

EFFECTS OF REGULAR CONSUMPTION
OF PORNOGRAPHY ON THE
EVERYDAY TREATMENT OF WOMEN

HONORS THESIS

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Abstract

Pornography is a growing part of American culture. Because people develop more sexual schemas, or perspectives, when they are regularly exposed to sexual content, it is likely that their view of women will be affected by said schema. This could result in men viewing all women through a sexual lens, and women viewing other attractive women as sexual competitors. We conducted a study that gauged how the consumption of pornography affects the everyday treatment of women from both men and women. Sixty participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, which included questions about pornography habits, by a female research assistant who was either dressed attractively or not attractively. The interaction was observed by a researcher who recorded the amount of interest exhibited by participants toward the research assistant. We hypothesized that males who consumed pornography regularly would exhibit flirtatious behaviors towards the research assistant, regardless of the way she was presented, while males who do not watch pornography would display more interested behaviors only in the attractive condition. This hypothesis was proven in part and disproven in part. We also hypothesized that females who consume pornography would exhibit more competitive behaviors towards the assistant than females who do not consume pornography. This was expected to be particularly true when the research assistant is dressed attractively. Lack of female participants who admitted to watching pornography left this part of the study inconclusive.

Introduction

It is no secret that the pornography industry is rapidly growing in the United States, and the world. With this century's explosion of technology and the World Wide Web making it impossible to fully regulate any form of media, what once required mobility and motivation to gain access to, is now just a click away. But responsibility for this trend cannot purely be placed on technology. From mainstream music that is flushed into Americans' ears, to pictures of society's most successful, elite females plastered nude or half-nude on every magazine cover, culture has perpetuated its growth. Although one might assume that this is just a male issue, and it is true that more males than females consume it, women are increasingly becoming enveloped in this form of entertainment as well (O'Reilly, Knox, & Zusman, 2007, p. 403). We have an interest in discovering how pornography affects men as well as women, since the effect will likely be quite different due to the innate differences between the sexes.

Whether we like it or not, what we see has an effect on our minds. Research indicates that people tend to model the behavior they are exposed to. For example, one study found that those who had observed social violence via media were more likely to emulate that behavior (Ward & Carlson, 2013, p. 372). The tendency to imitate media could be problematic in other cases as well, such as pornography, where the objectification of the female is central to the industry. Since there has been a marketable increase in the amount of pornography being consumed, it is reasonable to wonder if objectifying behavior toward women has risen along with it.

As Mckenzie-Mohr and Zanna (1990) explain, another way that people are affected by what they observe relates to the viewing of oneself through a self-schema, or structure in which to view the world, which is developed by observing their own behavior and social experiences, and beginning to see others through the lens of the developed schema (p. 296). For instance, a person who develops a sexual schema will likely view interactions with the opposite sex as being sexually charged and behave flirtatiously even when this may be inappropriate or misguided. The behavior modeling and schema theories can be used in conjunction to draw some conclusions. First of all, when somebody spends a lot of time viewing sexually explicit material, he or she is more likely to replicate that behavior in his or her own life. This would lead to developing a self-schema that is sexual, thus causing the person to view interactions with others through a lens that, when applied to the opposite sex, is always attuned to levels of sexual attractiveness (Mohr & Zanna, 1990, p. 297).

Even though our culture is trained to observe a woman's sexual desirability whether that is her intention or not, the burden has still been placed squarely on her shoulders, as opposed to those measuring her sexuality, to not be viewed as a sexual object. When boys get distracted in class by their female peers, it is not the boys who are punished and asked to respect their classmates, but instead it is the girls' job to dress more "modestly". Likewise, it boosts a male's status to have sex with a girl, but she, who is constantly pressured by males, will lose her reputation and be seen as "loose" by both sexes if she gives in too easily (O'Reilly et al., 2007, p. 404). It is not expected of him to value her reputation; in fact his

becomes better in violating hers. With this in mind, to say that the way she dresses or the way she carries herself is solely to blame for her objectification is inaccurate. Instead, it seems that women are often used as scapegoats for the vices of men, shielding men from the pressure to be disciplined in their sexuality. The power to resist sexual objectification is not wholly, or even mostly, in the hands of females, but can be attributed to and improved by both if they can commit to taking responsibility for their part in a hypersexual culture.

