

A Qualitative Exploration of Sleep-Related Sexual Interests: Somnophilia and Dormaphilia

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Abstract

Somnophilia is an under-researched paraphilia. Consequently, there are discrepancies in its definition and conceptual understanding. Also, literature regarding the sexual interest in being asleep during sexual activity (dormaphilia) is even more limited. As such, there is a need to understand these paraphilias more deeply. This study recruited 232 participants online to discuss the content, origin, sexual appeal, emotional appraisal, and behavioural enactment of their somnophilic and dormaphilic interests and fantasies. A Thematic Analysis led to the identification of four main themes: (1) Relevance of Sleep State; (2) Roles within Sleep Sex; (3) Enactment of Sleep Paraphilia and (4) Lack of Consent and Awareness. These four themes spanned across both those reporting somnophilic and dormaphilic fantasies. The Discussion explores the multi-faceted nature of the interests, and implications for the understanding of somnophilia and dormaphilia. This study provides the first qualitative exploration of sleep-related paraphilias, opening avenues for future research and practice.

Keywords

somnophilia, dormaphilia, paraphilia, sexual fantasy, sleep, thematic analysis

Somnophilia, coined by John Money in 1986, generally refers to a sexual interest in engaging in sexual activity with a sleeping person. Other definitions have since been

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offered, although they tend to be inconsistent (Griffiths, 2014; Lauerma, 2016). This appears to be largely due to their emphasis on different elements of the interest (e.g., the specific state, the context, the recipient's reaction, the lack of consent). For example, while Money's (1986) original definition was directed towards sleeping people, subsequent definitions were broadened to encompass 'unconscious' people (e.g., Griffiths, 2014). The definitional waters become further muddied by the terms 'Sleeping Beauty syndrome' and 'sleepysex'.

'Sleeping Beauty syndrome' and somnophilia were originally seen as synonymous (Pettigrew, 2017). This overlap may have stemmed from Money's original definition, as it stated that sexual arousal was dependent upon waking the sleeping party. However, Oeverland (2015) asserted that somnophilia and 'Sleeping Beauty syndrome' are distinct interests, with somnophilia referring to a sexual interest in sleeping partners and 'Sleeping Beauty syndrome' referring to being sexually aroused by observing a sleeping person wake up during the sexual activity. Somnophilia is also sometimes regarded as being synonymous with sleepysex. However, sleepysex refers to one or both partners being in near-sleep states whilst engaging in sexual behaviors (Moss, 2021). Here, sexual arousal is thought to stem from the intimacy of the interaction. These two additional concepts increase the scope of the term somnophilia, making it unclear as to whether it refers to an interest in sleeping people, waking people up, having sex in a sleepy state, or all of the above. Based on this, and the dearth of empirical data on somnophilia, it is difficult to form any firm conclusions about its definition.

Another concept worth noting is the sexual interest in being the recipient of sexual activity while asleep. This sleep-related sexual interest is discussed in forums dedicated to somnophilia but has received no empirical investigation until recently. Using a sample of men and woman recruited from general and somnophilia-focused social media sites, Deehan and Bartels (2021) examined the self-reported interest in being a passive partner during sexual activity (in a consensual context), as well as their use of sexual fantasies involving this scenario. They found that men and women reported an interest in being the passive recipient to an equal degree. They also found that this passive sleep-related sexual interest strongly correlated with the need for sexual submission and the use of masochistic fantasies in both men and women. Deehan and Bartels (2021) termed this sexual interest 'dormaphilia', arguing that it was related to, but distinct from, somnophilia.

The lack of research on somnophilia may be due to its perceived and purported rarity (Lauerma, 2016). However, in their sample of 1516 community participants, Joyal et al. (2015) found that 22.6% of men and 10.8% of women reported fantasizing about "sexually abusing a person who is drunk, asleep, or unconscious". In an online sample of 1036 men and women, Seto et al. (2021) found that the 9% reported an interest in 'somnophilia' (which they defined as "Sex with someone who is unconscious or sleeping") and 7.7% reported having engaged in such behavior. In their study specifically examining somnophilia, Deehan and Bartels (2021) found that 82% ($n = 425$) of their sample reported an interest in consensually engaging in sexual activity with a

sleeping partner, with 47% reporting a somnophilic interest within a non-consensual context. These findings suggest that somnophilia may be more prevalent than initially thought. However, in the studies by [Joyal et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Seto et al. \(2021\)](#), the sleep-related item/s were framed in abusive terms and/or referred to other non-conscious states. Also, the sample used by [Deehan and Bartels \(2021\)](#) included participants recruited from web-based forums and threads dedicated to somnophilia. Thus, the accuracy and specificity of the above findings are confounded by these issues.

The view that somnophilia is rare may also be perpetuated by its perceived association with a lack of consent. Indeed, in discussing the potential motivations underpinning somnophilic behavior, several authors make links between somnophilia and biastophilia, defined as a sexual interest in engaging in non-consensual sex ([Knafo, 2015](#); [Lauerma, 2016](#); [Pettigrew, 2019a, 2019b](#)). This presumed association may influence the definition and perception of somnophilia, potentially leading those with an interest in somnophilia being less likely to openly speak about it. To address this, [Deehan and Bartels \(2021\)](#) investigated whether somnophilic interest was correlated with an interest in non-consensual sex (i.e., rape proclivity and biastophilic fantasies), among other paraphilias thought to also be linked (e.g., necrophilia, sexual sadism). To do this, [Deehan and Bartels \(2021\)](#) developed the Somnophilic Interest and Proclivity Scale (SIPS), which distinguished between consensual somnophilia and non-consensual somnophilia. They found that a greater rape proclivity (in male participants) and the more frequent use of biastophilic fantasies (in female participants) remained significant independent predictors of non-consensual somnophilia, but not consensual somnophilia. This suggests that the interest in non-consensual somnophilia may be distinct from consensual somnophilia, with the former potentially driven by an interest in non-consensual sex more generally. Moreover, it highlights a need to understand what it is that sexually arouses someone with somnophilia. This would also help to resolve some of the definitional issues related to somnophilia.

Arguably, the most direct way to begin understanding what motivates and sexually arouses someone with somnophilia (and dormaphilia) is to ask the individuals who have the interest. Thus, the aim of the present study was to examine the qualitative accounts of community individuals who use somnophilic and/or dormaphilic fantasies with regards to their origin, source of arousal, emotional appraisal, and behavioral enactment. This research project also aimed to further validate the SIPS measure developed by [Deehan and Bartels \(2021\)](#). However, for the purposes of this paper, only the qualitative findings are reported.

Method

Participants

For this online study, participants were recruited via social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook), as well as online forums focused on somnophilia (e.g., Fetlife, Reddit). Study adverts invited participants to take part in an exploratory study on

somnophilia using a basic definition of somnophilia (“the sexual interest in sleeping people”). The adverts did not mention dormophilia as this term was only recently coined and, therefore, is not widely known within the general population. There are also no specific online forums dedicated to dormophilia. This interest is, however, discussed on somnophilia-related forums. Therefore, people with a dormophilic interest would have been recruited via the current sampling method.

