm getting from that is that they need me to go slow and they need me to reassure them during the shoot. And that's what they're telling me what they need before the shoot has even started. (P2, male, 42)

They are almost always nervous at first unless it's a client that I have met and we've done more than one shoot. The women often express discomfort.

Especially initially, and I'll speak with them. "What's making you uncomfortable?" Often there, it's a good time to remind them "You had said that you wanted to do a topless shot later, but we don't have to. Remember that this is up to you to decide." (P6, male, 37)

In order to put the clients at ease, almost all of the photographers started the photo shoot with the client clothed to help them become more comfortable.

So I always start out with shooting fully clothed so that we can kind of go through different positions, so I can see what they are comfortable with before they are not clothed. And it gives us a chance to chat and get to know each other and joke around because my sense of humour is probably my biggest asset for putting people at ease. (P5, male, 45)

And then I just start of really simply, usually the client is clothed and I go from there. Usually you can see a progression in the shots with the clients being a lot more closed in the beginning and they just tend to kind of conceal their bodies for the first probably 10 or 15 minutes of the shot. And then by the end of an hour or an hour and a half they are totally open and just comfortable with me. (P3, female, 26)

Several photographers mentioned that they were also in constant dialogue with their client, both at the beginning and during the photo shoot, in order to help their client relax.

Sexual Explicitness of the Photo Shoot

The level of sexual explicitness varied among the photographers. All of the photographers let the clients determine how nude they wanted to be during the photo shoot and this was discussed extensively before the shoots began. However, photographers mentioned that during the shoot clients often requested shots that were more revealing than what they had initially discussed.

They [the clients] almost always go beyond what they said they were going to do. Or whenever they have something that they explicitly say they will absolutely not do, they will always do it. And the funny thing is I will always even say that. "As soon as you say that, you will probably do it. I'm not going to be the one that makes you do it." They will probably just do it for the sake of doing it. It is really funny. (P5, male, 45)

I have had that many times where they had come for the straight lingerie shot. They ask me if I would mind, very politely, if I would mind taking photos of them semi-nude, most of them. This happens quite often. I don't suggest it. But in most cases, it always starts with the lingerie shots and then if they feel comfortable, they are the ones actually who will ask me. I don't even need to ask them. (P8, female, 37)

And often, it starts off quite conservative because you know, they always want to do just the conservative thing and then invariably, they say "Hey, you

know...do you want to step it up a notch or two?" And then they start asking "How wild do you want to get?" and I say "I'm ready. I'm ready to go." (P2, male, 42)

Photographers were very concerned that they did not pressure their clients into being nude or posing in ways that the clients were not absolutely comfortable with.

Some photo shoots were more explicit than others (i.e., partner shoots versus lingerie shoots). Again, the type of shoot, and the subsequent level of explicitness, was discussed with clients before the shoot. Most of the photographers had photographed a couple together (a female and a male), but the sexual explicitness and sexual activity of those sessions also varied.

While most photographers were willing to have the client's partner be included in the session, some photographers did not photograph actual sexual activity. One female photographer stated: "I don't mind people touching each other and stuff during the photo shoot, but I just think it would be too uncomfortable for me to photograph people having sex" (P3, female, 26). However, another photographer had shot male and female couples having sexual intercourse.

The times that I have had it get more explicit have actually been when couples have hired me. And basically they at least want shots of making out, but a lot of them will end up saying "Ok, we're just going to have sex. Cover it and we want this included." It's our own little private porn shoot so that gets much more explicit. They can be a lot of fun but that's also again an area where I'll very much tell the clients "This is your call. At any point if you decide you don't want to go as far as we discussed, that's ok. It's your shoot." (P6, male, 37)

Another photographer stated that one of her more risqué shoots was a couple having sexual intercourse and afterwards the couple told her they had just had anal intercourse for the first time.

Professional Relationship Between the Photographer and the Client

Although it was never specifically asked, none of the photographers discussed becoming romantically, intimately, or sexually involved with their clients in any way. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that the photographers are very cautious about how this business is portrayed by society in general and focused on maintaining a high level of professionalism at all times. This was communicated insofar as photographers not even touching female clients to rearrange clothing. One of the male photographers stated:

One of the things that I often worry about the most in photography is that barrier, the personal space barrier, because it's in every type of photography. In a wedding with the bride...I'm not going to ever touch her at all. I'll ask her if I can move part of her dress but not if her hair is there. I'm not touching anybody because you just don't know what their reaction will be, especially if you are photographing kids or this kind of thing [erotic photography]. I'm hyper-paranoid about that. (P5, male, 42)

Another female photographer commented that she would rearrange clothing or touch a client's breast (excerpt detailed below), but that this was in order to capture a better picture, not done in a sexual context.

