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Moral Objections to Pornography: Does the Reason for Opposition Affect Consumption?

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ABSTRACT

Recent literature has suggested a link between self-described "problematic" pornography usage or pornography addiction and moral incongruence (Grubbs et al., 2022; Guidry et al., 2019). That is, when someone is morally opposed to pornography, they feel worse about their use of it. As of yet, however, no link has been established between specific reasons for objecting to pornography and their effects on consumption. Participants were 54 adults selected randomly using Amazon's MTurk survey distribution platform. Respondents completed demographic questions and 6 scales measuring frequency of pornography use, objections to pornography, self-perceived problematic porn use, external and internal shame, God representations, and relationship with God. The hypothesis that distinct reasons for objecting to pornography would be negatively correlated with consumption was supported. Implications of the findings, limitations, and future directions are also discussed.

Moral Objections to Pornography: Does the Reason for Opposition Affect Consumption?

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Grant Parker

May 2023

This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Grant Parker, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Science in Psychology

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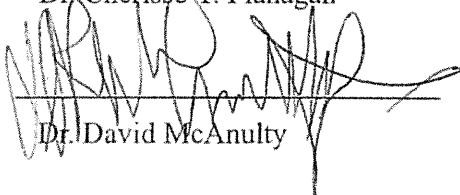
Date

19 May 2023

Thesis Committee

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Dr. David McAnulty

This thesis is dedicated to my son, Zoé, who will be just two weeks old when I defend.

Te adoro, mi amor.

"Remember, the moment is not the outcome."

-Mark Lewis

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To Andrea, my incredible wife: Thank you for supplying me with an endless stream of joy and encouragement. I've so often been discouraged, but you never let me remain that way for long. I love you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Pornography Use

An estimated 46%–76% of men and 16%–40% of women in modern nations actively use pornography (Zattoni et al., 2020). In fact, 98.9% of men and 91% of women report having consumed pornography at least once (Solano et al., 2020). Additionally, a survey of a nationally representative sample revealed that around 11% of men and around 3% of women experience some level of addiction to pornography (Grubbs et al., 2019). Pornography consumption is extremely common and has been for many years.

Moral Incongruence

Researchers have theorized that the harm that comes from pornography use is not due to some factor of the porn use itself, but rather due to the users' perceptions of its use (Guidry et al., 2019). One of the factors that has been thought to contribute to this is moral incongruence. Essentially, those who morally oppose pornography but still use it may experience negative outcomes. For example, individuals who are more likely to report self-perceived pornography addiction (Lewczuk et al., 2021), and anxiety and depression increase for porn users who morally object to pornography (Guidry et al., 2019).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Effects of Pornography

The connection between pornography and mental health has been extensively

investigated. A link has been established between pornography consumption and a

number of psychosocial variables such as depression and anxiety (Levin et al., 2012).

These effects are likely not due to pornography itself, however, but rather users'

perceptions of their use. In fact, frequency of porn use appears to influence anxiety

significantly less when an individual scores low on moral disapproval than when they

score high (Guidry et al., 2019). A similar trend has been shown for depression (Guidry

et al., 2019).

Pornography also affects sexual satisfaction. For example, when an individual

views pornography frequently they are likely to view pornography as a primary source of

information about sex (Wright et al., 2019). When a person views pornography in this

way, they are more likely to prefer porn over their partner as a means for sexual

fulfillment; and individuals who prefer pornography over their partner are less sexually

satisfied than those who do not (Wright et al., 2019).

Interestingly, pornography use seems to affect men and women in heterosexual

relationships differently (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011). Men tend to be less satisfied with

their relationships if they view pornography frequently but are more satisfied with their

relationships if their partner views porn regularly (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011). When

couples frequently watch porn together, they have higher relationship satisfaction than couples who watch individually (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011).

Viewing pornography can also influence the consumer's views of people groups the actors on screen represent. For example, studies have shown that degrading pornography promotes hostile sexism among men (Skorska et al., 2018). Attitudes among both genders can be affected by pornography. For example, pornography use has been observed to be an exacerbating factor moderating the relationship between hostile sexism and "she asked for it" rape myths among both men and women (Borgogna et al., 2022).