An initial sample of 329 participants were recruited. However, 97 participants did not complete the entire study and so were removed from the dataset. In the final sample of 232 participants, 81 identified as male, 142 as female, and nine reported other gender categories. The mean age was 32.12 years old ($SD = 10.15$), with male participants being statistically significantly older ($M = 34.63$, $SD = 12.74$) than female participants ($M = 31.02$, $SD = 8.03$); $t(221) = 2.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.34$. The majority of the sample (67.7%) identified as heterosexual ($n = 157$), with 19.4% identifying as bisexual ($n = 45$), 5.2% as pansexual ($n = 12$), 3.0% as gay ($n = 7$), and 1.3% as lesbian ($n = 3$). Also, 3.5% of the sample ($n = 8$) identified as another sexuality or gave no response. Eighty-one participants (34.9%) identified as single, 69 (29.7%) as being in a relationship, and 67 (28.9%) as married. Regarding where participants saw the study link, 48.3% reported accessing it via fetish forums ($n = 112$) and 43.5% ($n = 101$) reported accessing it through general social media platforms. The remaining participants did not provide this information.

Measures/Materials

This research project was conducted online using Qualtrics and involved participants answering a series of open-ended questions designed to explore somnophilic and dormophilic fantasies in more detail. This was followed by participants completing the SIPS (Deehan & Bartels, 2021) in order to further validate the scale. As stated, for the purposes of this paper, we will only focus on the qualitative findings gained from the open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions: If participants stated that they had previously fantasized about either having sex with someone who was asleep (somnophilia) or someone having sex with them while they were asleep (dormophilia), they were automatically directed to five open-ended questions that asked about various features of their fantasies/interest. These questions were:

- What do you see in your mind’s eye when you fantasize about this?
- What is it about this behavior that you find sexually appealing?
- When and how did this interest (and the fantasies) originate?
- How do you feel emotionally about this sexual interest?
- What hindrances have you experienced (if any) when attempting to act out this interest/fantasy with a consenting partner?

These questions were intended to gather information about the participants' sleep-related interests, fantasies, and associated experiences. Fantasy content and sexual appeal were asked about separately to avoid conflating the context of the fantasy with the driver of sexual interest. Questions about origin and emotions associated were intended to gather further information about participants' relationship with their somnophilic and/or dormaphilic fantasies and interests. Hindrances to realizing their fantasies were included to gain an understanding of the experiences associated with the enactment of the fantasies (for those who had attempted this).

Frequency question: This question assessed how often participants fantasized about somnophilic and/or dormaphilic activities using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Have fantasized about once or twice') to 4 ('Have fantasized about very frequently').

Masturbation question: Participants were asked whether they had masturbated over their reported fantasies and answered either 'Yes' or 'No'.

Behavior question: Participants were asked whether they had acted out their somnophilic and/or dormaphilic fantasies with a consenting partner, using either 'Yes' or 'No' response.

Procedure

Ethical approval for this online study was granted by the University of Lincoln. After clicking on the Qualtrics link, participants were presented with an information sheet explaining the rationale of the study and what they would be asked to do, as well as a written consent form where they were asked to click a button indicating their consent to continue. Those who gave their consent to take part were then asked where they accessed the link for the study. This was done to compare the frequencies of participants recruited from fetish-specific forums and general social media platforms. Participants were then asked to provide demographic information (age, sex at birth, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status). Following this, participants were asked whether they identified as having somnophilia. These data will be used to compare individuals who identify as having somnophilia with those who do not within future quantitative analyses. They were not asked if they identified as having dormophilia as this paraphilia is currently unknown due to being a newly term coined (Deehan & Bartels, 2021). Participants were then asked whether they had ever fantasized about having sex with someone who was asleep, and whether they had ever fantasized about someone having sex with them while they were asleep. If participants responded with a 'Yes' to either of these questions, they were then presented with a set of questions specific to the fantasy they had reported using. These included questions about frequency, masturbation, and whether they had acted out their fantasies, as well as the five open-ended questions described in the Measures section. It was possible for participants to respond 'Yes' to experiencing both somnophilic and dormaphilic fantasies. If this were the case, they would answer the set of questions twice (once for somnophilic fantasies and once for dormaphilic fantasies). Finally, all participants completed the SIPS. They were then debriefed and thanked for their time.

Analytic Approach

To begin, the first author reviewed the datasets and removed those who did not answer the open-ended questions. Due to its exploratory nature, the qualitative data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA) via an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). This approach means that any identified themes will be strongly linked to the data. It also reduces any potential biases of the researchers due to the bottom-up nature of the theme identification (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the initial phase of the TA (data familiarization), the first author immersed themselves in the qualitative data and read the answers to the open-ended questions in isolation of each other. At this stage, initial codes were generated by the first author (the second phase). The unit of analysis was the answers given across all the open-ended questions; not just the answers given to a specific question. This broadened the contextual meaning of the codes and, in turn, the themes that were identified. There were two types of answers to the open-ended questions: (1) short, distinct answers that contained one clear code (e.g., detailing a specific sexual act); and (2) longer, more complex answers (e.g., detailing an elaborated scenario), which included more than one code. For longer or more ambiguous responses, advice was sought from other authors to accurately code them. Answers to the questions pertaining to origin and emotional appraisal were not included in the TA. This decision was made due to the very short and categorical nature of the answers, which rendered the unit of analysis too precise (i.e., they demonstrated no overlap with each other or with other codes derived from the other questions). Thus, rather than create themes that simply reflected the question and/or that lacked context, these categorical answers were counted (see Table 1 and Table 2) and analyzed separately.

During the third phase (searching for themes), all four authors reviewed the codes present in the data and grouped the codes together across the three remaining questions from both the somnophilic and dormaphilic subsamples. Through axial coding, connections between conceptually similar codes were drawn. For example, 'taking control' and 'feeling dominant' were deemed conceptually similar. This method of creating themes based on the codes developed at the open-coding stage led to the identification of themes driven by the data, rather than being established a priori. This resulted in the identification of six themes with an underlying meaning that was relevant across both subsamples. These six themes were then examined by the research team and grouped into three broader (superordinate) themes (see Supplementary Materials for a breakdown of the specific codes and frequencies of each code across the identified superordinate and subordinate themes).

These three final themes (and their two subthemes) were redistributed to the research team for a final review. No further amendments were made, and no further higher-level themes were identified. Detailed discussions were had between the team to label the themes accurately in a manner that represented the content and its specific relevance to sleep-related paraphilias. The final phase (writing up the findings) is presented in the following Results section, wherein each theme is described, along with accompanying extracts where relevant. Please note that, when 'sample/s' is mentioned, it refers to

participants that reported using only somnophilic fantasies or only dormaphilic fantasies. It is important to note that these samples were not dictated by the participants' self-identification response, but rather by their answers to the screening questions prior to the open-ended questions ("Have you ever fantasized about having sex with a sleeping person?" and "Have you ever fantasized about someone having sex with you while you were asleep?", respectively). Please see Supplementary Materials (S1) for details on how the researchers ensured methodological rigor in line with the markers of quality for qualitative research provided by Tracy (2010).