The only photographer that alluded to any type of potential relationship with clients was the gay male photographer. And even then, he was adamant that that type of interaction occurs outside the context of this professional session. He stated:

I see it as part of my job after the shoot to normalize the person which is bring them out of the bubble we've created. So I will sometimes guide the conversation to more mundane things. Let's wrap up from the mindset that we had. It's great that [the client] had fun, but we both need to step away from that. I'm more concerned about that with my gay male clients, because we have to maintain professionalism. Now we're potential sexual partners. We just created an intimate space so I need to pull back a bit, make sure that I am not in a situation where I am about to be asked out on a date or something like that. I'm making this sound complicated, but it's not. Maybe 10 minutes. But it's just you step back a little bit. It's after their shoots. I'll clean up their studio a little bit. I may bring up something like "Good, we wrapped up on time so you won't hit rush hour traffic" or things like that. (P6, male, 37)

Concluding the Photo Shoot

The photographers unanimously discussed how participants were very comfortable being nude by the end of the photo shoot. Clients would often not bother getting dressed between poses and some clients even debrief with the photographer either partially or completely nude. One of the photographers discussed how he tried to acknowledge that the end of the shoot was sometimes the end of a fantasy for the clients.

They get into the photography and then there is all of these different peaks and valleys of nervousness and then when it comes to the end of it, you usually end with the most graphic part of the whole shoot. And then there is this slight apprehension at that point of 'what now?' And then it's kind of finishing, them getting dressed and all that, and at that point there is a bit of discomfort. The reality sets back in, the fantasy is gone, and there is usually this last little bit of lingering discomfort. And then maybe it's me, too, because I tend to get very formal at that point so that they feel as protected as possible, because I don't want them to feel that now we're buddies and now I can be a goof. So maybe it's partially from me, because of my own fears of making people more comfortable. But that seems to be the camber of the photo shoot. (P5, male, 45)

Viewing the Photos

The process by which the clients viewed the pictures varied. Some photographers supplied the woman with a CD of all of the photos immediately after the photo shoot was over, some clients were sent to an online password-protected gallery to view the photos, and other clients came back to the photographer's studio where

they viewed the photographs together. Regardless of the process by which the clients received the photographs, the clients were very happy with the results. “A lot of them, for the most part, are just absolutely stunned. They can’t believe it’s them” (P1, male, 36).

That’s my favourite part. They usually are absolutely eye-watering stunned. Every single woman I have ever photographed has been so stunned by what they saw. That’s my favourite part. And that’s where I get the idea of the whole therapeutic side of it for them. They really see themselves as beautiful and as much as we are supposed to de-emphasize that as much as possible, it’s so hard-wired and so obvious to me, we can’t get past it. It doesn’t matter if you have a 190 IQ and you are the most accomplished writer or an Olympic athlete, if you don’t feel that you are attractive, then you just don’t have the confidence when looking at the photos. (P5, male, 45)

In conclusion, although each session varied between photographer and client, the previous descriptions suggest there are a number of elements that are constant between all photography sessions.

Thematic Analysis

Initial examination of the transcripts identified five themes with a number of associated sub-themes. The initial themes were: (1) Changing/Growing Nature of Erotic Photos; (2) Relationship Between the Client and the Photographer; (3) Reflecting on the Experience; (4) Nature of the Photos/Experience; and (5) Motivations.

Further analysis of the transcripts resulted in a total of four themes with associated sub-themes: (1) Changing Nature of Erotic Photos (sub-themes: what is erotic photography; increasing popularity/acceptance; diversity of clients; celebration of women’s sensuality/sexuality); (2) Relationship Between the Photographer and the Client (subthemes: rapport-building; permission-giving/reassurance; gender dynamics); (3) The Erotic Photo Shoot Experience (subthemes: body concerns/self-esteem; progressive comfort; sexual nature of the experience; post-shoot euphoria; life-changing experience); and (4) Motivations (subthemes: pictures for partner; documentation for oneself; personal experience of doing an erotic photo shoot). The themes and subthemes are discussed in more detail below and excerpts from the participants are included to further explicate each theme.

Changing Nature of Erotic Photos. What is Erotic Photography?

All of the photographers unanimously agreed that erotic or boudoir photography is not the same as pornography and that the photography that they produced was different from pornography. Interestingly, most photographers advertised using the term boudoir photography as this term is more socially acceptable, but still denoted an essence of eroticism. Photographers described how their photography may incorporate pieces that are used in pornography, but that their photography incorporated artistic imagery for the purpose of being visually aesthetic, not only

pure sexual arousal. The following excerpts detail what photographers said when asked if this type of photography is different than pornography.

Yes, totally. It's sometimes a subtle distinction because there is definitely a cross over. Pornography is focusing on sexual contact with no other reason for being other than the arousal—the sexual arousal. Many erotic pictures contain the same ingredients as pornography but the difference is that it is artistic, it brings creativity and beauty and interest other than straight sexual 'getting your rocks off' interest into the picture. And it's a very subtle difference. (P9, female, 57)

Hugely because with pornography you don't have a choice. It's in your face and for the most part, not that beautiful. It's just a bit too much. Whereas with erotic photography, the whole point is either teasing you and tantalizing you visually. It's more about what you can't see, whereas pornography is all about what you can see and probably stuff you wouldn't want to see. (P1, male, 36)

That's a great question. Because there are certain elements of pornography that are very typical and that are very stereotypical that when used in the right context, with the right lighting, the right situation actually work very effectively in erotic photography. (P5, male, 45)

Another photographer provided an example of a specific pose which is commonly seen in pornography that can be effectively photographed within the context of this style of photography without looking extremely graphic:

A perfect example and this is very graphic and it is a very typical pornographic-type shot, if you have someone facing the opposite direction of you in a photo and they are with their head down low and their rear up high. That can be the most graphic and the most gross photo, but if it's done a certain way with the lighting just right, it can be super sensual without being in the least bit rude. Although some people might still find it rude. (P2, male, 42)

Photographers also made a distinction between the consumers of pornography in comparison to erotic photography.