Religiosity and Pornography Use

Though religious people and theological conservatives view pornography less frequently than other groups, their rate of consumption has increased steadily since the 1960s (Perry & Schleifer, 2018). In fact, usage within this population has increased at a near identical rate to other, non-conservative and non-religious populations; meaning that even though religious conservatives continue to strongly oppose the use of pornography, more porn is being watched by this group now than ever before (Perry & Schleifer, 2018).

Interestingly, it seems that religiosity may be associated with greater porn usage. For example, in the US porn use is high in states where the population is very religious (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). Pornography use also appears to affect some aspects of religiosity. Those who watch porn frequently have higher levels of religious doubt and pray less than those who do not. However, those who watch porn the most actually tend to be more religious than their counterparts who watch porn less often (Perry, 2017). Just as religiosity affects one's beliefs about pornography, pornography seems to impact the

way people view religion and religious practice. While religious Americans have historically been one of the loudest voices of opposition to pornography, it seems that this opposition often has more bark than bite. Religious men are often more opposed to the use of pornography in theory than in practice (Perry, 2018a). In addition, even though religiously committed individuals are less likely to view pornography than their non-religious counterparts, this incongruence between belief and practice can increase an individual's likelihood of self-identifying as addicted to pornography. For example, moral incongruence and religiosity have been shown to be predictors of self-perceived pornography addiction (Lewczuk et al., 2021). In short, while being religiously committed does decrease pornography usage, porn users who are religious seem to believe that their usage is more problematic.

One of the main ways religion has been related to pornography addiction has to do with shame. The more religious an individual is, the more they tend to disapprove of pornography morally, which, in turn, causes higher levels of perceived addiction and sexual shame (Volk et al., 2019). Feelings of shame can increase hypersexual and addictive behaviors; leading to increased pornography use and ultimately causing even more shame (Chisholm & Gall 2015). Additionally, individuals who experience symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or a high level of religious obsessions endorse being addicted to pornography at abnormally high levels (De Jong & Cook, 2021). Overall, it seems likely that consuming pornography while being a committed member of a religious group opposed to its use causes high levels of shame, thereby exacerbating the process of addiction.

Shame and Views of God

Shame, religiosity, sexual satisfaction, and pornography use all seem to be connected in some way. Religious people tend to experience more sexual shame than their nonreligious counterparts and, in turn, people who experience high levels of sexual shame tend to be less sexually satisfied (Marcinechova & Záhorcová, 2020). That said, there are many variables that moderate religious individuals' relationships with shame. For example, religious fundamentalists who have a high awareness of God, meaning they believe that God is frequently present or active in their lives, experience significantly less shame than those who hold fundamentalist beliefs along with a low awareness of God (Keller et al., 2015). There are many different ways for religious individuals to view a God or gods, and the way God is viewed can deeply impact one's actions and attitudes.

God representations, or "mental representations of a deity" can play a role in the psychological well-being of religious individuals (Sharp et al., 2021, p. 340). For example, subscribing to loving images of God is correlated with having a deep sense of purpose and meaning (Stroope et al., 2013). Additionally, those who view God as remote rather than loving report more depression, anxiety, paranoid ideation, and hostility (Bradshaw et al., 2008). Conversely, positive God representations are associated with both positive self-concept and positive relationships, and are negatively associated with neuroticism (Stulp et al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, God representations will be assessed using the five-factor LAMBI measure, which assesses how individuals describe God across five dimensions: limitless, authoritarian, mystical, benevolent, and ineffable (Johnson et al., 2019). As of yet, a link has not been established between God

representations and shame, nor with pornography-related behavior. Consequently, a goal of this study will be to examine these associations.

<div align="center">**Objections to Pornography and Pornography Use**</div>

Religious and Moral Objections

There are a number of reasons why an individual may object to the consumption of pornography. As described above, many people have a religious objection to pornography, viewing porn consumption as morally sinful. But religious groups differ in their views of pornography. For example, where Christianity and Islam, for the most part, take a hard stance against pornography, some religions, such as Buddhism, approach it on a more case-by-case basis. Similarly to many feminist anti-porn arguments, Buddhists would argue that pornography use is immoral when it objectifies people or causes violence (Nash, 2014). Eroticizing the subjugation of women is considered wrong within Buddhism. Christians, by contrast, have traditionally opposed pornography consumption as intrinsically sinful. Relatedly, some Christians have claimed that increased access to pornography has "contributed to the moral decline of America" (Burke, 2018, p. 2) and "flatly denies the lordship of Jesus Christ" (Thorne, 2017, p. 41). For such reasons, many Christians argue that porn should never be viewed.