Results

Within the final sample ($N = 232$), 114 participants (49.1%) identified as having somnophilia, with 116 (50%) reporting that they did not. Two participants (0.8%) did not provide this information. When asked if they had ever fantasized about having sex with someone who was asleep (somnophilic fantasies) or being the recipient of sex whilst they themselves were asleep (dormaphilic fantasies), 33 (14.2%) reported using only somnophilic fantasies, 53 (22.8%) reported using only dormaphilic fantasies, and 80 participants (34.5%) reported using both. Sixty-six (28.4%) participants reported using neither fantasy.

Although participants recruited from fetish-specific forums fantasized about somnophilia ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.93$) more frequently than those recruited from social media sites ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.06$), the difference was not statistically significant, $t(111) = 1.72$, $p = .09$. However, in line with Cohen's guidelines (1988), the difference was of a medium magnitude ($d = 0.35$). The frequency of dormaphilic fantasies was found to be significantly greater in those recruited from fetish forums ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.97$) compared to those recruited from general social media platforms ($M = 1.86$, $SD = 1.02$), $t(131) = 6.08$, $p < .001$. The size of this effect was large ($d = 1.09$). Furthermore, compared to those recruited from social media sites, a significantly greater proportion of participants from fetish forums reported masturbating to dormaphilic fantasies (55.4% vs. 14.9%), $\chi(1) = 11.32$, $p < .01$. Although more participants recruited from fetish sites masturbated to somnophilic fantasies, compared to those recruited via social media (58.9% vs. 12.9%), the difference was not statistically significant, $\chi(1) = 3.66$, $p = .06$. Similarly, although more participants recruited from fetish sites reported attempting somnophilic behavior with a consenting partner than those recruited via social media (49.1% vs. 12.9%), the difference was not significant, $\chi(1) = .35$, $p = .55$. However, participants recruited from fetish sites reported acting on their dormaphilic fantasies at a significantly higher frequency than those recruited from social media (49.1% vs. 15.8%), $\chi(1) = 5.35$, $p < .05$.

Origin and Emotional Appraisal

As mentioned, responses to the questions about the origin and emotional appraisal of sleep-related paraphilias were not thematically analyzed. This was due to the brief and categorical

nature. Instead, the categorical responses were summed into four broad categories for both samples. As shown in [Table 1](#), childhood/adolescence was the most common origin for somnophilic fantasies (32.1%). The most common origin reported for dormaphilic fantasies was previous behavior or partners (23.5%). Comparatively, however, this origin was more common in those who reported somnophilic fantasies (27.7%).

Regarding emotional appraisal, [Table 2](#) shows that both samples reported positive emotions towards their sleep-related interest. However, a statistically greater proportion of participants with dormaphilic fantasies (48.5%) reported positive appraisals compared to those who used somnophilic fantasies (34.2%). Some participants were clear to state that they felt positive as long as consent was clear granted from the passive party. A statistically greater proportion of those reporting somnophilic fantasies (16.7%) reported this condition, relative to those reporting dormaphilic fantasies (8.8%). Also, more participants who used somnophilic fantasies reported negative emotions (21.9%) compared to those who used dormaphilic fantasies (10.3%).

Thematic Analysis

Six final themes were produced from the TA, which were subsumed under three superordinate themes. [Figure 1](#) shows these three superordinate themes and their corresponding subthemes. Each theme pertains to both somnophilic and dormaphilic fantasies. Thus, for clarity, we report the results separately for each type. It should be noted that some participants reported using both types of sleep-related fantasies.

Theme 1: Relevance of Sleep State

The relevance of the sleep state to participants' fantasies was a clear theme within the data. This was comprised of two subcategories: 'Sleep State' (where sleep was identified as a key visceral component within one's sexual fantasy content) and 'Sleep as enabler' (where sleep was identified as a means of being able to enact other behavior that may have been more difficult or prohibited while the passive person was awake) ([Figure 2](#)).

Table 1. Frequencies of Origins for Somnophilic and Dormaphilic Fantasies.

	Somnophilia (<i>n</i> = 112)		Dormaphilia (<i>n</i> = 136)		Chi-Square		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>df</i>	X^2	<i>p</i>
Pornography	13	11.6	11	8.1	1	23.45	<.001
Previous behavior or partner	31	27.7	32	23.5	1	6.66	.01
Childhood or teenage years	36	32.1	33	19.6	1	7.67	<.01
Other source	14	12.5	22	16.2	1	18.28	<.001
Unsure	10	8.9	20	14.7	1	3.32	.07
Not answered	8	7.1	18	13.2	1	13.55	<.001

Table 2. Frequency of Emotions Associated With Somnophilic and Dormaphilic Fantasies.

	Somnophilia (n = 114)		Dormaphilia (n = 136)		Chi-Square		
	n	%	n	%	Df	X ²	p
Positive	39	34.2	66	48.5	1	6.24	.01
Positive (with consent)	19	16.7	12	8.8	1	11.87	<.01
Negative	25	21.9	14	10.3	1	9.44	<.01
Unsure	16	14.0	23	16.9	1	0.38	.54
Not answered	15	13.2	21	15.4	1	25.11	<.001

Note. The categories 'Positive' and 'Positive (with consent)' are mutually exclusive.

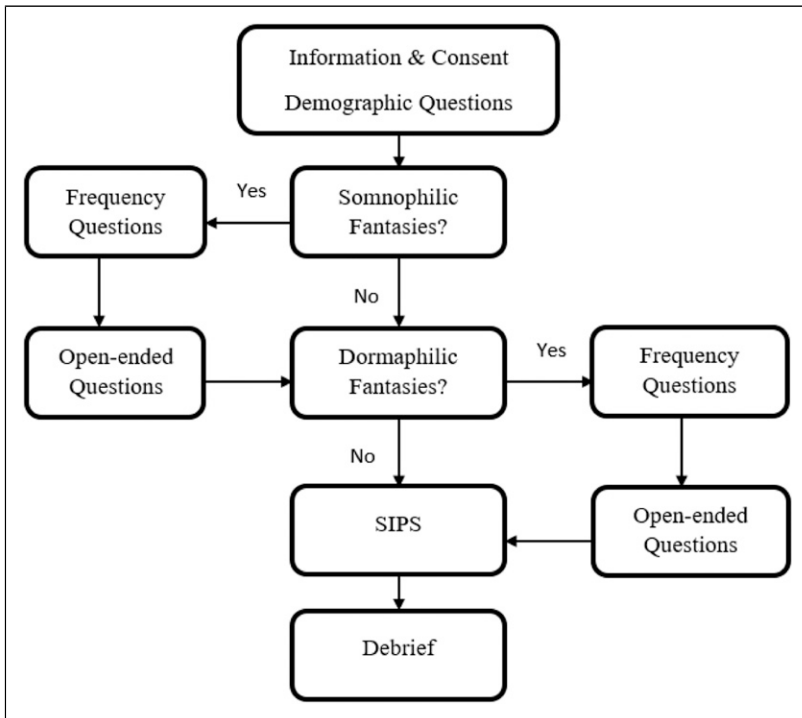


Figure 1. Flowchart detailing the procedure of the study.