Yes, because with erotic photography, nine times out of ten, the client is the woman herself, whereas with pornography it's never the woman that's the client. It's a commercial thing. Porn is commercial, whereas erotic photography is an off-shoot of portraiture is what it is. It's [erotic photography] not commercial. (P2, male, 42)

First of all, the typical aim of something that is shot as pornography is to be sexually stimulating. It's commercial. So in other words, you're really selling the product. As opposed to work which may be erotic or sensual, because there's a difference, that's often much more about the person...it's much more about them connecting with some aspect of themselves that they want to show. (P6, male, 37)

The level of explicitness also varied between the photographers, which was related to what they called this type of photography. Some photographers

specialized in lingerie photo shoots for female clients that were for a present for their partner, which they categorically called boudoir. For example, the following excerpt came from a female photographer:

Erotic photography is more sexual as opposed to boudoir. What I do is a female that comes in and wants to offer a gift to her boyfriend or husband or whatever. Or it's a gift for herself, she's marking a time, it's a memento, a part of her life, and she is getting to the age where she wants to remember it. She comes in and she wants to feel beautiful and look beautiful. It's very different from erotic photography. Erotic photography is more sexual. Boudoir, if I have to show part [nudity], it's done in a very tasteful manner. It's silhouette. (P10, female, 39)

However, other photographers ($n = 4$) never mentioned the term boudoir within their interviews, even though they were encouraged to use the term(s) they normally used to refer to this type of photography. One photographer asked her clients detailed questions during their pre-consultation meeting regarding what types of photographs they wanted to create during their photo shoot. The photographer stated:

I ask "What kind of photos are you looking for?" I start at boudoir which is lingerie, semi-nude, nude, sensual, erotic, and explicit. And I ask "What level do you see yourself going to with this photo shoot?" We talk about it briefly because we talk about what they each mean. If you all you want is boudoir, I'm going to spend 2 hours in boudoir. If you say you want to get to explicit, I'll do a few little boudoirs working into it down the road, but I want to get to explicit. (P9, female, 39)

Other photographers mirrored this concept: boudoir does not fully encapsulate the complete range or style of photographs that may be included in an erotic photo shoot.

Increasing Popularity/Acceptance

Many of the photographers remarked at how the erotic/boudoir business has increased in the past years. Photographers even noted that they were surprised that all photographers did not shoot this type of photography because it is incredibly lucrative. When asked to describe what changes the photographers have seen in regards to the erotic/boudoir photography business and the history of their photography careers, one photographer noted "Wow, there's something here. I could actually make real money and there's a market for this stuff" (P2, male, 42).

Given that the average length of time as a photographer was over 15 years, most of the photographers had also seen changes in people's attitudes to erotic/boudoir photography.

[Erotic photography] is not taboo in the least anymore. Now everyone brags about it. It's so much more mainstream, it's like you know, twenty years ago, no one had tattoos. Now everyone's got a tattoo. Twenty years ago it was rare to do erotic photography. Now everybody does it. And everyone talks about it

and everyone's proud about it. It's not a dirty little secret. I'm under the impression that 10-15 years ago everyone would get a set done and they would keep it in their bottom drawer. And now, it's certainly more framed and put up, perhaps only put up in the bedroom or whatever, but on display more so than ever and that's wonderful. (P2, male, 42)

Photographers also discussed how there was an increased acceptance in terms of being sexy and sensual that was not present in the past.

People like sexy now. They want to be sexy. They don't want to have to apologize for being sexy. Unapologetically sexy. You are allowed to be a private investigator, a PhD student, a business owner, a physician and be sexy. (P4, female, 37)

Diversity of Clients

One of the main purposes of this study was to identify the typical clients of erotic/boudoir photography. The majority of clients were female. One of the male photographers did a lot of work with the gay community, which as he described, was the result of him being gay and providing a niche service. However, almost all of the photographers stated that there was no stereotypical client in terms of age, body size, or ethnicity. One photographer stated: "I have almost all different body shapes. There is definitely more fit people who come in, but it has been all over the map" (P3, female, 26). This same photographer remarked on the various ages that she photographs:

The age. I was amazed at how much it varies. I have had people come in who are in their 40s and one woman who was 50 come in to do some nudes for her partner. He mostly wanted them, but by the end of the day, she really got into it. In the beginning she was a bit nervous. But she was really comfortable with her body. It was really great to see someone who is that comfortable at that age. A lot of younger girls have come in as well. Probably early 20s to 30s is the majority. (P3, female, 26)

However, no other photographer mentioned that women in their early 20s to 30s were the majority. This may be reflective of the clients that this particular photographer shoots, as this photographer is 26 years old. Another photographer mentioned that the majority of her clients were older.

I have seen different kinds of sizes, all different types of bodies. I would say the majority of the women I have are in their 40s, but I do get the occasional early 20s or in their 20s who are getting married. But most of my clients are aged 40 and up. (P10, female, 39)

Although there did not seem to be a typical client, photographers remarked that the women who come in for this type of photography were different in some regard. "But they are definitely women who I would consider to be more open-minded about their sexuality and about their nudity than your average woman" (P9, female, 57).