Similarly to Christians, many Muslims oppose pornography outright. Omar Husain (2021, p. 24) writes, "Muslims must restrict all gateways to forbidden sexual intercourse by controlling the means of looking, touching, and speech," and that there is no justification for viewing pornography within the tradition of Islam.

Feminist Objections: Harm to Women and Oppression

Whereas traditional arguments against pornography center around an intrinsic quality that renders it immoral, feminist theorists argue that pornography should be avoided due to the harm it causes women. For example, Heredia (2022, p. 223) states, "pornography inevitably engenders a violent and degrading attitude towards women." Since pornography causes women to be viewed in demeaning and even violent ways it is therefore morally objectionable.

Pornography harms women in a few distinct ways. First, it seems that male porn consumption is "a powerful determinant of physical and sexual violence against current and former female partners" (Dekeseredy, 2016, p. 504). Additionally, many women have objected to their partner's attempts to have them do things they saw in pornography (Dekeseredy, 2016). Women with this experience are also more likely to be sexually assaulted or physically victimized than women who have not experienced this (Dekeseredy, 2016). Pornography also can harm the women who view it themselves. Though some women use porn as a safe place for sexual exploration, many find themselves "experiencing painful, harmful or unenjoyable sex" due to being conditioned to emulate stereotyped and violent sex acts (Davis et al., 2020, p. 72). Some women also are harmed by watching pornography, as their self-esteem suffers when they compare themselves to performers on screen (Davis et al., 2020).

It is important to note that, just as religious views differ regarding pornography, so do views among feminists. For example, Daum (2015, p. 545) argues that pornography can, especially in the age of the internet, "provide women (and other marginalized individuals) with an opportunity to redefine the content of sexually explicit speech and

challenge patriarchal definitions and consequent control of women's sexuality." Daum goes on, however, to note that many feminists oppose pornography, even to the point of advocating for anti-pornography laws, because these feminists view pornography as "sex discrimination and subsequently a civil rights violation in the interest of promoting women's equality" (p. 548). In sum, though feminists are not fully united in their views on the morality of pornography use, many object to pornography because of the harm it does to women.

Well-Being Related Objections: Negative Effects Upon the Self and Relationships

Finally, a third argument against the use of pornography concerns the harm pornography is believed to cause to its users. As described earlier, pornography can negatively impact mental health, intimate relationships, and sexual satisfaction (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Guidry et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2019,). A noteworthy finding in this regard is that porn use has been observed to be predictive of divorce among married couples (Perry, 2018b). Additionally, some groups, such as some Christians, perceive using pornography as infidelity (Yamoah & Dei, 2015). In light of such negative impacts upon marriages, along with adverse personal effects, many people may choose to avoid porn consumption.

The Present Study: Moral Opposition to Pornography: Does the Reason for Opposition Affect Consumption?

Recent literature has suggested a link between self-described "problematic" pornography usage or pornography addiction and moral incongruence (Grubbs et al., 2022; Guidry et al., 2019). Additionally, we know that religiosity positively correlates with porn users' tendencies to identify themselves as "addicted to pornography" (DeJong

& Cook, 2021; Lewczuk et al., 2021). We also know that theologically conservative and religiously committed Americans are very likely to oppose the use of pornography but consume pornography at only a slightly lower rate than their non-religious and theologically liberal counterparts (Perry, 2017). Though we know that religious and moral disapproval impact frequency of porn use, little quantitative research has investigated other reasons for objecting to or avoiding pornography. To date, no link has been established between specific reasons for disapproval of pornography and the effects of these objections on the consumption of pornography. Consequently, the goal of this study was to explore how various objections to pornography are related to pornography use.