If there is to be any resistance to this way of thinking, it must first come from women since they are the objects of the problem. But there can be no effective push for change if the very people who are called on to start it are at war with themselves. It is true, unfortunately, that too many women have bought into the belief that their sexual attractiveness is their most important quality, which leads to competitiveness in their desire to appeal to men. Also, women tend to be their harshest critics. When a girl dresses or behaves a certain way, it is often other girls who are the first to cry “slut” and tear down her reputation. One aim of this study is to explore how pornography contributes to this within-sex struggle. Women who watch pornography adopt a more sexually permissive outlook, becoming more likely to have and expect behavior that is consistent with the content they consume (Wright, Bae, & Funk, 2013, p. 1132). The same as with men, this outlook could be the result of a developed sexual schema, which social experience and an understanding of the self contribute to (Markus, Crane, Bernstein, & Siladi, 1982, p. 38). As discussed before, the development of a schema leads to not only a concept of the self, but a lens to interpret the behavior

of others (Mohr & Zanna, 1990, p. 296). While the obvious result of this would be that a woman with a sexual schema would interpret opposite-sex interactions in sexual terms, it is also possible that the schema would alter the perception of interactions with other women, particularly attractive women, as competitive. Because they are typically gauging themselves and others in terms of sexual attractiveness, we predict that they would see other attractive women as a threat to potential partners.

Drawing from the information explored thus far, this study aimed to test two hypotheses. The first is that men who regularly consume pornography would express sexual interest in all women, regardless of the attractiveness of the woman, while those who do not consume pornography were predicted to express more interest in an attractive woman than in a less attractive woman. The second hypothesis states that women who consume pornography were more likely to treat attractive women with distaste, or as competitors, than were women who do not consume pornography.

Method

Participants

For this study researchers had 60 participants recruited from the quad area of Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. They were approached unsystematically, and only those under the age of 18 were excluded from the study. There were an equal number of male and female participants, who were treated with APA Ethical Guidelines.

Materials

Researchers used a questionnaire of 20 questions for participants to answer, which asked participants random questions on topics such as media preferences, dating preferences, and others (See Appendix A for questionnaire). There was also a question about the participant's pornography consumption, which was of the most interest to researchers. There was also a behavior checklist that an observing researcher had to determine the level of interest participants had in interacting with the research assistant who was giving the questionnaire. Behaviors observed included whether the feet were facing the surveyor, if there was a face-to-face interaction, how often the participant was smiling, if the legs were crossed toward the surveyor, whether the participant was leaning toward the surveyor, and how animated the participant's voice was.

Procedure

In data collection, treatment of women was measured in the following way. An equal number of male and female participants were asked by a research assistant to fill out a questionnaire. There were two conditions in which either the assistant was dressed in attractive clothing or unattractive clothing, which are depicted in Appendix B. A researcher was in the vicinity, observing the interaction and going through a checklist of behaviors to determine the level of interest that the participant had in the interaction with the research assistant. At the end of the questionnaire, the researcher approached as the assistant walked away for debriefing and consent.

Results

Researchers predicted that men who watched pornography would act highly attracted to our research assistant in both conditions (displaying 3 or more interest behaviors). Those who do not watch porn were predicted to be more interested in the research assistant in the Attractive condition than in the Unattractive Condition. This hypothesis was tested using a 2 (porn watching versus non porn watching) x 2 (attractive versus not attractive) Factorial ANOVA with a cutoff value of .05 (See Appendix B, figure 2. See Appendix B, Table 1 for Means). There was not a significant main effect of the interest behaviors, which yielded $F(2, 56)=.77, p=.41$.

The next graph (Figure B3), also a Factorial ANOVA, shows the interest behaviors for those who watch pornography versus those who do not, regardless of the Attractiveness Condition. The p-value for this graph is a marginally significant .09. Means are displayed in Appendix B, Table 2. Those who watch pornography overall displayed fewer interest behaviors than those who do not watch pornography, $F(2, 28)=1.55, p=.09$.

The second hypothesis states that women who consume pornography will treat the research assistant with distaste, especially in the attractive condition. Because only one participant claimed to watch pornography, the researchers were unable to draw a conclusion.

Figure B4 in Appendix B is exploratory data. Again, a 2 (porn watching v. non) x 2 (friend preference) Factorial ANOVA was used, with a cutoff of .05.

This displays that those who have more male than female friends showed the most interest behaviors as opposed to those who had an equal number of male and female friends or had more female friends than male. Within these groups, the trend remains that those who consume pornography displayed fewer interest behaviors than those who do not watch pornography. However, the interaction was insignificant, which yielded $F(3, 24) = .717, p = .55$.