Photographers also suggested an inverse relationship between how happy the women were with their photos and both their age and how attractive the women were. “The more attractive the woman is, the more concerned she typically is—especially the younger ones” (P3, female, 26). Another photographer said:

Every woman that has ever come to me that is stunningly gorgeous who wants to do erotic photos was not attractive when they were a kid. They were very, in their own words, very homely, skinny, boyish types. And then once they got older, they got very feminine, beautiful. And they are still trying to accept that, to get through it, that they feel that way, that they are feminine. And when they see themselves in this super feminine light, does it ever change the way they perceive themselves. (P5, male, 45)

Photographers also noted this inverse relationship between younger clients and how happy they were with the photos.

Yes, I find that the younger ones are more picky because it’s like they haven’t accepted what they look like yet as opposed to the 40 yr old. She’s had the kids. She’s like “Ok, this is what I look like, lets live with it.” (P10, female, 39)

Celebration of Women’s Sexuality and/or Sensuality

The majority of clients were female, and thus, this theme is specific to female clients. In relation to erotic/boudoir photography becoming more popular, the photographers discussed how this photography was a way for women to celebrate their sensuality and their femininity.

I think that at the end of the day that every woman wants to have that kind of shot taken of them. Whether they like to admit it or not or how clothed they are or not, but who wouldn’t want to have a great picture taken of them in that intimate form? It doesn’t really matter how you look. You can get a good shot of everyone if you’ve got the right lighting and angle. (P1, male, 36)

The way that I really view this type of photography is that it’s a statement by women that they’re accepting of themselves, that they want to celebrate the way they look and the way that they feel, and their feminine side, their true feminine side. (P5, male, 45)

Relationship Between the Photographer and the Client. Permission-Giving/Reassurance

Photographers commonly stated that they provided positive feedback to the clients when there were in a great pose. However, for male photographers, it was important that these comments were not considered inappropriate or sexual, but rather encouragement for the client to continue what she was doing so the photographer could capture the moment. The following excerpt was from a male photographer.

I’ll often tell them at the same time “Wow this is perfect. You have no idea how beautiful you look at this moment.” And it’s like watching someone

glowing. It's amazing. It's a really neat feeling and it's a very addictive moment. And it's probably a moment that not everyone would appreciate, like spouses, for example. It's not a sexual thing either. It's purely, purely an aesthetic moment that you are seeing something that is as perfect as you can make it and then you have the technical job of capturing that as perfect as possible. (P5, male, 45)

Another female photographer remarked:

I am constantly talking about what we are doing in the photo shoot, showing them images, shifting the lights, and I am constantly dialoguing about that to keep us both in that head space. But I can tell when I show them the photos...I always take the picture to them right after. Like this is knowing you're hot. And it is like "Oh yeah, this is awesome." (P4, female, 37)

Gender Dynamics. Photographers provided diverse feedback in terms of how their gender affected their working relationship with their clients. Regardless of the photographer's gender, the photographer stated that they were the better suited gender to do this job. For example, male photographers stated that because they are men (and all but one heterosexual), they are able to see through the eyes of other men and what men would consider sexy. Female photographers stated that because they are women, they are able to provide their photography services in a non-judgemental way which increases the comfort of their clients.

But as far as me being a man taking photographs of women, obviously I am a man and I'm a heterosexual man so I know what I like in the looks of a woman, so I think that helps. I know what's sexy. And I try to put myself in...I try to look through the eyes of her boyfriend or husband and say "What would he want to look at?" (P11, male, 50)

Whereas, female photographers mentioned that because they are women, the clients feel more comfortable with them and are able to let loose because they are not being judged. One female photographer had the following to say when asked if gender is a component of doing this type of photography:

It would suck. I am sorry, I feel really bad for the guys. I shoot with other photographers and I shoot with men, I don't discriminate. And they are very guarded when they approach. They are being polite and they have to be. I can just reach in...I mean, at least once a week I am holding someone's boob in my hand to get the right shot. So I will walk up and say that I am coming in and reach in and fix it. It has to be done, but a guy can't do that. Anything from adjust hair to bra straps to lifting a breast. I think it's an unfair advantage. A man with the exact same profession cannot do what I do. (P4, female, 37)

One male photographer mentioned that he had had some incidences with his clients' respective partners not being happy that a male photographer had taken such intimate pictures. This photographer mentioned one particular boyfriend who contacted him and threatened to beat him up because they were very jealous that he had photographed his girlfriend.

It's crazy how many times I've had to suggest to some of the girls that I've [photographed] to pass on to their respective others that I'm gay. The amount of jealousy and over-protectiveness that some of their boyfriends have had. It's a bit overwhelming. (P1, male, 36)

Another female photographer mentioned that the husband of one of her clients found her gym bag with all of the lingerie for the upcoming photo shoot. He immediately thought she was having an affair, at which point the woman had to disclose that she was having an erotic/boudoir photo shoot which was supposed to be a surprise anniversary present for the husband.

The Erotic Photo Shoot Experience. Body Concerns/Self-Esteem

Many of the photographers stated that many of the female clients were worried about how they would look in the pictures.

