Porn Gets Classy: A Latent Class Analysis of Pornography Users

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Introduction

Because use of, and positive attitudes toward, pornography are increasing (Carroll et al., 2008; Carroll et al., 2018; Mestre-Bach et al., 2020; Price et al., 2016), it is crucial for scholars to understand how it impacts people. Scholars have noted that pornography influences both individuals (Hald & Malamuth, 2008) and couples (Bőthe et al., 2021; Danebeck et al., 2009; Willoughby et al., 2016) in a variety of both positive and negative ways. Researchers have also found some general patterns of pornography use, including gender patterns (Carroll et al., 2017; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2013), motivational patterns (Paul & Shim, 2008), and couple patterns (Willoughby et al., 2020). These findings are vital, but it is important in both scholarship and intervention that we more closely examine groups of pornography users in today's world so that we can distinguish effects on a deeper level.

Methods

Using a large sample of adults (n = 3750), a latent class analysis was run with the following measures in order to understand the types of pornography users that exist. Both mainstream and violent pornography use were measured by how often individuals viewed various kinds of pornography and was created from the Pornography Usage Measure (Busby et al., 2020) on a scale from 1 ("Never") to 6 ("Every day or almost every day"). Porn acceptance was measured by how acceptable individuals thought pornography was for various groups of people and was created from the RELATE pornography acceptance measure (Busby et al., 2001) on a scale from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"). Porn viewing duration asked individuals how often their viewing sessions with pornography typically lasted on a scale from 1 ("Less than 5 minutes") to 6 ("Longer than 2 hours"). Finally, frequency of masturbation asked individuals what percentage of the time they masturbate when viewing pornography. Latent classes were created by running multiple models for classes and examining BIC, AIC, and entropy values to determine the number of classes that best fit the data.

ANCOVAs were run in order to better understand how these classes differ on relational outcomes of sexual satisfaction and relationship stability, as well as an individual outcome of general distress. Sexual satisfaction was measured using the Golombok-Rust Inventory of Sexual Satisfaction (Rust & Golombok, 1985). Participants rated their satisfaction on different aspects of sex in their relationship on a scale from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very Often"). These measures were reverse coded as needed. Relationship stability was measured using the RELATE relationship stability scale (Busby et al., 2001). Participants responded to questions about stability on a scale from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very Often"). These measures were also reverse coded as needed. General distress was measured using the MASQ-General Distress scale (Watson et al., 1995). Participants reported how much they have felt or experienced certain emotional states during the past week on a scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Extremely"). The ANCOVAs included covariates for age, sex, education, relationship length, religiosity, and life satisfaction.
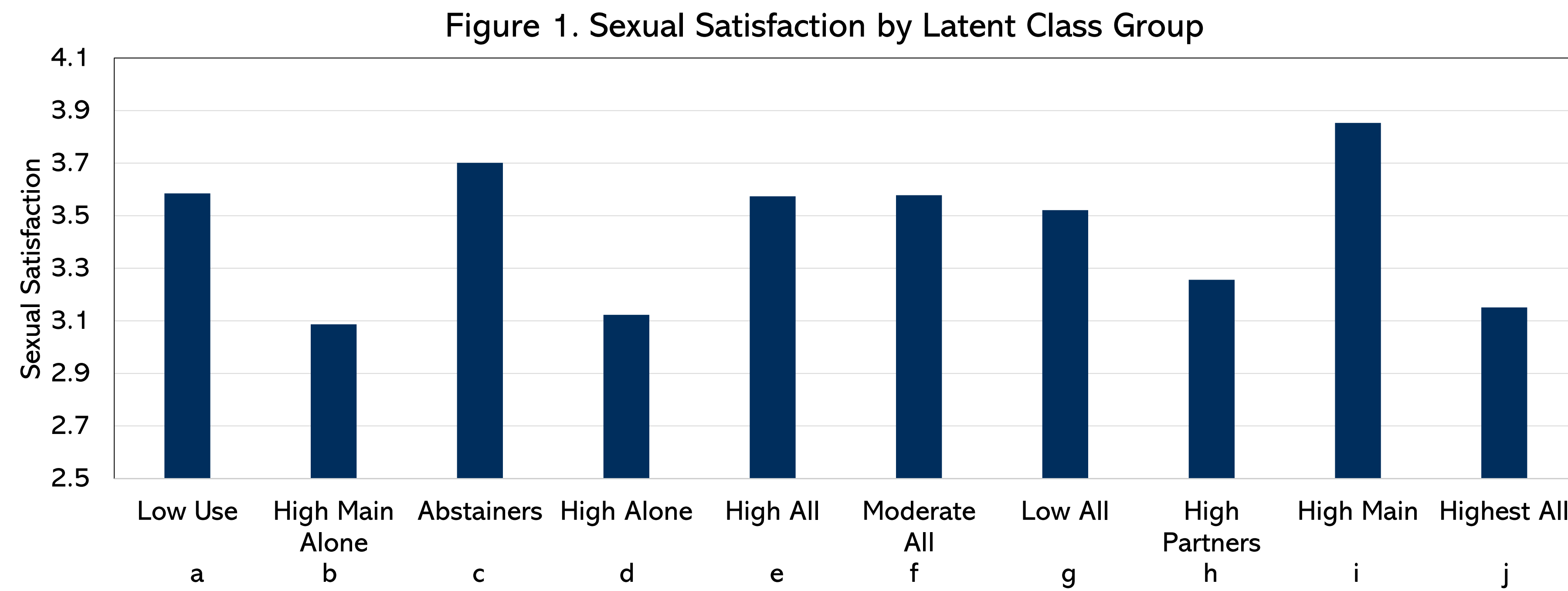