Discussion

The first hypothesis was proven in part and disproven in part. First of all, the male hypothesis was partially correct in that, indeed, men who did not watch porn displayed more interested behaviors in the Attractive Condition than in the Unattractive Condition. Also, males who did watch pornography displayed similar levels of interest across both conditions. Where the results differ from our hypothesis is in the assumption that men who watch porn would have an overall higher level of interest in our research assistant than those who do not. Here, the findings showed the opposite trend.

These results are of interest because they indicate that the regular consumption of pornography does have an effect on behavior. Those who do not watch pornography could have behaved with greater interest in the Attractive Condition for a few reasons. The premise that this prediction was made on is that these people are not as likely to have an overdeveloped sexual schema, leaving them to feel compelled to relate an interest in the research assistant when she appeared particularly attractive, but not simply because she was a female (McKenzie-Mohr & Zanna, 1990, p. 296). This supports the notion that these males were not

viewing the interaction through a lens trained to be receptive to *any* potential sexual partner.

Those that professed to watch pornography, as the researchers predicted, had roughly the same level of interest in both conditions. This supports the idea that men who watch pornography will likely see all women as potential sexual partners, and therefore distinguishing an attractive versus an unattractive woman would be unnecessary to this end. The results are surprising in that, instead of these men being more interested, they displayed a lack of interest in the research assistant compared to males who did not watch pornography. There are a few possible explanations for this as well. To begin with, it could be that those who watch pornography use it as a substitute for pursuing real relationships. Whether those that watch pornography develop this way because of the media they consume, or if a non-flirtatious personality type is the most likely to be drawn to pornography is not clear. What is clear is that in either case, pornography may be taking the place of a true potential connection with a female. This goes along with the noncommittal dating trend that has permeated America.

A second explanation is supported by Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod (1988), who found that those exposed to violent pornography over an extended period of time caused viewers to be less sympathetic to rape victims (p. 766). This finding suggests that watching this material, which degraded and objectified women, led to the viewers being desensitized to it's issues and seeing women with less sympathy than those who did not. In regards to the present study, perhaps the men who claimed to regularly watch pornography have become desensitized to seeing

attractive women and therefore are not as affected or impressed when confronted with one. The habituation that occurs in these men supports the finding that, within relationships, there is a negative correlation between men who watch sexually explicit material and women's relational and sexual satisfaction (Muusses, Kerkhoff, & Finkenauer, 2014, p. 78).

The last part of the Results section, in which the level of interest was measured between those that did and did not watch porn, along with the friend preferences of the males, shows that regardless of other factors (even one that did in fact have an effect on interest behaviors), the trend between those that don't watch porn versus those that do remained negative. It also showed that men that are most often surrounded by other men act more interested in women than those that claim to regularly be in contact with women. This gives more evidence to the claim that men are likely to become desensitized to women when they are exposed to them less, but be more intrigued if they do not come in contact with women as regularly.

As for the women, the fact that only one out of thirty admitted to watching pornography regularly has a few implications. O'Reilly, Knox, and Zusman (2007) found that there is a double standard between men and women in regards to the acceptableness of watching pornography. Men often saw women who watched it as "loose" even though they were likely to approve of it for other men (p. 404). If women were not being truthful in their responses, a likely possibility for some, they could have done so for fear of judgment. Also, fewer women are accepting of watching pornography than men, so they also may be personally

ashamed of it (O'Reilly, Knox, and Zusman, 2007, p. 403). While some may call for liberation of women and that they should be just as open and free from judgment as men when it comes to their sexuality, through these findings that this particular hobby does have arguably negative behavioral effects, it is pertinent to suggest that perhaps men should be held to a higher standard just as women are.

The demand for more sex and objectification in pop culture displays the desensitization that has occurred as pornography has grown with the Internet. However, just because this is the new norm does not mean that it is a healthy norm. As mentioned before, the findings of Muusses, Kerkhoff, and Finkenauer (2014) show the negative effects of pornography on relationships (p. 78). In that case, pornography could be a contributing factor to the increase in divorce rates that has emerged globally as the Internet has advanced (Afifi, Davis, Denes, & Merrill, 2013, p. 240).

There were some issues with the present study that could have affected the findings. First, because only one set of data collectors were available, it was only possible to gather a small number of participants. Researchers were still able to garner interesting data, but results may have been more compelling, especially on the female side, if there had been more participants. Secondly, the data was gathered at different times of day, on different days. This could have had an effect on participants' mood, and therefore behavior (Diaz-Morales, Escibano, & Jankowski, 2015, p. 37). Finally, participants may have been unwilling to disclose their pornography habits, which would cause some data to be inaccurate.