With women? Where do I start? No offence. But it's always about "oh the this...and the curve and the stretch mark." And I say: Photoshop. Photoshop. Photoshop. That's all I can say. Anything you're not happy with, whether it's a zit on the end of your nose to stretch marks from having a kid or whatever, it can all get taken care of. They say: "Just don't make me look fat." (P1, male, 36)

By far, the stomach was the body area that women were most concerned with but this was not always the case. "The ones that have kids are usually the ones that are paranoid about their bellies. The ones that don't have kids don't have to worry about that so they have more time to worry about their ass" (P4, female, 37)

Men were not immune to body concerns. Men, who are not as used to being judged by their physical appearance, were also very worried about how the pictures would look like.

I would say that there are two big stumbling blocks for men. First is going shirtless, which sounds funny because in our society, it's so socially acceptable for men to be shirtless. But the minute the shirt comes off, to a man, 'I'm not longer dressed.' But that's usually an easy one for them to cross. If they've crossed that line, most men have no problem showing rear nudity at all. A butt is just a butt. But that frontal nudity for most guys is a killer, which again, is amusing because I'm sure if they played team sports, they would think nothing about it in the locker room. But this is a different setting. (P6, male, 37)

Progressive Comfort

All of the photographers talked about the shoot progressing in stages. The clients were usually quite nervous during the first stages of the shoot. Often the photographers would start out with the women clothed in very simple positions in order for the clients to relax and become comfortable with the environment. Many of the photographers mentioned that by the end of the shoot, the woman would simply change outfits right in front of them, rather than leaving the room to change.

I just start off really simple, usually the client is clothed and I go from there. Usually you can see a progression in the shots with the clients being a lot more closed in the beginning and they just tend to kind of conceal their bodies for the first probably 10 or 15 minutes of the shoot. And then by the end of an hour or an hour and a half they are totally open and comfortable with me. (P3, female, 26)

A couple of the photographers described that there was a ‘sweet spot’ within the shoot. This was a period where the clients were really into the photo shoot and where the clients always had the best pictures. Then once the clients moved beyond the sweet spot, the pictures would not be that great.

Because when you are shooting at the limit you get your best work. And if you go past that limit, you’re done. The best work is always when they are at the point where they think they have already gone too far and they are going to hang on and that’s when, those are always the photos that they look back and go “Wow!” and the other ones are just like “Oh, whatever.” (P5, male, 45)

Another photographer likened the stages to curtains going up and down. “They peak where they are very comfortable. And they let that curtain down” (P11, male, 50).

Sexual Nature of the Experience

Photographers were mixed as to whether or not there was a sexual element to the photo shoot. The photo shoots that were described as fashion or lingerie shoots were never described as having a sexual component to them. However, the photographers did discuss how they encouraged their clients to get into an erotic or sensual mind frame in order for that to really come across in their pictures. Photographers also mentioned encouraging their clients to think about who the pictures were for (if they were for a partner). “At the end of the day, all I’m telling them is to imagine that through the end of the camera is whoever it is that you want to see your pictures. Don’t think about me. Just think about the end result” (P1, male, 36)

The relationship between the photographer and the client may be an important predictor of women even letting their guard down enough to admit that they are sexually aroused. One of the male photographers stated that approximately two-thirds of the clients become sexually aroused during the shoot. Interestingly, the majority of this particular photographer’s clients were previous wedding clients which may be why these women feel comfortable admitting there is a sexual arousal piece to the photo shoot. When asked if this is something that he encourages in the shoots, he said:

I let them be who they want to be. I let them know that there is nothing to be embarrassed about. It is totally up to them what they want to do with [the sexual arousal]. I don’t really try to encourage it, because for whatever reason, it may be considered something negative. I always identify to them that I realize that they are aroused and that it’s up to them what they do with it. It’s a hard thing to word because you don’t want to embarrass them, but you also don’t want them to close up and get scared. (P5, male, 45)

Another photographer mentioned that female clients may be aroused, but hesitant to admit their sexual arousal.

Yeah, I think that women may not express it at the time or they are more concerned about how they look. And to say you are aroused can be like an invitation to sex. But, yeah, I would think it was hot. The cool thing is that you can layer your fantasies, the experience itself, and thinking about the experience afterwards. Because it all crosses over for women. It is different for women. They can be aroused without it being physically obvious. (P4, female, 37)

Not all female photographers were comfortable shooting male clients because the nature of photo shoots with men was much more sexual than erotic or artistic.

I have done a few men and have decided not to shoot men any more. As a small photographer, I feel that I can do that because I don't alienate men from my photography because I find that most men really if they pretend to want erotic photos, they basically want shots of their hard-ons and cum [ejaculation] shots. And to me that is pornography and I don't enjoy shooting that. (P9, female, 57)

Another female photographer, while comfortable shooting male clients even as single subjects, commented on the differences between male and female clients.