As described above, the study assessed three reasons for why an individual may object to the use of pornography: objections related to religion, oppression, and personal well-being. Since no measure previously existed to assess these objections, one goal of the study was to create a measure that does so. Once created, ratings of objections were correlated with measures of pornography usage. An additional goal of the study was to determine how God representations and the quality of the God relationship are related to pornography consumption. Lastly, the associations of shame with pornography consumption, God representations, and the quality of the God relationship were explored.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Procedures and Participants

Participants were recruited using Amazon's MTurk online survey platform. A

total of 128 respondents initially completed the survey. However, a number of

participants completed the survey in less than 10 minutes, likely indicating that they did

not meaningfully engage with the content of the survey. Consequently, the sample was

reduced to 54 of the original participants who took at least 10 minutes to complete the

survey. Of these participants, 61.1% were male and 38.9% were female. heterosexuals

made up 53.7% of participants, while 38.9% identified as bisexual, 5.6% as gay, and

1.8% as aromantic. 98.1% indicated that their race was White, and 1.8% indicated

Black/African-American. The sample was 74.1% Catholic, 14.8% Evangelical Protestant,

3.7 Jewish, 1.9% Black Protestant, 1.9% Latter-day Saints, and 1.9% Muslim; and 1.9%

of respondents indicated no religious affiliation. The average age of participants was

34.26 ($SD = 8.8$) with the youngest being 23 and the oldest 59.

Measures

Porn Use Frequency Scale

Participants were asked to report how often they view pornography. For this

study, *pornography* was defined as "erotic or sexually explicit films, video clips, or

pictures that intend to sexually arouse the viewer, excluding chat rooms or other forms of

virtual contact with another person." To start, participants were asked, "What best

describes your viewing of pornography?" with the response options, "I generally view porn daily," "I generally view porn weekly," "I generally view porn monthly," "I generally view porn yearly," and "I never view porn." After responding, participants were then asked: "When you view porn, how many minutes, on average, do you spend viewing it?" Answers to these questions were used to calculate, for each participant, a measure of "minutes per day" of pornography consumption. The porn use frequency scale can be found in Appendix B.

Objections to Pornography Scale (OPS)

As stated, a goal of this study was to create a scale that measures objections to pornography. Three objections to pornography were assessed by this scale, objections related to religion, oppression of women, and personal harm. Overall, seventeen items were drafted for the Objections to Pornography Scale. Six items assess moral/religious objections, five items assess oppression of women objections, and six items assess personal harm objections. Example items associated with each subscale include, "I believe that God finds the use of pornography abhorrent," "The porn industry oppresses women," and "Viewing pornography negatively impacts my mental health." Items are rated using the following Likert scale: 1 = This objection/reason is very unimportant to me, 7 = This objection/reason is very important to me. The entire Objections to Pornography Scale can be found in Appendix C. Overall, the three scales displayed good internal consistency in this sample: Religious/Moral objection items (Cronbach's Alpha = .87), Feminism/Oppression objection items (Cronbach's Alpha = .79), Personal Harm objection items (Cronbach's Alpha = .83)

Brief Pornography Screen (BPS)

Participants' perceived levels of problematic porn usage was assessed using the brief pornography screen (Kraus et al., 2020). Participants were asked to respond to five items, such as, "You find yourself using pornography more than you want to," and, "You find it difficult to resist strong urges to use pornography." Items are scored from 0 = Never to 2 = Very Often. The entire scale can be found in Appendix D.

Five-Factor LAMBI Scale of God Representations (LAMBI)

The five-factor LAMBI scale of God Representations was used to assess which adjectives participants would use to describe God (Johnson et al., 2019). The measure consists of 41 items that make up five subscales: limitless (e.g., "boundless"), authoritarian (e.g., "wrathful"), mystical (e.g., "energy"), benevolent (e.g., "forgiving"), and ineffable (e.g., "unknowable"). Items are scored from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The entire scale can be found in Appendix E.