Figure 1. Sexual Satisfaction by Latent Class Group

Figure 1. Significant Differences

a: c, l
b: a, c, e, f, g, l
c: b, d, g, h, j
d: c, l
e: b, j
f: b, j
g: b, c, i, j
h: a, c, i
i: a, b, d, g, h, j
j: a, c, e, f, g, i

Table 1. Latent Class Analysis Group Averages		% of Total Sample	Mainstream Porn Use			Hardcore Porn Use		
	Use	%	Alone	Partner	Joint	Alone	Partner	Joint
Group								
Low Use		24.03	1.45	1.88	1.31	1.10	1.14	1.04
High Mainstream Alone		2.88	4.07	1.88	1.32	1.59	1.18	1.01
Abstainers		28.05	1.06	1.18	1.03	1.01	1.03	1.00
High Alone		1.15	3.70	2.23	1.48	4.31	1.64	1.14
High All		4.08	3.61	3.61	3.49	3.38	3.46	3.38
Moderate All		6.56	2.47	2.65	2.32	2.16	2.16	2.10
Low All		22.45	1.92	2.03	1.37	1.22	1.19	1.05
High Partner		3.36	1.76	4.65	1.27	1.53	4.06	1.14
High Mainstream		4.40	3.40	3.57	3.53	1.21	1.26	1.10
Highest All		3.04	4.88	4.93	4.97	4.83	4.94	5.11