Men are accustomed to entering a professional/sexual situation. Women don't enter those situations. I had a guy yesterday that I was photographing and he said to me "Can I ask you a favour? Will you lift up your skirt?" and I was just like, "No, but I understand where you are coming from." No women would ever do that. He even asked me "How many women come in to do this [masturbate to the camera]?" and I said "None. Women don't masturbate to the camera." They don't come in to masturbate in a photo shoot. He was like, "Really?" and I said "No, it is all men." Women don't do that and I don't think it is because they don't feel comfortable, but it is because they don't want to. I think some might do it with their partner, but not on their own. That is why I said with the men, it is very different. (P4, female, 37)

The clients' motivations for the photo shoots (explained in detail below) may play into this sexual arousal piece. Women who are having erotic photos for the experience of the photo shoot may be more likely to become aroused. Further research examining this theme is needed.

Post-Shoot Euphoria

All of the photographers were unanimous in how they described the positive reactions of the clients. Every photographer described their clients as being 'on a high' after the photo shoot was over. "It must be therapeutic because I can't imagine how light they feel afterwards, it must feel great, really neat" (P5, male, 45).

They say to me: "I have to come back. I have to do this again. I have to tell all my girlfriends to come and do this." They are very happy with the experience.

I think it's a great experience for them and I think it's mostly the experience that they are sharing with their friends, not just the photos. (P8, female, 37)

Life-Changing Experience. The photographers also talked about how the photo shoot changed the women's lives because the women now viewed themselves as more sexy than they had in the past, resulting in increases to the women's self-esteem.

I get feedback from them and the very first one [feedback] was when a plus-sized lady who wrote this beautiful letter to me saying how this session has changed her life because since then she is choosing to dress differently, she carries herself differently, and now when her fiancé tells her how sexy she is, she actually believes him just because of the photos I have produced of her. (P8, female, 37)

It is a really positive experience. It is probably something that everyone should do. Really important to be comfortable with your body and having erotic or nude photos seems to help a lot of women be more comfortable with their bodies. It does actually make you feel quite good about yourself. (P3, female, 26)

Many of the photographers also mentioned that they had many repeat clients who have come back to them for more pictures because the experience continues to be so rewarding.

Motivations

See client paper (Muise et al. 2010) for a much more detailed analysis of the client motivations. The following excerpts are meant to add an additional level of analysis.

Pictures for Partner

Many of the photographers mentioned that the clients were having these photos done for a partner. Wedding and anniversary gifts, as well as Valentine's Day and Christmas gifts, were common reasons why women were having the photos taken. "One girl had an album of photos and she had it delivered to her fiancé's hotel room the night before they got married and said 'Just in case you get cold feet, this is what's waiting for you tomorrow'" (P11, male, 50).

Documentation for Oneself

Photographers also mentioned that there were women who were having photos taken for themselves. "The most common denominator is "I look good right now. I want to capture it" (P4, female, 37). Another photographer stated:

The clients I'm encountering are most interested in just being recorded in a very sexy way. Typically, they are feeling good right now and they want to record it. Women who are just celebrating their awesome physique and I don't want to say new found power, but their new found acknowledgment of said power. (P2, male, 42)

Another photographer mentioned that the purpose of having pictures taken changed from the first consultation to having the photos taken. “What I discovered, is that it always starts out with photos for their loved ones and at the end, they come to terms that it was more of a present to themselves than to their boyfriends” (P8, female, 37).

One photographer noted that men and women had different motivations for having their pictures taken. “Yes, for women, often it’s a present...[for men] it is much more self-motivated. It’s not a gift for someone” (P6, male, 37).

Personal Experience of Doing an Erotic Photo Shoot

Photographers also mentioned women who really wanted to have the experience of doing an erotic photo shoot experience, regardless of who the photos were for (i.e., partners or themselves). One photographer stated that one of their recent clients had made a list of things over the course of the year to get out of her comfort zone; participating in an erotic photo shoot was on her list of things to do. Two photographers likened the experience to going to the spa. “I think that for them [women], it’s a day out at the spa, but something a little bit different. They want to feel that they look beautiful” (P11, male, 50).

I have started to see this as very rewarding for most people. The typical person has a very negative body image. Nudity is bad. Sexuality is bad. So this is very liberating for many people. And often that is what they look for. This is going to be my treat, my fun. And I think that people underestimate themselves. Once you start letting go of the hang-ups, it all goes, and there is a big freedom. It’s like ‘Yes, I’ve done this. This is me. The sky didn’t fall. I’m not so ugly that I broke the lens.’ (P6, male, 37)

Discussion

Erotic photography is becoming more and more popular in society today. Yet, there is no research to date that details why individuals participate in erotic/boudoir photo shoots, either from the perspective of the client or the photographer. More importantly, there is no research that outlines what an erotic photo shoot experience looks like from the perspective of those individuals that play a pivotal role in the creation of these specialty photo shoots. Thus, the results from this exploratory study shed light on an interesting type of photography that is receiving increased interest from society. Photographers have unique insight into this increasingly popular type of photography, which may be viewed as an indicator of the changing nature of sexuality in society.

The results from this study are twofold. First, one of the goals was to determine what a typical photo shoot looks like, from how to contact a photographer, how explicit a photo shoot may become, to how the photographs are distributed to the client. Although each erotic photo shoot is a unique collaboration between both the client and the photographer in terms of the props, poses, and overall style of the photographs, there was a generic template for each photo shoot.