'Sleep State' Subtheme. When describing what they saw in their mind when fantasizing about somnophilia or dormaphilia, the sleep state itself was a core element. As stated, the results are described separately for somnophilic fantasies and dormaphilic fantasies.

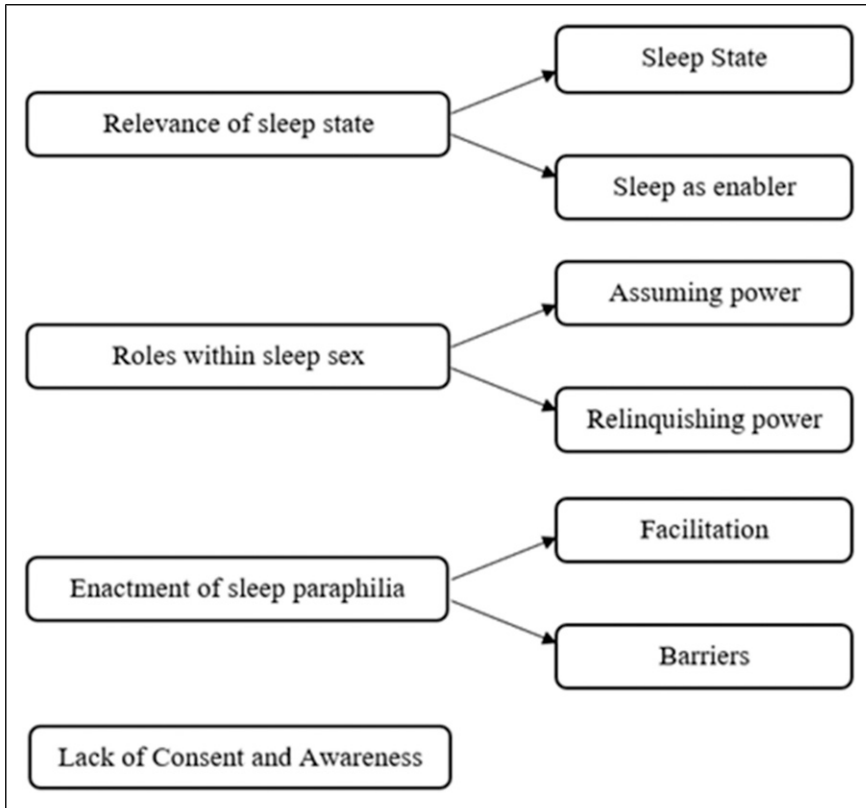


Figure 2. A visual representation of the themes and subthemes identified in this study.

Somnophilia. In those reporting somnophilic fantasies, the sleeping person was described as beautiful and desirable. Also, both ‘falling asleep’ and ‘waking up’ were mentioned as being vital elements in both samples. For example, 10.7% of participants who reported somnophilic fantasies stated that envisioning the passive partner waking up was a key element of their fantasy, while another 12.5% of participants stated that the passive partner awakening was key to the sexual appeal of the fantasy. Also, 6.3% of participants reporting somnophilic fantasies mentioned that watching the passive partner fall asleep was a key element of their fantasy. They also often reported positive emotional states (such as surprise and pleasure) when discussing the passive partner waking up (“*The sleepiness/dreary eyed starts as cute then when awake the enthusiasm is sexy. For the other party to be excited after waking also adds a feeling of being wanted*” - Participant 2).

Dormaphilia. In those who reported dormaphilic fantasies, 25.7% stated that waking up played a key part in their fantasy, and that this was the point at which their fantasy began. Also, 8.1% of participants reported that their fantasies were viewed from an outside perspective (e.g., looking down on themselves in bed as the scenario played out). A small proportion of participants (2.9%) wished to be presented with physical evidence of the interaction after waking up (e.g., video evidence). This suggests that, for those interested in dormaphilia, there is a split between those who wish to wake up and those who wish to remain asleep during the interaction. Also, participants reporting dormaphilic fantasies stated that being awoken by sex was either the “*best possible way to wake up*” (Participant 62) or a relaxed way to begin sexual activity once awake. Others made positive references to pretending to be asleep during the sexual activity (“*Pretending to be asleep but really liking it but having the power to deny it ever happened*” - Participant 105).

‘Sleep as Enabler’ Subtheme. Many participants mentioned how the sleep state of the passive partner acted as an enabler for other key elements of their fantasies. Both subsamples commonly stated that the feeling of desire was, for them, a key element of the sexual appeal.

Somnophilia. In those participants who reported somnophilic fantasies, 5.4% stated feeling a strong level of desire for seeing their partner in the passive state (“*It is another way of making love to my girlfriend whether she is asleep or awake. She is irresistible and beautiful in her sleep*” - Participant 123). A few participants reported that the sleep state of the passive person removed obstacles from the sexual interaction, which they found appealing. For example, 3.6% of participants who reported somnophilic fantasies stated that the lack of resistance from the passive partner was sexually appealing (“*I think it’s the feeling of intimacy/closeness without resistance*” - Participant 27), while another 3.6% found the lack of rejection or pressure from the passive partner to be appealing (“*I feel as if I can take as long as I want and need to without any pressures or rejections*” - Participant 123). This suggests that the sleep state enabled these participants to engage in sexual activity more easily, as they did not have to manage the expectations or reaction of the passive partner. This lack of interaction between the active and passive partners was described by one participant as “*Closeness without having to deal with social interaction/relationship*” (Participant 82).

Dormaphilia. Of those participants reporting dormaphilic fantasies, 19.1% stated that sexual activity (while they were asleep) made them feel they were attractive and desirable to their partner (“*someone wants you so much that he can’t wait for you to awake*” - Participant 29). This feeling of desirability was strongly linked to the high levels of trust within the partnership. Notably, these statements of desirability were often made in relation to a specific partner being in the active role, as opposed to an unknown individual. This suggests a preference for an existing relationship to be present before the behavior takes place (“*Something about your partner not being able*

to wait until you wake up that they have to have you there and then” - Participant 6). Also, 4.4% of participants reporting dormaphilic fantasies stated that being in the passive role made them feel relaxed and that it put no pressure upon them. One participant expanded on this by stating: “When I’m the one sleeping, I also like the lack of responsibility and the lack of having to partake in social interactions and taking initiative and stuff” (Participant 17).

Theme 2: Roles Within Sleep Sex. Somnophilic and dormaphilic behavior involves two clear roles: namely, being the active partner and being the passive partner. However, participants discussed how these roles comprised other dynamics within the relationship. These can be described as one partner ‘assuming power’ within the dynamic and one partner ‘relinquishing power’ (Figure 2). These terms were derived from Brown et al. (2021) as they aptly describe the scenarios presented within the present data. They also allow us to avoid using or applying labels that may have varying connotations, such as dominant and submissive (Moser & Kleinplatz, 2007).