External and Internal Shame Scale (EISS)

Participants' general shame was assessed with the external and internal shame scale (Ferreira et al., 2022). This scale is made up of eight items that are divided into two subscales: external shame (e.g., "other people don't understand me") and internal shame (e.g., "I am isolated"). The following instructions are given for this measure: "Below are a series of statements about feelings people may usually have, but that might be experienced by each person in a different way. Please read each statement carefully and circle the number that best indicates how often you feel what is described in each item." Participants were asked to rate each item using a five-point scale (0 = Never to 4 = Always). The entire scale can be found in Appendix F.

Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI)

The Spiritual Assessment inventory is made up of 54 items assessing how participants generally feel about their relationship with God (Hall & Edwards, 2002). These items make up six subscales: Awareness (e.g., I am aware of God being very near to me"), Realistic Acceptance (e.g., "when this happens, I still want our relationship to continue"), Disappointment (e.g., "there are times when I feel frustrated with God"), Grandiosity (e.g., "I seem to have a unique ability to influence God through my prayer,"), Instability (e.g., "I am afraid that God will give up on me"), and Impression Management (e.g., "I am always in a worshipful mood when I go to church"). Items are scored on a Likert scale from 1 = Not at All true to 5 = Very True. The entire scale can be found in Appendix G.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Porn use frequency was calculated by determining how many minutes participants typically spent viewing porn when they consumed it, then dividing by the number of days per week they viewed pornography. Overall, the average porn use per day was calculated to be 38.59 minutes per day ($SD = 47.42$). The histogram for porn use can be observed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Histogram of Porn Use Frequency (Minutes per Day)
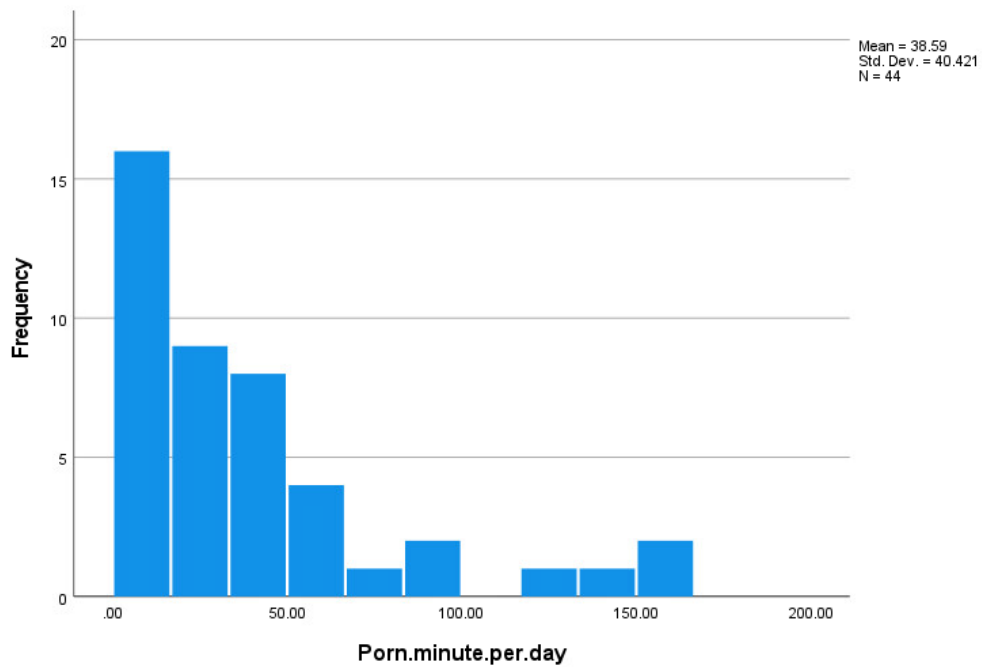
Porn Use Frequency and Objections to Pornography

One of the initial goals of the study was to examine the relationship between distinct reasons for objecting to pornography and frequency of pornography use. It was predicted that individuals who objected to pornography due to harm-related or feminist-informed beliefs would use pornography less frequently and would also perceive their pornography usage as less problematic. To test these predictions, correlations were run on the two measures of porn consumption and the three measures of objections to pornography. These correlations can be found in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, these predictions were partially supported. While scores on the feminist and harm-related objection subscales correlated negatively with porn use frequency, so too did scores on the religious/moral objection subscales. Overall, then, when participants reported objections to pornography, of whatever sort, they consumed less pornography. Additionally, each of the objection subscales correlated positively with self-perceived problematic porn use. That is, those who object to pornography, for any of the three reasons, believed their consumption to be more problematic.