The most salient feature of the erotic photo shoot is that the photographer gives complete control to the client. This was apparent in terms of where the photo shoot would happen, who would be present during the shoot, and how nude the client would become. The photographer then has the technical challenge of capturing that vision based on the client's preferences. As such, clients place a lot of trust in their chosen photographer to capture the style of photographs that they want. This is likely why referrals were cited as the most common way that clients contact photographers.

Photographers take their photography business very seriously even though this may be a 'sexier' component of their business. Photographers were steadfast in their comments regarding the professionalism of the shoots. Some photographers even mentioned being more formal in these types of shoots because they did not want to behave in a way that would be viewed inappropriately by the clients in any way. Given that not all photographers participate in erotic photography, these photographers may be individuals who are more liberal or at least more comfortable with sexual explicitness compared to individuals who do not participate in this type of photography.

In general, the erotic photo sessions follow a similar sequence even though sessions are individually catered to each client. Photographers discussed the importance of determining what the client wanted from the shoot, ranging from who the photos were for to the level of nudity the clients were willing to engage in. These conversations always took place before the photo shoot started. Photographers mentioned a progression in the photo shoot. Clients were often nervous or uncomfortable at the beginning of the photo shoot but very comfortable and enjoyed the process of the photo shoot by the end, to the point of being comfortable being completely naked in front of the photographer at the end of the shoot. All of the photographers interviewed reported that their clients felt euphoric at the end of the photo shoot and discussed how participating in a photo shoot can be a self-esteem boost for many women. Together, the photographers and clients created unique photography sessions based on the client's preferences.

Interviewing the individuals who specialize in the production of erotic photography provided a unique opportunity to explore the uniqueness of erotic photography. The terms that the photographers use to describe their work included boudoir, artistic nudes, or intimate portraiture with no one term being used by the majority of photographers. However, some photographers suggested that boudoir photography was less explicit and more likely to involve lingerie shots compared to erotic or action shots that are more likely to be more explicit and potentially involved actual sexual activity. The photographers in this study were very adamant that pornography is not what they are producing—even for the photographers who produce the more explicit erotic photography. They describe their work as artistic and creative, even though it may draw on some of the techniques used in pornography. Erotic photography was described for its ability to tantalize and tease the viewer and described as photographing what you cannot see, rather than the blatant explicitness that you can see in pornography. The photographers' distinction between erotic photography and pornography mirrors the distinction between erotica and pornography in the limited academic literature that is available. Pornography has been described as more

explicit with the main purpose being sexual arousal or gratification, whereas erotica has been characterized as having more complexities in terms of intimacy, seduction, and artistic underpinnings (Kovetz 2006; Kuhn et al. 2007; Rea 2001).

It is important to study material that is characterized as erotica and related behaviour and activities, such as erotic photography, because these behaviours and activities can provide insight into the nature of sexuality in our society. In general, women are exploring more diverse and creative activities related to their sexuality. This is apparent in a number of different realms, such as women attending 'sexercise' or pole-dancing classes (Hamilton et al., in preparation) attending sex-toy parties (Herbenick and Reece 2006), or wearing sexy lingerie or tight clothing in order to feel sexy for oneself (Grammer et al. 2004). Levy (2006) argues that this mainstream sexualisation of women has resulted in a "raunch culture" where women attempt to adhere to a standard of "hotness" that is modelled on adult movie actors. She believes that the new wave of feminism, at least in terms of commercialised sexuality, is simply a new form of objectification. However, we do not believe that this idea is reflected in the photographers' discussion of women's participation in erotic photography. Instead, the photographers construct this as an empowering endeavour that allows women to create a sexualised image on their own terms, one that is not based on male fantasy or mainstream pornographic images.

Erotic photography may be another avenue by which women are able to explore the boundaries of their sexuality. Photographers from this study reported that the women who were able to push their boundaries and limits in the photo shoots were often the most satisfied with their photographs. Perhaps this is because women are beginning to break away from feeling that their sexual behaviour is only acceptable within the context of romantic relationships (Regan and Dreyer 1999; Wiederman 1997) or is something they cannot express publicly or document for themselves or partners. Violet Blue, a sexuality columnist and author who has reviewed women's erotica, was featured on the pornography and erotica episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Blue suggests that in recent years more women are viewing erotica and pornography and she attributes this to the increase in women-centered pornography. Women's participation in erotic photography may reflect women's desires to create erotic material on their own terms.

The increasing popularity of erotic photography may also explain why photographers were not able to describe a 'typical' client. The clients ranged in age, body size, relationship status, and their motivations for having the photos taken. This is quite different compared to a decade or two ago when the large majority of these photographer's clients were women who were having photos taken for their professional work (i.e., escorts). Today, women are having these photos taken for a variety of reasons: to document themselves; to say that they have participated in an erotic photo shoot; to give a partner a sexy present; or just to feel good about themselves. Only one of our photographers specialized in male erotic photography. According to this photographer, men's reasons for having an erotic photo shoot were even more self-motivated compared to women's reasons.