‘Assuming Power’ Subtheme

Somnophilia. When discussing what they envisioned when fantasizing about somnophilic behavior, only one participant referenced being in control. However, when describing what they found sexually appealing about somnophilia, 30.4% participants mentioned the act of taking control, being dominant, and, as Participant 82 stated, having “total power” over the passive partner. Some participants described being able to control their partner’s body, as well as controlling what occurred within the sexual encounter without having to interact with their partner (“Somnophilia puts me in charge, and it allows things to be attempted that can’t be done if the other person is awake” - Participant 48). Some also mentioned the passive partner’s inability to resist the situation or the advances of the active partner. Here, the appeal of somnophilia lay in the guarantee of control (“They cannot resist, and only biological function is present but no memory afterwards” - Participant 167).

Dormaphilia. This subtheme was not prevalent within the data provided by those with dormaphilic fantasies. However, as mentioned earlier, one participant did mention that, by pretending to be asleep during the sexual activity, they hold the power to deny that anything happened (Participant 105).

‘Relinquishing Power’ Subtheme

Somnophilia. Evidence of ‘Relinquishing power’ was present within the accounts provided by those who engaged in somnophilic fantasies, although it was in reference to the other party. For example, 8.9% of these participants explicitly mentioned the vulnerability of the passive partner and how this was a key element of their fantasy (“Taking advantage of someone who is in a vulnerable position” - Participant 154). Also, 3.6% of participants referenced the strong level of trust between themselves and their partner. This was often referenced as being a sexually appealing aspect. For

example, one participant found it appealing “*that [he was] being totally trusted*” (Participant 33).

Dormaphilia. Within those participants reporting dormaphilic fantasies, 15.4% reported that the fantasy content (and its sexual appeal) was based on their own vulnerability, while 2.2% reported that it was the lack of control. The phrase ‘*taken advantage of*’ was used frequently. This suggests that these participants view dormaphilic interactions as a means to fulfil the active partner’s wishes, which they find sexually appealing (“*I am asleep. Seeing someone take control of my body and having their way*” - Participant 16). Also, 1.5% of those reporting dormaphilic fantasies referred to the strong level of trust between the two partners.

Theme 3: Enactment of Sleep Paraphilia. When describing their fantasies, the sexual appeal, and behavioral enactment, participants in both samples often mentioned the factors that both facilitated and obstructed the behavior and/or the enactment of their fantasies. Thus, the Enactment of Sleep Paraphilia theme was split into two subthemes: ‘Facilitation’ and ‘Barriers’ (Figure 2).

‘Facilitation’ Subtheme. Participants frequently mentioned specific behaviors as being the key element of their fantasy, rather than solely referring to the sleep state (see ‘Sleep state as enabler’ subtheme). These behaviors ranged from behavioral descriptors (e.g., ‘rough’ and ‘sensual’) to a wider variety of specific sexual acts, scenarios, or positions.

Somnophilia. Of the participants reporting somnophilic fantasies, 17.0% mentioned a specific behavior (such as oral sex) compared to 18.4% of participants who reported dormaphilic fantasies. Also, 16.1% made specific reference to the partner they pictured. This varied from a current partner to an ex-partner to someone that they wanted to be partnered with. Another element mentioned was the use of substances to facilitate a sleep state in the passive partner. This varied in accordance with the context. For example, there was mention of active participants using specific drugs to put someone to sleep (“*Myself being tied down and forcefully put to sleep by the use of an anaesthesia mask, or chloroform, or an injection, or a pill, or an IV drip*” - Participant 17), while others discussed encountering someone who was unconscious due to self-administered drugs or alcohol (“*Almost always the person will be passed out drunk and completely unresponsive*” - Participant 84).

Dormaphilia. Of those who reported dormaphilic fantasies, 18.4% referred to specific behaviors, while 15.4% made specific reference to the person they pictured (e.g., a partner, ex-partner, an idealized partner). Also, 5.9% mentioned the use of substances to facilitate a sleep state in themselves and the desired enactment of the fantasy.

‘Barriers’ Subtheme. The most common barrier to enacting somnophilic behaviors differed to those related to enacting dormaphilic behaviors. This is understandable given the contrast in control over the situation.

Somnophilia. For participants who reported somnophilic fantasies, 18.8% stated that the passive partner waking up was the biggest barrier to enacting their fantasies. One participant spoke about the frustration they felt towards their partner waking up during the scenario ("*Some partners sleep too lightly, and/or the over the counter sleeping aids are not strong enough to keep them asleep for the entire time. It's incredibly frustrating to have them wake up before I intend*" - Participant 61). These findings are notable as they stand in contrast to those who find the passive partner waking up to be sexually appealing when (see 'Sleep State' subtheme). Other barriers included a lack of interest from their partners (10.7%) and that fact that they had not disclosed the interest to their partners (12.5%). The latter was often related to concerns about being judged or misunderstood. For example, one participant stated that they had not found a way of "*articulating how much I like this play without sounding creepy*" (Participant 55). This is also of note because, as detailed in the final theme, the lack of awareness and consent from the passive partner was a sexually appealing factor for some participants. This suggests that a lack of awareness/consent is an element that elicits differential reactions within those reporting somnophilic fantasies.

Further, 7.1% of participants reporting somnophilic fantasies mentioned physical restrictions as a barrier to enacting the fantasy. This included difficulties maneuvering the sleeping person into an appropriate position. Also, 5.4% of participants stated that a lack of explicit consent would be a barrier for them. For 5.4% of those reporting somnophilia fantasies also mentioned physical safety as a barrier, such as administering the appropriate level of substances to maintain a sleep state without causing health concerns.

Dormaphilia. The most discussed barrier to enacting a dormaphilic fantasy was a lack of interest from the other party (16.9%). As dormaphilic interactions require another party to be interested and play the active role, a lack of interest is a logical barrier to encounter. Some participants mentioned that their partners had tried to assume the role but felt it was "*weird because [they felt] like it [was] rapey*" (Participant 79) and that they "*felt guilty after*" (Participant 87). Participants who reported dormaphilic fantasies also mentioned a lack of communication with their partner (10.3%) and the fact that they themselves kept waking up during the scenario (12.5%). This means that the three most mentioned barriers were consistent across both samples. One participant stated that they had not disclosed their fantasy with a partner because it dampened its appeal ("*I feel like it loses the appeal for me if I have to ask someone to do it*" - Participant 94).

Physical safety was not considered a barrier by those reporting dormaphilic fantasies. However, 6.6% of participants reporting dormaphilic fantasies mentioned some physical restrictions as a barrier, such needing to go to the toilet, painfulness, not being in the "*best position*", or being too tired upon awakening. Only 0.7% stated that a lack of explicit consent would be a barrier for them, while 1.5% of participants spoke about potential feelings of 'violation' after the scenario. One of these participants summarized

this by saying that their communication involved “*finding a balance between safe roleplay and real feelings*” (Participant 17).

Theme 4: Lack of Consent and Awareness

Some participants mentioned that a lack of consent was an appealing feature of their fantasies. Given the important implications this has for understanding the possible link between somnophilia and sexual offending in some individuals, this finding was isolated as a specific theme.