Table 1

Summary of Correlations Between Frequency of Pornography Use, Self-Perceived Problematic Porn Use, and Religious/Moral, Feminist, and Harm-Related Objections to Pornography

	Pornography Use (Minutes per Day)	Brief Porn Screen
Religious/Moral Objections	-.27*	.24*
Feminist Objections	-.30*	.29*
Harm-Related Objections	-.39**	.23*

*p < .05 **p < .01

Relationship with God and Pornography Consumption

An additional goal of this study was to analyze the relationship between relationship with God and pornography consumption. It was predicted that a negative relationship with God (e.g., disappointment) would correlate positively with both frequency of porn use and self-perceived problematic porn usage. To test this prediction, correlations were run on the two measures of porn consumption and the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI). These correlations can be found in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, there was partial support for these predictions. Specifically, it was observed that every subscale of the SAI was correlated positively with ratings of problematic porn use. Essentially, those who reported a relationship with God, of any sort, perceived their porn consumption as problematic. This contrasted with the negative correlations observed between the SAI subscales of Awareness, Grandiosity, and Instability and daily porn consumption. Overall, this pattern of results suggests that religiosity was associated with less porn consumption but increased distress over that consumption.

Table 2

Summary of Correlations Between Relationship with God Subscales, Frequency of Pornography Use, and Self-Perceived Problematic Porn Use

SAI Subscales:	Pornography Use (Minutes per Day)	Brief Porn Screen
Awareness	-.29*	.38*
Disappointment	-.16	.48**
Grandiosity	-.26*	.44**
Instability	-.36*	.56**
Impression Management	-.18	.36*
Realistic Acceptance	-.16	.43**

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

God Representation and Pornography Consumption

Another goal of this study was to explore the relationship between God representations and pornography consumption. It was predicted that negative God representations (e.g., Authoritarian) would correlate positively with both frequency of porn use and self-perceived problematic porn usage. To test these predictions, correlations were run on the measures of God representations and the two measures of porn consumption. These correlations can be found in Table 3. As can be seen in table 3, all God representation subscales correlated negatively with pornography consumption, while the Authoritarian, Mystical, and Ineffable subscales correlated positively with self-perceived problematic porn use.

Table 3

Summary of Correlations Between God Representation Subscales, Frequency of Pornography Use, and Self-Perceived Problematic Porn Use

God Representation Subscales	Pornography Use (Minutes per Day)	Brief Pornography Screen
Limitless	-.35*	.18
Authoritarian	-.35**	.29*
Mystical	-.27*	.25*
Benevolent	-.27*	.19
Ineffable	-.35*	.52**

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

Shame and Pornography Consumption

The final goal of the study was to determine the relationships between external and internal shame and consumption of pornography. It was predicted that shame would relate directly to frequency of pornography use and directly to self-perceived problematic porn usage. To test these predictions, correlations were run on the measures of shame, frequency of porn use, and problematic porn usage. These correlations can be found in

Table 4. As can be seen in Table 4, both dimensions of shame were positively correlated with self-perceived problematic porn usage. External shame was negatively correlated with porn consumption per day.

Table 4

Summary of Correlations Between External and Internal Shame, Frequency of Pornography Use, and Self-Perceived Problematic Porn Use

	Pornography Use (Minutes per Day)	Brief Porn Screen
External Shame	-.26*	.42**
Internal Shame	-.25	.38**

*p < .05 **p < .01

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

Pornography

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the relationship between reasons

for objecting to pornography and frequency of pornography use. It was predicted that

individuals who object to pornography due to feminist or well-being related reasons

would consume less pornography. It was found that these two reasons, as well as

religious/moral ones, relate inversely to pornography use, meaning that each of these

reasons for objecting may relate to individuals consuming less porn. Notably, however, it

was found that high scores on the objection subscales correlated positively with self-

perceived problematic porn use. This aligns with previous findings that moral

incongruence relates to porn consumers finding their own usage problematic (Lewczuk et

al., 2020). These findings suggest that those who oppose pornography for any of the three

reasons tend to restrict their personal use but, in spite of this, perceive their usage as more

problematic than those less opposed to pornography.