Although this study had some surprising findings, they remained consistent with the researchers' goal of providing evidence that there does seem to be a relationship between pornography consumption and everyday behavior, at least with men. Other methods would likely work better in gauging behavior of women who watch pornography. Plenty of questions on this subject remain, such as: Are there certain types of men drawn to watching pornography? If so, what are the characteristics? Is there a relationship between Pornography Consumption and divorce? What is the effect of watching pornography, if any, on cognition? Answers to these questions would give a more comprehensive understanding of how this particular media affects its consumers, as well as society as a whole.

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Appendix A

Participant is free to skip any questions he/she does not want to answer.

Questions:

1. What is your favorite literary genre?
 - a. Adventure/Fantasy
 - b. Comedy
 - c. Romantic
 - d. Drama
 - e. Other
 - f. I choose to skip this question
2. Ethnicity:
 - a. African American
 - b. Hispanic
 - c. Caucasian
 - d. Other
 - e. I choose to skip this question
3. Age: _____
4. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. I choose to skip this question
5. Which male actor would you prefer to watch in a movie?
 - a. Liam Neeson
 - b. Brad Pitt
 - c. Jonah Hill
 - d. Steve Carrel
 - e. I choose to skip this question
6. Which female actress would you prefer to watch in a movie?
 - a. Meryl Streep
 - b. Angelina Jolie
 - c. Melissa McCartney
 - d. Tina Fey
 - e. I choose to skip this question
7. What is your dating style?
 - a. I prefer High Commitment relationships
 - b. I date, but it takes me awhile to settle down
 - c. I like to casually date several people at once
 - d. I don't date
 - e. I choose to skip this question
8. What is the most important physical feature on someone you are interested in?
 - a. Eyes
 - b. Smile
 - c. Hair

- d. Physique
 - e. I choose to skip this question
9. What is your favorite film genre?
- a. Rom-Com
 - b. Action
 - c. Adult
 - d. Drama
 - e. None of these
 - f. I choose to skip this question
10. How often do you watch television dramas?
- a. Not at all
 - b. 1-2 hours a week
 - c. 3-5 hours a week
 - d. at least an hour every day
 - e. I choose to skip this question
11. How often do you watch comedy?
- a. Not at all
 - b. 1-2 hours a week
 - c. 3-5 hours a week
 - d. at least an hour every day
 - e. I choose to skip this question
12. How often do you watch pornography?
- a. Not at all
 - b. 1-2 hours a week
 - c. 3-5 hours a week
 - d. at least an hour every day
 - e. I choose to skip this question
13. How often do you participate in outdoor activities?
- a. Not at all
 - b. 1-2 hours a week
 - c. 3-5 hours a week
 - d. at least an hour every day
 - e. I choose to skip this question
14. Which trait is the most important to you in a mate?
- a. Intelligence
 - b. Confidence
 - c. Physical attractiveness
 - d. Thoughtfulness
 - e. I choose to skip this question
15. What is your favorite pastime?
- a. Reading
 - b. Watching television
 - c. Browsing the internet
 - d. Go for a walk
 - e. None of these
 - f. I choose to skip this question

16. Favorite type of music?
- a. Rock
 - b. Pop
 - c. Alternative
 - d. Country
 - e. I choose to skip this question
17. On a scale of 1-5, how much does physical appearance matter to you in a potential romantic partner (1 being not at all, 5 being it is the most important quality)
18. Which of the following best describes you?
- a. I have more male friends than female friends
 - b. I have about the same number of male as female friends
 - c. I have more female friends than male friends
 - d. I choose to skip this question
19. What year in school are you?
- a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. I choose to skip this question
20. What best describes your living situation?
- a. I live on campus
 - b. I live in an apartment close to campus
 - c. I live in a house close to campus
 - d. I commute from out of town
 - e. None of these
 - f. I choose to skip this question

Appendix B



Figure B1. Research assistant is shown in attractive attire, left, where she wore makeup and styled her hair along with wearing feminine clothing, and unattractive attire, right, where she wore neutral clothing and did not wear makeup or style her hair.