Somnophilia. For those reporting somnophilic fantasies, 8.9% mentioned that their fantasies featured a lack of consent. Two participants (1.8%) explicitly mentioned rape (e.g., “the idea of rape”, “rapey fetish”) as being a sexually appealing aspect of their somnophilic fantasies. Two other participants (1.8%) mentioned that the idea of ‘consensual non-consent’ was sexually appealing. These comments were accompanied by the sexual appeal of being in control. A post-hoc exploration of the data revealed that these comments were made by those who reported using both somnophilic and dormaphilic fantasies.

Some participants did not explicitly mention a lack of consent but, instead, provided statements that potentially imply non-consent. For example, a further 10 participants (8.9%) stated that the passive partner’s lack of awareness was sexually appealing (seven of these participants also reported using dormaphilic fantasies). Also, several participants who reported somnophilic fantasies also referenced the feeling of risk (including the taboo nature of the act, feelings of danger, the idea of “not getting caught”, and “mischief”). This aspect of risk was reported to be sexually appealing by 12.5% of participants; one of which had also mentioned “rape”, and two who had also mentioned lack of awareness.

Dormaphilia. Of those participants who reported dormaphilic fantasies, 0.7% of them explicitly mentioned that a lack of consent was present within their fantasy content. Five participants (3.7%) stated that the idea of non-consent was sexually appealing. One of these participants mentioned that what they see in their mind’s eye is “*something close to a rape, but there is no struggle*”. Another of these participants (who also used somnophilic fantasies) specifically mentioned “*consensual non-consent*” as being an appealing factor. As seen with somnophilic fantasies, some participants (2.2%) mentioned a lack of awareness being present in their dormaphilic fantasies (i.e., not knowing what happens to them while asleep), which two participants found sexually appealing. Two others referenced the notion of ‘mystery’, which may be analogous to the idea of “not knowing” what has occurred. Each of these participants also reported using somnophilic fantasies. Finally, a few participants (2.2%) mentioned that the taboo nature of the dormaphilic act was the sexually appealing aspect of their fantasy.

Discussion

This study aimed to gain a deeper insight into the content, origin, source of sexual arousal, and emotional appraisal of somnophilia and dormaphilia and associated fantasies, as well as participants' experiences of behaviorally enacting these fantasies. Since participants provided brief and categorical answers regarding the emotional appraisal and origin of their interests/fantasies, these responses were not thematically analyzed. Instead, they were subsumed under broad categories in a bottom-up manner. For the fantasy origin question, these categories were pornography, previous behavior or partner, childhood or teenage years, and other sources. Relative to dormaphilic fantasies, somnophilic fantasies originated from pornography, previous behaviors/partners, and childhood/teenage years. This may indicate that somnophilia is acquired or learned from external sources and/or prior experience (Laws & Marshall, 1990). However, it is possible that pornography and/or prior experiences led to the acquisition of specific fantasy content (Gee et al., 2006), rather than the acquisition of the interest itself. Also, the reported sources may overlap. That is, for some participants, somnophilic fantasies may have originated from pornography during adolescence. Thus, some may have reported 'pornography' while others may have reported 'adolescence'. Further research is, therefore, needed to unpack these nuances surrounding the origin and development of somnophilia and associated fantasies. Compared to somnophilic fantasies, dormaphilia fantasies originated more from other sources, such as consuming media (e.g., films and stories based on the fairytale 'Sleeping Beauty').

Regarding emotional appraisal, responses were categorized as positive, positive contingent on consent being given, and negative. Relative to dormaphilia, somnophilia tended to be regarded as negative. Dormaphilia, on the other hand, was associated with more positive appraisals relative to somnophilia. However, somnophilia was regarded as positive if consent was obtained, relative to dormaphilia. These findings may indicate that some participants perceive their somnophilic interest as problematic. This could be due to its presumed link with non-consensual sex, particularly given that consent was emphasized by several participants. This was also reflected in the 'Barriers' subtheme identified via the thematic analysis, wherein some participants reported difficulties disclosing their fantasies to partners due to fears of seeming 'creepy'. Dormaphilia may be perceived as less problematic (and thus more positive) because it involves being in a passive role. The problem of seeming 'creepy' is, instead, an issue for the person in the active role. Indeed, participants with dormaphilic fantasies described their partners as being reluctant to take on the active role due to its perceived conflation with rape.

The qualitative accounts pertaining to the content, sexual appeal, and behavioral enactment of sleep-related interests/fantasies were thematically analyzed, resulting in the identification of three superordinate themes. These were labelled as: (1) *Relevance of Sleep State*; (2) *Roles within Sleep Sex*; and (3) *Enactment of Sleep Paraphilia*, each of which contained two subthemes. These themes were present within the data provided by those reporting somnophilic fantasies and those reporting dormaphilic fantasies.

However, the nature of these themes varied according to the specific type of interest. Thus, we will discuss what the findings have informed us about each sexual interest separately.

Somnophilia

One definition of somnophilia is “an attraction to the sleeping/unconscious” (Pettigrew, 2017, p. 351). This definition aligns with an object-oriented paraphilia, wherein the object is not a specific category of person (e.g., adult, child) but rather a person in a specific state (i.e., asleep). Indeed, participants in the present study described sleeping people as beautiful and irresistible. However, somnophilia has also been defined as an interest in having sex with a sleeping person (Deehan & Bartels, 2021; Pettigrew, 2017). Given that this definition includes an interactional element, it may be a manifestation of a broader attraction to passivity, as previously proposed in the literature (see Pettigrew & Deehan, 2021). Indeed, as found within the *Sleep as Enabler* subtheme, participants reported that a lack of resistance or social interaction (enabled by the sleep state) was sexually appealing. According to Fedoroff et al. (1997), the appeal of passivity may stem from a fear of rejection. This appeared to be the case for some of our participants, as a lack of rejection was reported to be important within the *Sleep as Enabler* subtheme. This may be influenced by sexual functioning problems or perceived sexual performance issues. Future research could, therefore, examine whether factors such rejection sensitivity, sexual inhibition, sexual self-consciousness, and/or sexual functioning issues are associated with somnophilic fantasies. If they are, it would highlight an area to address in treatment for those whose somnophilic interest causes distress to oneself and/or others.

A desire to dominate someone may be another reason for why sex with a passive, sleeping person is appealing (Fedoroff et al., 1997). Indeed, a need for sexual dominance is associated with somnophilic interest (Deehan & Bartels, 2021) and is supported by the *Assuming Power* subtheme within the present study. For example, participants referred to dominance, control, and power as being a sexually appealing aspect of a somnophilic encounter. Here, the sleep state is crucial as it places the person in a vulnerable position, helping to guarantee control over them and perform behaviors that one cannot do with someone who is awake. This shows a link between the *Sleep as Enabler* and *Assuming Power* subthemes, in that, sleep not only acts as an enabler for other sexual behaviors (e.g., oral sex) but also for the acquisition of a certain state (e.g., a feeling of power).