God Relationship and Representation

Another prediction was that scores on subscales indicating negative

representations or aspects of relationship with God would positively correlate with

frequency of pornography use and perception of use as problematic. Overall, it was found

that a relationship with God, across dimensions, predicted the tendency to describe one's

porn use as problematic, but no aspect of the relationship predicted more porn consumption. In fact, awareness, grandiosity, and instability all correlated negatively with consumption. As for God representations, each of the subscales correlated negatively with porn use. The subscales Authoritarian, Mystical, and Ineffable, however, correlated positively with perception of porn use as problematic. Overall, it seems that religious individuals who view God in many different ways consume less pornography but feel that their use of it is more of a problem.

Shame

Finally, another goal of the study was to examine the relationship between external and internal shame and both frequency of pornography use and perception of porn use as problematic. Previous research has supported a model in which individuals who experience shame due to pornography usage often enter into a cycle where, as shame increases, so too does pornography use (Chisholm & Gall, 2015). It was predicted that both external and internal shame would correlate positively with frequency of pornography use and self-perceived problematic porn usage. Self-perceived problematic porn usage was found to be positively correlated with both external and internal shame. Interestingly, however, external shame was negatively associated with frequency of porn consumption, and no significant relationship was found between frequency and internal shame. As such, individuals who experience the most shame may watch the least porn but feel that their usage is the most problematic.

Implications of the Study

Clinical Implications

Findings from this study indicate that objecting to the personal use of pornography decreases actual consumption, but increases feelings that one's porn habits are problematic. Therapists may benefit from keeping this concept in mind when working with clients who are concerned about their pornography use. Since negative effects associated with pornography are likely due to users' perceptions of their use (Guidry et al., 2019), understanding how staunchly against pornography a client is could be of great importance in their treatment. Additionally, the findings from this study and others like it could be used in psychoeducation programs surrounding porn use. It seems that those who object to pornography and experience negative feelings regarding their use could benefit from understanding that fervently opposing it may actually be causing them more harm in the long run. This presents a unique difficulty when working with religious populations, however.

While therapists would not seek to directly change the religious beliefs their clients hold, results from this study show that these beliefs may be associated with heightened distress surrounding porn usage. A potential avenue for navigating this challenge exists within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. In ACT, clients are encouraged to let go of or "defuse" from the rigid rules and judgments they hold (Harris, 2009). As such, religious clients who are experiencing shame surrounding their pornography use could benefit from interventions aimed at developing a less judgmental and rigid stance towards the self. Methods like these would allow therapists to treat their clients effectively without undermining their religious values. Additionally, within ACT,

clients are encouraged to determine their values and make actions that align with those values (Harris, 2009). It is possible that reframing avoiding pornography as an action that aligns with a deeply held value could aid in clients experiencing less distress when they do use pornography.

Future Directions

Further research into objections to pornography and their bearing on pornography use and related outcomes should be continued due to their impact on shame and self-perceived pornography use. The current study supported the hypothesis that morally objecting to porn, while it may decrease actual consumption, increases the belief that its use is problematic for the user. However, since the sample for this study was made up of mostly White Catholics, further research is required to determine whether this is true for other groups.

Additionally, since pornography has been theorized to harm its participants indirectly, via their own judgments and beliefs about their use, and since oppositions to pornography were found to relate positively with shame, it could be beneficial to correlate measures of objection to pornography with measures of well-being. Conversely, one could also correlate these objection measures to those assessing negative psychosocial variables such as anxiety or depression.

Pornography use has also been found to affect the sexual and relational well-being of its users (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Wright et al., 2019). Given the results of this study, future research could seek to determine the roles of religion and in relational and sexual satisfaction for porn users. Additionally, pornography use has been found to be

predictive of divorce (Perry, 2018b). It could be interesting to see if those results remain consistent for religious porn users.

Another future direction for this research has to do with the nature of porn use described in this study. For the objections scale, participants were specifically informed that the questions were regarding their personal use of pornography. Future research could investigate how strongly individuals in a relationship object to their partner's use of pornography, and how that objection affects their relational well-being. Additionally, no mention, in this study, was made of partners watching porn together. It may be worth investigating how individuals that watch porn with their partners feel about their own pornography use.