The positive aftereffects of having erotic photographs taken was also important. The current study demonstrates that participation in an erotic photo shoot has farther reaching implications than the anecdotal evidence implies (Latimer 2007). While the

photographers suggested that this was a “fun” experience for their clients, many photographers mentioned that the women were also amazed at how good they looked in the photos, which translated to the women feeling an increase in their self-confidence and self-esteem. However, these positive feelings were not solely as a result of seeing the photographs. Many of the photographers mentioned that their clients felt incredibly positive simply due to the experience of completing the photo shoot. It is important to note that clients, regardless of being considered beautiful by societal standards, such as having a slim body size, also reported feeling sexy and beautiful. Interestingly, photographers mentioned that women who had not stereotypically been considered beautiful were often the ones who had the most powerful reactions to the photos. Research on the impact of body awareness on sexual arousal indicates that being more aware of one’s body can increase subjective sexual arousal, even among women with low body esteem (Seal and Meston 2007). Erotic photographs may be a tool that could be used to increase women’s self-esteem, if done with the right photographer. Erotica has also been used in sex therapy to promote positive sexuality and help clients achieve greater sexual fulfillment (Striar and Bartlik 1999). Participation in erotic photography may have similar effects.

Photographers who do participate in erotic photography may be very different than photographers who do not participate in this type of photography. Many photographers who do participate in erotic photography do so as part of their regular photography business (i.e., wedding and family portraits). However, photographers may not actively advertise their erotic photography business due to concerns of how their general clientele would react. Even within our sample of photographers, there was a range of comfort in terms of how risqué the clients’ photos were. As the purpose of this study was to obtain further detail on the changing nature of this type of photography and the clients that are having erotic photography taken, we did not dedicate a large portion of the interviews to exploring how the photographer became involved with this line of photography. Of further interest is how one becomes a successful erotic photographer and how does one’s own sexual attitudes and values play into this professional role.

Combining these results with the findings from the study on women who have had erotic photographs taken will provide useful information about this phenomenon from several perspectives. While clients who participated in erotic photography are able to provide detailed information about their personal motivations for engaging in this experience, erotic photographers were able to provide additional insights into the general themes related to erotic photography and how this practice has changed over time. In many cases, the motivations presented by female clients themselves (Muise et al. 2010) were mirrored by the photographers in the current study. Further investigations in this area could include more in-depth exploration of how the erotic photo shoot experience can influence body esteem and both the romantic and sexual relationships of clients.

One aspect of the changing nature of sexuality is that practices that were once hidden or limited to a few participants have now become mainstream. Erotic photography is now attracting a greater number and diverse range of participants and it is important to explore how this phenomenon is experienced. The current study presents the first academic investigation of the modern trends in erotic

photography and suggests that this practice offers positive implications for both men's and women's sexuality and sexual self-exploration.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

How long have you been a photographer? How long have you taken erotic photographs?

What percentage of your photography business is erotic photography?

How many different people would you say you have taken erotic photos of in your career?

How much do you typically charge for erotic photos?

How has erotic photography changed from when you first started to now?

Do you think that erotic photography is different from pornography? If so, how is it different?

How would you describe the typical clients who take erotic photos? Gender (what percentage are female, male, couples, groups)? Age? Relationship status? Body size?

If gender differences, discuss these. If couple differences, discuss these.

What are the most common types of erotic photos?

How would you describe the typical photo shoot? Describe the studio in which these typically take place and the general progression of events (i.e., make-up, hair, looking at photos, deciding what to wear etc.)

What do you do to ensure your safety during the photo shoots?

How do you decide on where the photo shoot will take place? Do you meet with the client before the day of the shoot?

Do you have staff that accompanies you on these photo shoots?

What do you do in the situation that a client wants to bring someone along with them to the photo shoot?

How would you describe the common types of erotic photos that you take (artistic nudes, boudoir, fantasy, themed, BDSM, sexually explicit)?

What are the main motivations that the women you photograph express for having erotic photographs taken? Do they describe these pictures as being for their partners or for themselves?

Is this the first erotic photography experience for most of your clients?

What do the women typically wear in the erotic photos? Who selects this?

What are the main emotions that the women you photograph express feeling during the photo shoot? Do they describe the experience as out of character for them? Do they express being nervous or concerned about how their body looks? Do they express feeling sexy or sexually aroused?

What do you do to make the women you photograph more comfortable?

What do the clients express as being their biggest worry about taking these photos? Are there specific areas of the body that clients seem most self-conscious about? How do you address this to make them more relaxed?

How much do your clients generally disclose to you during a photo shoot? What types of things do they tell you?

Do you feel that the mood or comfort level of the women changes as the photo session progresses? How do you think your gender and the gender of the client is a factor in their comfort level?

Do you decide prior to the photos how revealing the photos are going to be and the style of the photos? Does this normally progress as planned or do pictures generally become more revealing than planned?

How do the women usually react after seeing their photos for the first time?

Do most get their photos printed/framed or books of their photos made? How do they decide which photos to select? Is this something that you do together? Do any of them reveal where they plan to display the photos?

What are the general feelings expressed by the women at the end of the photo shoot?

Do you get the impression that these women have discussed their erotic photo experience with other people in their lives? Do you get the impression that the women feel others would be surprised if they knew of their erotic photos?

Describe what you feel are the most risqué types of photos you have taken?

Have you had erotic photos taken of yourself? Did you feel this was important to better understand the experience of your clients?

What do you see for the future of erotic photography?

Is there anything else that I have not asked you that you feel is important to share about your experiences with erotic photos? Are there any stories that stand out from your experiences?

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