It should be noted that, within the *Facilitation* subtheme, many participants emphasized the importance of trust and gaining consent before engaging in somnophilic behavior. Arguably, these participants harbor what Deehan and Bartels (2021) termed consensual somnophilia. However, as outlined in the *Lack of Consent and Awareness* theme, a small proportion of participants reported that a lack of consent was an appealing aspect of their somnophilic fantasies. It can be argued that these participants hold an interest in non-consensual somnophilia (Deehan & Bartels, 2021). It should be

noted that we did not separately ask about consensual and non-consensual fantasies in our open-ended questions. Thus, the proportion of participants harboring non-consensual somnophilia may be higher in this study. Nevertheless, the fact that some participants did report an interest in non-consensual sexual behavior (within a sleeping context) needs to be recognized given the links it has with offending behavior. As outlined by the Motivation-Facilitation Model (Seto, 2019), an offence-related paraphilic interest or fantasy can provide the motivation to offend, which is likely to occur if certain state or trait facilitatory factors are present (e.g., antisocial traits, offence-supportive cognitions, self-regulation problems, alcohol use). This model highlights the importance of not equating interest with behavior, whilst acknowledging the key role that an interest *can* play. Thus, in the present study, it is possible that the participants do not harbor any facilitatory factors to offend, only the interest itself. Indeed, two participants referred to the appeal of ‘consensual non-consent’, suggesting that consent from the passive person is important to them. Similarly, another participant (who referenced ‘rape fetish’) noted that a lack of consent would be barrier to enactment. This highlights the complexity of consent within somnophilic interactions, which requires direct examination in future research. Of course, the proposition that our participants lack facilitatory factors cannot be confirmed from the present data. Therefore, future research also needs to establish the factors that moderate the link between somnophilia (consensual or non-consensual) and sexual offending behavior against a sleeping person.

Another point noted in the *Lack of Consent and Awareness* theme was that a lack of awareness (on the part of the passive person) was an appealing aspect of some participants’ somnophilic fantasies. This may imply an interest in non-consent or may be an arousing feature that stems from an interest in non-consensual behavior (in the context of sleep). On the other hand, the lack of awareness may be distinct from a lack of consent. For example, it may be more closely linked to the need for control and dominance. Knowing the passive person lacks awareness could even be a source of arousal in and of itself, which the sleep state enables (similar to wearing a blindfold, wherein the active person enjoys performing actions that the blindfolded person is not fully aware of due to their lack of sight). This is certainly an area for future research to explore before any firm conclusions are drawn.

It should be noted that the majority of participants who mentioned a lack of consent and awareness as being appealing reported using both somnophilic and dormaphilic fantasies. This may suggest that those who hold both sleep-related interests are more likely to enjoy the idea of engaging in non-consensual behavior. This may be driven by a primary biastophilic interest. Alternatively, because they enjoy fantasizing about themselves in a non-consenting role whilst sleeping (non-consenting dormaphilia), they project this interest on to the passive person within their somnophilic fantasies. Whatever the reason, those with both interests may form a subgroup that differs from those who harbor only somnophilia or only dormaphilia. Thus, future researchers may wish to explore potential differences between these subgroups.

Money (1986) proposed a different definition of somnophilia, wherein the sexual response depends on intruding upon a sleeping person and awakening them with sexual behaviors. This was partially supported by the *Sleep State* subtheme where, for some participants, a key and sexually appealing part of their fantasy was having the sleeping person wake up. Although Money (1986) did not explain why individuals are aroused by this, findings from the *Sleep State* subtheme suggest that it is influenced by seeing the sleeping party's emotional reaction when they awake. These emotional reactions included pleasure, enthusiasm, and excitement, which made the active participants feel desired. Perhaps, for some individuals, somnophilic behavior provides a way to determine if they are desired by their partner or other people more generally. Indeed, feeling desired is an important aspect of sexual behavior and can enhance sexual arousal in women (Graham et al., 2004) and sexual satisfaction in men (Murray & Brotto, 2021).

It should be noted, however, that Money's (1986) definition is incomplete. That is, within the *Sleep State* subtheme, participants stated that seeing someone fall asleep was the key element within their fantasies. Moreover, approximately half of the participants with a somnophilic interest preferred that the sleeping person did not wake up. In conjunction with the *Assuming Power* and *Sleep as Enabler* subthemes, this finding may be explained by a desire to remain in control throughout the encounter, or the need to avoid rejection. It may also be explained by both, depending on the needs of the individual. Either way, if the person wakes up, control may be lost, or rejection may be experienced. As indicated in the *Barriers* subtheme, having a partner wake up was the main hindrance to enacting a somnophilic fantasy, even with the use of sleeping aids.

Based on the present findings, the answer to what is the 'true' definition of somnophilia is not a straightforward one. The relevance of the sleep state is a clear defining feature. However, the nature of its relevance is multi-faceted, offering different functions for different subgroups of people. This may indicate that the manifestation of somnophilia, both in fantasy and behaviorally, is influenced by the profile (e.g., beliefs, background, personality) of the person with the interest. Put differently, there may be different subtypes of somnophilia. Indeed, Deehan and Bartels (2021) argued that consensual and non-consensual somnophilia can be viewed as distinct interests. The results of the present study suggest that the sexual interest in sleeping partners is distinct from the sexual interest in observing a sleeping person waking up whilst engaging in sexual activity with them. This aligns with Oeverland's (2015) proposed distinction between somnophilia and 'Sleeping Beauty syndrome', respectively. Future research could examine the possibility of such subtypes from a quantitative perspective. If corroborated, it would indicate that more specificity is needed when assessing sleep-related paraphilias. It could also mean that the different interests have differing treatment needs for those who seek or require help with managing their interest.

Dormaphilia

Historically, the sexual interest in being the recipient of sexual activity whilst asleep was devoid of a technical term (Money, 1986) and lacked empirical investigation.

However, Deehan and Bartels (2021) recently examined this interest, which they named ‘dormaphilia’. As indicated in the definition above, dormaphilia does not refer to being sexually aroused by the idea of being asleep. There was also no evidence for this being the case in the present study. Instead, the interest seems to be confined to the receipt of sexual advances while in a sleep state. The nature of this paraphilia is, therefore, interesting as it reflects a behavior enacted by someone else upon the person with the interest. This is somewhat similar to masochism. Incidentally, Deehan and Bartels (2021) found that dormaphilia was positively associated with the use of masochistic fantasies, as well as the need for sexual submission. This may indicate that dormaphilia is underpinned by a desire to submit to the sexual will of another. Indeed, as indicated in the *Sleep State* and *Relinquishing Power* subthemes, many participants reported enjoying the idea of being taken advantage of and abandoning power/control (via a dormaphilic interaction). A few also fantasized about not consenting to the sexual behaviors. It is possible that the appeal of relinquishing power in this context is increased by the feeling of being highly desired. Indeed, prior research has found that women tend to be sexually aroused by their partner’s desire for them (Graham et al., 2004). Moreover, as indicated in the *Sleep as Enabler* subtheme, many participants reported feeling attractive and highly desired due to their partner not being able wait until they are awake to engage in sexual behavior with them. However, an issue for some, as noted in the *Barriers* subtheme, was the loss of appeal by asking a partner to do this. It is essentially akin to asking their partner to desire them.