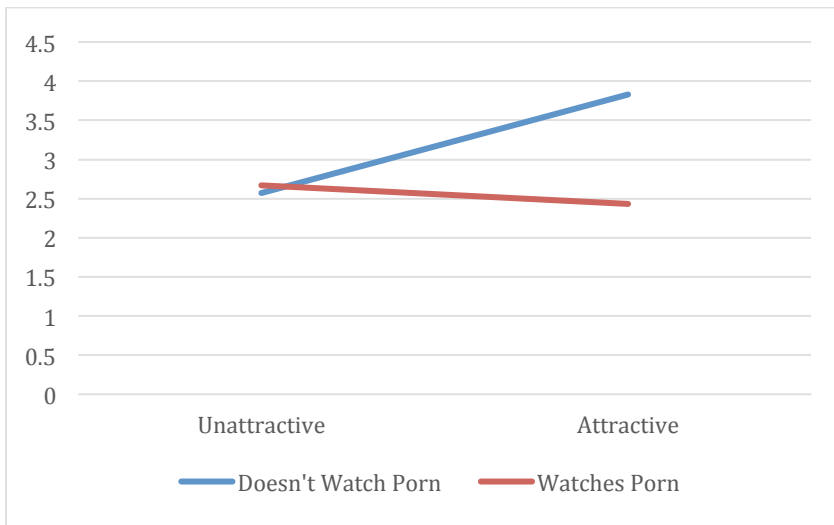


Figure B2. The graph displays Number of Interest Behaviors (y-axis) displayed by those who watch porn versus those who don't in both the Attractive and Unattractive condition.

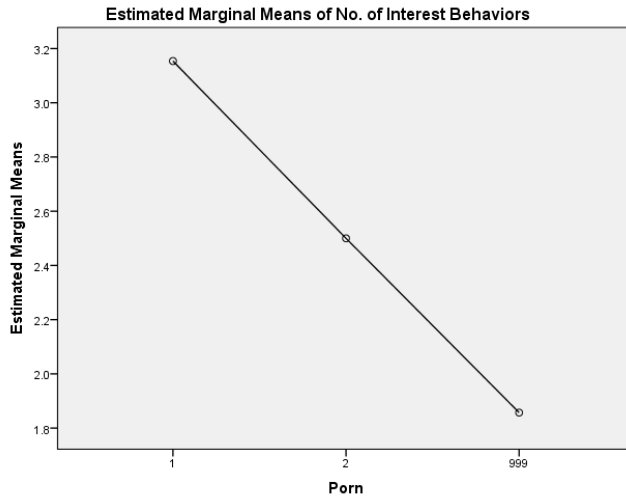


Figure B3. This graph depicts those who do not watch porn (1) versus those who do (2) on the x-axis and their average number of interest behaviors, displayed on the y-axis. 999 represent those who chose to skip the question.

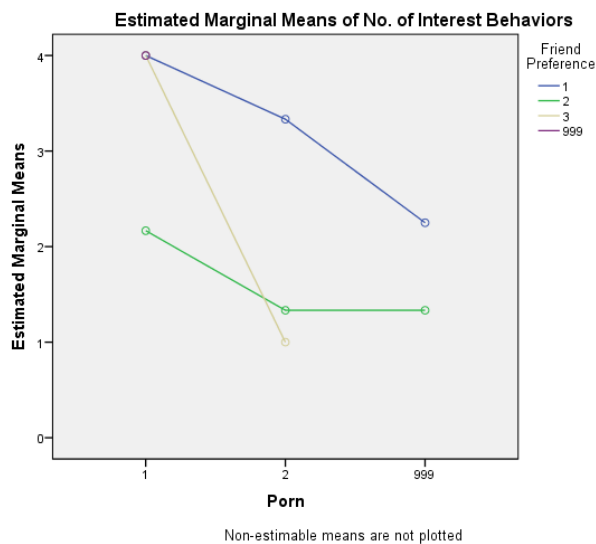


Figure B4. This graph shows those who do not watch porn (1 on the x-axis) versus those who do (2). Line 1 are those who have more male friends than female friends, line 2 are those who have about the same number of female friends as male friends, and line 3 are those who have more female friends than male friends. The y-axis depicts number of interest behaviors displayed.

Porn	Attractive/Un	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	1	2.57	1.618	7
	2	3.83	1.169	6
	Total	3.15	1.519	13
2	1	2.67	1.528	3
	2	2.43	1.813	7
	Total	2.50	1.650	10
999	1	1.40	1.673	5
	2	3.00	1.414	2
	Total	1.86	1.676	7
Total	1	2.20	1.612	15
	2	3.07	1.580	15
	Total	2.63	1.629	30

Table B1. Column 2 shows the means for those in each of the four conditions (Unattractive-1, Attractive-2; Does not watch porn-1, watches porn-2).

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: No. of Interest Behaviors

Porn	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	3.15	1.519	13
2	2.50	1.650	10
999	1.86	1.676	7
Total	2.63	1.629	30

Table B2. Means of interest behaviors for those who do not watch porn (1) versus those who do (2).