

women on TOP

The porn industry
has traditionally been seen as a man's
world. But a new sexual revolution is
catering for the female appetite

words: Hannah Bass

It begins like any high society party. Guests in cocktail dresses and chinos sip champagne and make small talk from behind Venetian masks.

But at midnight the atmosphere changes. Two women strip down to lace lingerie and jump into the Jacuzzi, beckoning a couple of blokes to join them.

Soon enough every surface writhes with naked bodies. From behind my mask I behold threesomes, foursomes and fivesomes. A leather-clad dominatrix leads a nude man off into a private room. Another girl approaches me, boyfriend in tow, and whispers in my ear: "We've had our eye on you all night."

I have braved a Killing Kittens party, an orgy for the "sexual elite" where, according to its organisers, "the sole aim is the pursuit of female sexual pleasure".

No-strings sexual gratification, once the preserve of men, has been seized by women hungry for satisfaction. And Killing Kittens is part of the new sex industry cashing in on female desire.

But Killing Kittens isn't any old orgy. Featured in *Tatler* and *Harper's Bazaar* it is an exclusive network whose members are vetted on attractiveness, age and social standing. It is run by Emma Sayle, the daughter of Colonel Guy Sayle OBE and a close friend of the Duchess of Cambridge.

After buying my ticket online, I receive an email confirming the secret location. I am also reminded of "the rules". Men must wait to be approached by women.

**'Women account for
one in three visitors
to porn websites'**

Jo, 28, an advertising executive, has been flitting between couples all night. I ask her what she loves about these parties. "The sense of power is incredible," she says. "I can have any man, or woman, I want."

According to a 2011 study by Dr Terri Conley, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, women are just as likely as men to have casual sex when they can be assured that the encounter will be safe and enjoyable.

"Women are generally more positive towards casual sex than most people assume," Conley says. "And my research suggests that men and women's attitudes and reactions to casual sex would be the same if there were a level playing field."



That is, if women didn't have to worry about issues such as physical safety and the stigma surrounding women having casual sex, they would be as positive as men are about it."

Finella, 24, a secondary school teacher from Shropshire, says she's "stereotypically male" in her attitude to sex. With her Mulberry handbag, pashmina and plummy public school tones, Finella certainly doesn't seem like a sex-mad lad. But that's how she describes herself. "There's that cliché that says men think about sex every seven seconds," she says. "I'm very masculine in that I think about sex a lot. I like sex. A lot."

For Finella, no-strings sex is a unique pleasure. For her casual encounters are a way to experiment and explore. "I'm a bit of an exhibitionist," she says, "and I'd really like to have sex with other people watching. That's something I wouldn't want to do in a relationship because it would affect your private dynamic. For me, casual sex is a safe way of discovering yourself."

However, Finella says she still struggles against the outdated idea that "nice girls don't like sex".

"Sex is always seen as a win for men and something that women should feel a bit ashamed of," she says. "Men can enjoy sex for the sake of it, while women get judged by men and other women for enjoying or getting turned on by it."

Not, however, at a party like Killing Kittens, which Finella will attend in a fortnight. And with over 6,000 Killing Kittens members, 80 per cent of whom are women, there's a clear demand for female-oriented fun. It's a lucrative market: the Hewson Group's 2011 *Women, Sex and Shopping* report found that women spent £6bn last year on sex toys, lingerie and pornography.

If that's surprising, then this is the real shock: women account for one in three visitors to pornographic websites. And girls aren't just watching porn - they're making it too.

Anna Arrowsmith has been directing award-winning pornography since 1998 under the pseudonym Anna Span. Arrowsmith, who is also studying for a doctorate in gender studies, says she was driven by the desire to create a "female Soho", a women's alternative to the sex

industry enjoyed by men.

She says: "Having your own pornography, a representation of your imagination, is vital for having sexual autonomy. A man has the confidence of knowing the world respects his sexuality enough to offer industries that cater to it, regardless of whether or not he chooses to

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use them. Women don't have that."

The common misconception is that only men respond to erotic visual stimulus. Yet a 2008 study found that all women showed signs of physical arousal while watching explicit films - even if they reported no conscious arousal. Perhaps it's just that mainstream porn, with hairy blokes jack hammering away at silicone blondes, makes most women wince.

Arrowsmith's films aim to "bring back the female perspective that's often omitted in porn". Her lens lingers on men chosen for their good looks, and she tries to build a storyline with believable characters.

Through interviewing both men and women about their desires, Anna found that context and detail was important to women. "Men have had their sexuality catered for; they've always had images provided so they've not had to fill the details in with their imagination," she explains. "Women have had the time to go back to the same fantasy and replay it and replay it because they didn't have anything offered to them on a plate."

But the female appetite is being catered for by a burgeoning sex industry powered by women. At Killing Kittens that night, my desire is mistress. It makes for a far more savoury - and sexy - experience than being groped and grinded upon in a nightclub.

As Rihanna, pop's dominatrix *du jour*, sings: "Make me your priority, there's nothing above my pleasure." A new sexual revolution is gathering pace, and this time women are on top. ●