One question raised by Deehan and Bartels (2021) was “how one achieves gratification by acting upon a dormaphilic interest with a consenting and willing partner” (p. 218). Unlike masochism, people with dormaphilia need to be asleep for their fantasy to truly occur in real-life. As such, they will presumably not experience any gratification in real-time or on a conscious level. The *Sleep State* and *Barriers* subthemes provided some insight on this point. The findings indicated that there is split between those who wish to remain asleep during the sexual activity and those who wish to wake up. Those who prefer the former regarded waking up as a barrier to enacting their fantasies. However, if they successfully remained asleep, they reported wanting evidence that the sexual activity had taken place, such as a video recording or finding their clothing removed. This evidence would indicate that the fantasy had played out, which may elicit feelings of sexual gratification. Video evidence could also be used later as a sexual stimulus. Also, those participants who reported fantasizing about dormaphilic encounters from a third person (observer) perspective may find the recording particularly arousing as it would match the perspective of their fantasy. However, further research is needed to examine if this is the case.

For the other participants, waking up was a crucial aspect of their dormaphilic fantasy. This may be because, for them, waking up provides evidence that their sexual fantasy is playing out in real-life, eliciting sexual arousal. This arousal may also be increased by the feeling of being highly desired (as mentioned by some participants). However, some other participants stated that waking up was the point at which their sexual fantasy began. Thus, for these participants, waking up may the focus of their

interest. In other words, they may wish to be woken up by sexual behaviors. In these cases, being the recipient of sex during sleep is a means to an end, rather than the core feature of the interest. Gratification may, therefore, be experienced upon awakening and possibly accentuated by the continuation of the sexual interaction, albeit, in a wakeful state.

Finally, a small proportion of participants reported that a lack of consent is a sexually appealing feature of their dormaphilic fantasies (see *Lack of Consent and Awareness* theme). One participant mentioned ‘consensual non-consent’ while another stated that “*there is no struggle*”. Based on this, it is likely that these fantasies do not reflect a desire to be assaulted but rather a desire to submit or relinquish power with a trusted partner. Also, the idea of not knowing what occurred during the encounter was deemed to be appealing by a few participants, with some using the word ‘mystery’ to describe the fantasized encounter. Thus, the idea of being unaware may be a means to heighten sexual arousal with a trusted partner (when considered in conjunction with the *Relinquishing Power* theme).

These findings have provided some useful insights into the nature of dormaphilia. Like somnophilia, it appears to be multi-faceted, possibly comprised of subtypes (e.g., those who prefer staying asleep and those who prefer waking up). Further research is required to examine these possible subtypes, and the factors that underpin and influence them. Although somnophilia and dormaphilia share some similarities (e.g., barriers to enactment), there are clear differences, such as the role of the individual and the source of the sexual appeal.

Limitations

A number of limitations of this study are worth noting. First, due to being an online study, the length and quality of the answers provided by participants were varied. Some provided long, detailed answers, whilst others gave short answers. Thus, it would be beneficial to corroborate the current findings using a more in-depth process of data collection (e.g., via face-to-face interviews). Second, qualitative data analysis is subjective and susceptible to researcher biases, thus, highlighting a further reason to corroborate the themes and findings identified in this study. Third, although participants were recruited from both social media and fetish forums, the sample was still comprised of self-selected participants. As such, the findings may only pertain to a particular subsample of people with somnophilic and dormaphilic interests. Fourth, participants were asked specifically about behaviour with a consenting partner only meaning that they we do not have data pertaining to people’s experience of engaging in non-consenting behaviours. Similarly, participants were asked about fantasies involving a sleeping person without distinguishing between consensual and non-consensual actions. As a result, we do not know whether the participants’ somnophilic fantasies involved consensual or non-consensual interactions, apart from the few that freely reported this as a feature. Furthermore, it is unknown whether any of the participants had ever committed a sexual offence, whether convicted or not. Thus, while this study

provides some insight into the potential link between somnophilia and offence-related factors (e.g., lack of consent, drug use), it is not possible to generalize the findings to those who have committed a sexual offence. Instead, research examining this particular topic is needed.

Implications for Research and Practice

Our findings provide some useful avenues for future research and considerations for forensic practice. For example, researchers should further investigate the source of sexual arousal in those with somnophilic and dormaphilic interests, as this study suggests it may be multifarious. It may be that different sources of arousal are influenced by different factors or profiles. Further, ascertaining the arousal source would allow for a more tailored treatment for those distressed by their interest, or who have committed a sexual offence against someone as they slept. It may also allow for a more accurate assessment of risk. In relation to sexual offending, some participants mentioned that a lack of consent was a sexually appealing aspect of their fantasies. It is possible that these community-based participants harbor what [Deehan and Bartels \(2021\)](#) refer to as non-consensual somnophilia. Alternatively, they may harbor an interest in non-consensual sex (biastophilia) and are drawn to the sleep state because it functions as an enabler to act upon this interest. This has relevance to practitioners as it raises the question of whether the lack of consent within somnophilic fantasies increases the risk of sexual offending. It is important to note that a lack of consent was not a prominent theme within the sample. Rather, many participants emphasized the importance of acquiring consent and having a trusting relationship with their partner. However, since there are currently no empirical studies examining somnophilia in those convicted of a sexual offence, it would be beneficial to explore the prevalence of consensual and non-consensual somnophilia within this population.

Related to this topic, a few participants referred to the use of drugs, mainly in relation to putting the passive party into a sleep state and/or to ensure they remained asleep during the sexual behavior. Thus, it functioned as a facilitator for acting upon their interest. In general, when substances are discussed in relation to sexual behavior, it is often in relation to non-consensual behavior. However, most of the participants who discussed drug use referred to it in a consensual context. This consensual use of sedative substances to facilitate a sleep state presents a contrast to the use of psychoactive substances within ‘chemsex’ where individuals use stimulants to facilitate long lasting sexual sessions ([McCall et al., 2015](#)) While it is encouraging that somnophilia and substance use were discussed in relation to consensual somnophilic and dormaphilic interactions, this will not be the case for all situations involving sexual behavior, substance use, and sleep. Thus, this presents a key area for future researchers to explore, as it will have implications for forensic practice. For example, it is possible that an interest in non-consensual drug-facilitated somnophilic behavior could be shifted to a consensual context.

Concluding Remarks

Although somnophilia and dormaphilia are two under-researched paraphilias, they may be more prevalent within the general population than once thought. Money (1986) characterized somnophilia as a predatory and marauding interest. However, the present findings, alongside those of Deehan and Bartels (2021), indicate that somnophilia and dormaphilia have a variety of presentations and motivations. There is also a clear indication that the two interests (and their behavioral expression) tend to be situated within a consensual and trusting context. Thus, the present findings may help form an understanding and awareness that helps reduce the stigma associated with sleep-related sexual interests, perhaps encouraging safe spaces for individuals to discuss and explore their interests. When considering non-consensual somnophilic behavior, it is important to explore the fantasy content and lived experiences of the individuals, as it will provide a context for practitioners working with and treating people who have offended in this way or who have reported a sexual interest in sleeping people. Future research is now needed to explore how somnophilia presents differently in a forensic sample, as well as ascertain the factors that influence somnophilia and dormaphilia, and their behavioral expression.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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