Figure 2. Relationship Stability by Latent Class Group
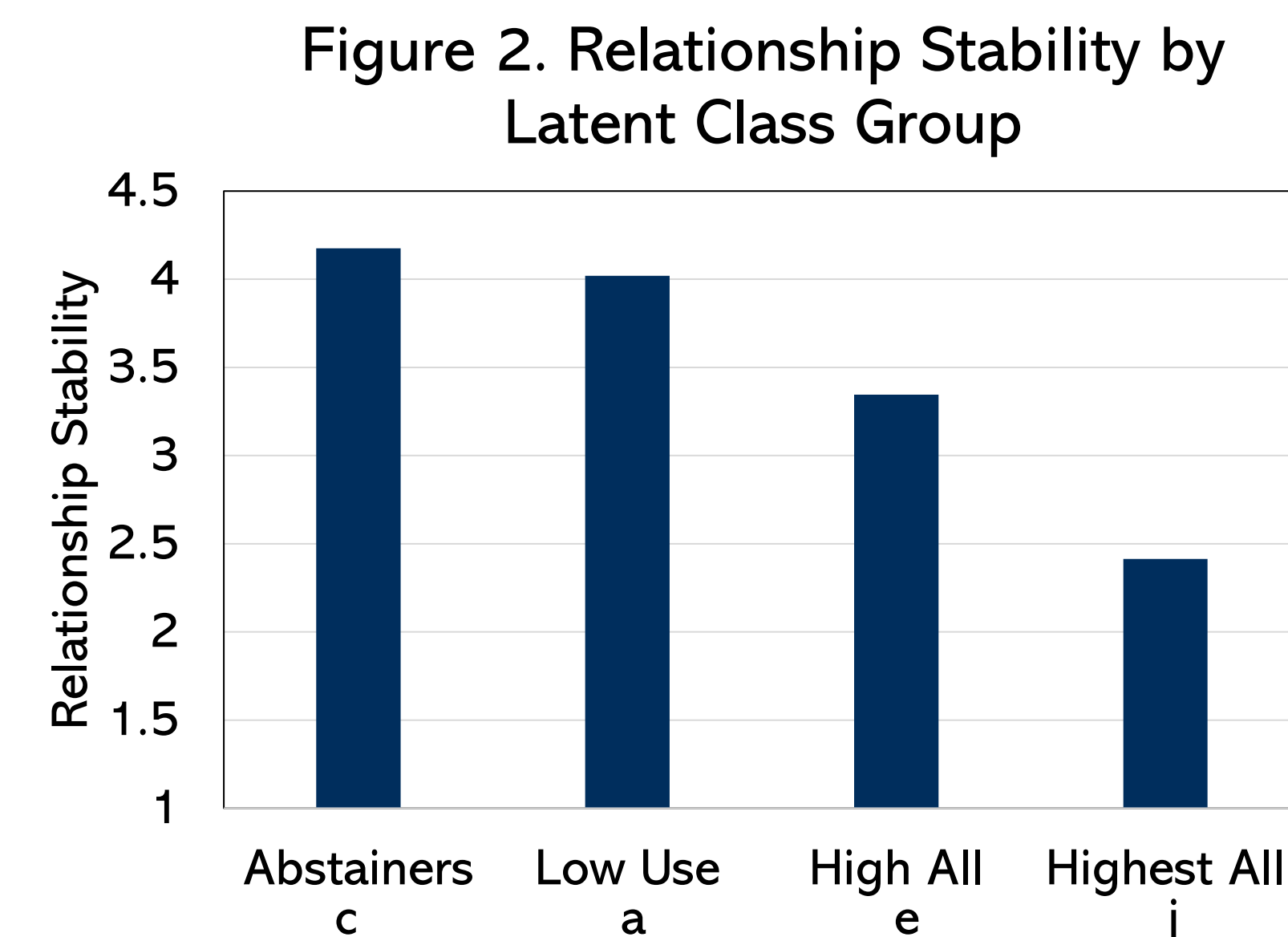
Figure 2. All differences were significant.
Only partial results displayed.

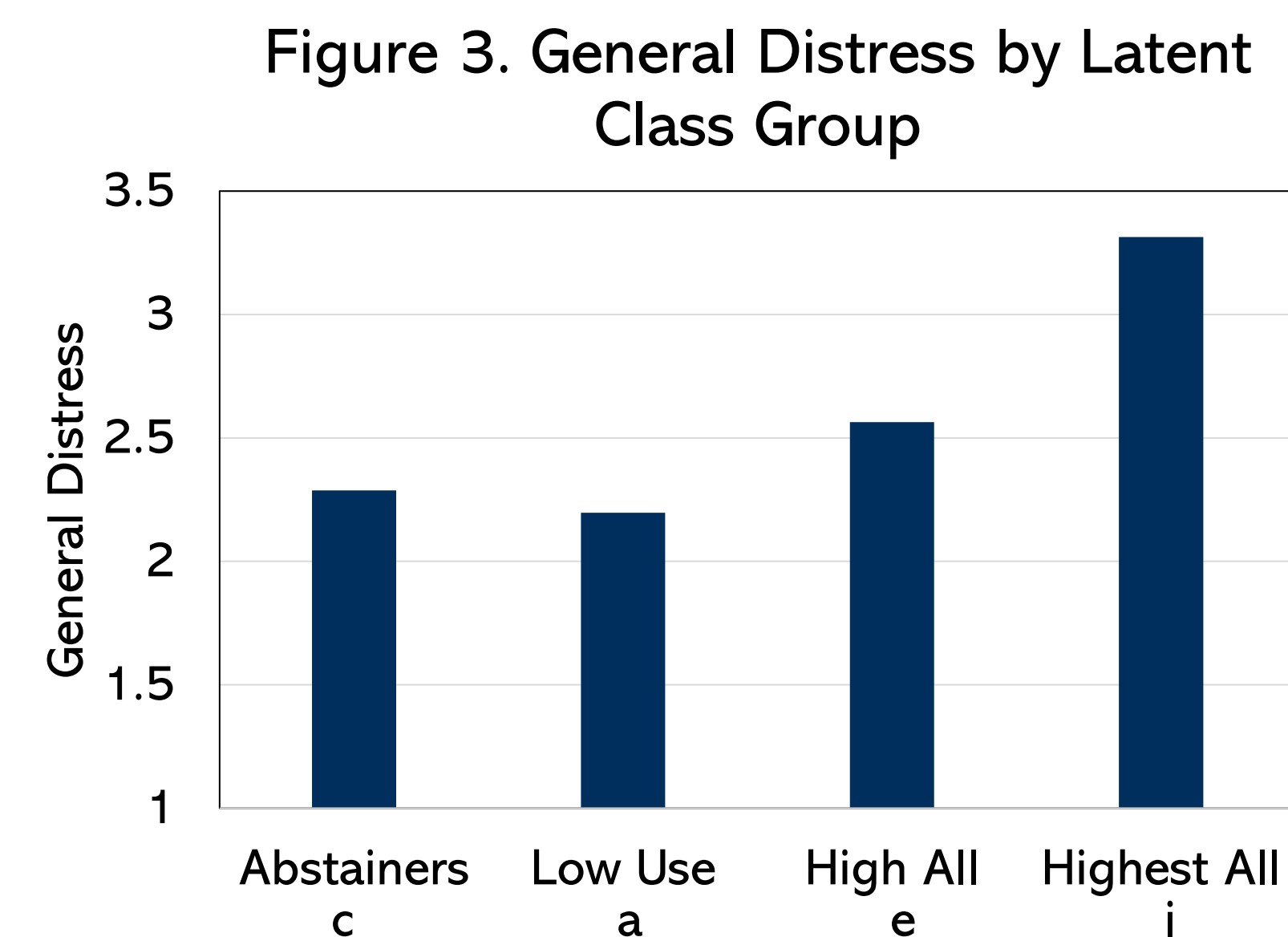Figure 3. General Distress by Latent Class Group

Figure 3. Significant Differences
c: e, j   e: c, a, j
a: e, j   j: c, a, e
Only partial results displayed.

Results

Results from the latent class analysis suggested that the 10-class model was the best fit for the data. Means for mainstream pornography use and violent pornography Phy use are included in the present table (see Table 1) and are the focus of this research. An ANCOVA was conducted to compare sexual satisfaction across the 10 classes. The analysis produced a statistically significant result (F = 43.794, p < .001) that explained 15.0% of the variance in sexual satisfaction. Post-hoc Bonferroni EM (Estimated Marginal) Means were also analyzed and revealed significant differences in means (see Figure 1). Another ANCOVA was run to compare relationship stability. This analysis produced a statistically significant result (F = 71.386, p < .001) with 22.4% of the variance in relationship stability being explained. Post-hoc Bonferroni EM Means revealed significant differences in means (see Figure 2; only the two highest and two lowest classes on pornography use measures were included for the sake of brevity). A final ANCOVA was conducted to compare general distress. The analysis produced a statistically significant result (F = 108.606, p < .001), with the independent variables explaining 31.0% of the variance in general distress. Post-hoc Bonferroni EM Means highlighted significant differences in means (see Figure 3; only the two highest and two lowest classes were included for the sake of brevity). The trend reveals that those in the pornography classes with lower use tended to have more stable relationships, more sexual satisfaction, and less general distress, with those trends reversed for those in pornography classes with higher use.

Discussion

Understanding classes of pornography users is an important advancement in the field of family scholarship and has been attempted by scholars in recent years (Bőthe et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2017a; Brown et al., 2017b; Rasmussen & Bierman, 2018; Rissel et al., 2017; Štulhofer et al., 2019). The latent class analyses completed by these scholars, however, often suffered from small and homogenous samples, as well as poor measures of pornography use. For the first time, research has been completed on a large, nationally representative sample, with focused measures about pornography use and its effects. The clear trend in the outcomes reveals that pornography use generally has negative effects on sexual satisfaction, relationship stability, and general well-being. There are exceptions to this trend, however, such as the 9th class (high on mainstream pornography use), which had the highest sexual satisfaction. One possible explanation is that this group may have higher levels of communication about pornography use which serves as a moderating influence. More research needs to be completed in order to understand this reversed trend. On average, however, there are real negative effects occurring as pornography use increases. This finding demands caution about pornography use for both individuals and couples. With these newly discovered pornography classes, future research can illuminate how these classes vary across demographic characteristics, as well as additional trends in other outcomes.