Limitations

The major limitations of this study have to do with participant recruitment. Since participants were recruited online and allowed to self-select, there was no way to ensure that a representative sample would be found. Additionally, the self-report nature of the surveys meant that participant engagement with survey materials was not enforceable. This resulted in many participants' scores being removed from final calculations as it seemed a legitimate attempt was not made to accurately complete the surveys. Also, each participant holds their own biases and values, so scores on any self-report measure may be swayed due to differing interpretations of survey content. Lastly, the sample evaluated in this study was homogenous, as 98.1% of participants were White and 74.1% were Catholic. This means that scores may not be representative. A more diverse sample could aid in understanding whether the relationships observed in this study are universal, or if they are due to some aspect of personal or cultural background.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

Date: April 4, 2023
PI: Grant Parker
Department: 2090-Psychology, 20900-Psychology-Chair
Re: Initial - IRB-2023-57
Master's Thesis; Moral Objections to Pornography: Does the Reason for Opposition
Affect Consumption?

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision
below for Master's Thesis;
Moral Objections to Pornography: Does the Reason for Opposition Affect Consumption?.
The administrative
check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt
Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational
tests (cognitive, diagnostic,
aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public
behavior (including visual
or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not
reasonably place the subjects at
risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing,
employability, educational
advancement, or reputation.

Research Notes:
Additional Approvals/Instructions:

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the
committee can determine whether
or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are
located within the Study
Details in Cayuse IRB.
The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these
responsibilities may result in
suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary
Investigator is a student and

fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding
any and all of the following:
• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt,
Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from
inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all

members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to
confidentiality should be minimized.
For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website
http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Porn Use Frequency Scale

1. To start, what best describes your viewing of pornography?
   a. I generally view porn daily.
      i. When you view porn, how many minutes, on average, do you spend viewing it?
   b. I generally view porn weekly.
      i. How many days per week do you typically view pornography?
         1. When you view porn, how many minutes, on average, do you spend viewing it?
   c. I generally view porn monthly.
      i. How many days per month do you typically view pornography?
         1. When you view porn, how many minutes, on average, do you spend viewing it?
   d. I generally view porn yearly.
      i. How many days per year do you typically view pornography?
         1. When you view porn, how many minutes, on average, do you spend viewing it?
   e. I never view porn.

APPENDIX C

Objections to Pornography Scale (OBS)

Instructions: Below are a variety of reasons why people might object to the personal use of pornography. Please read the reasons for objecting and rate the degree to which each is important to you in how you view your own pornography use from 1 to 7 (1 = This objection/reason is very unimportant to me, 7 = this objection/reason is very important to me).

Religious Objection Subscale Items

1. Viewing pornography is sinful
2. Viewing pornography is against God's will
3. I believe that God finds the use of pornography abhorrent
4. I believe that God will punish me for viewing pornography
5. God hates pornography
6. Members of my religious group should not view pornography

Social Justice/Feminist Objection Subscale Items

1. The porn industry oppresses women
2. When I view pornography I am participating in a system that harms women
3. Sex workers are harmed by the porn industry
4. Viewing pornography distorts my view of women
5. Viewing pornography promotes violence toward women

Harm/Well-Being Related Subscale Items

1. Viewing pornography negatively impacts my mental health
2. Viewing pornography negatively affects my sex life
3. Pornography use is harmful to my intimate relationships
4. Viewing pornography is bad for me
5. Viewing pornography exacerbates my existing mental health problems
6. My partner has expressed concern over my pornography use

APPENDIX D

Brief Pornography Screen (BPS)

Instructions: In the last 6 months, have any of these situations happened to you in regards to your use of pornography?

	Never	Occasionally	Very Often
1. You find yourself using pornography more than you want to.	0	1	2
2. You have attempted to "cut back" or stop using pornography, but were unsuccessful.	0	1	2
3. You find it difficult to resist strong urges to use pornography.	0	1	2
4. You find yourself using pornography to cope with strong emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, loneliness, etc.).	0	1	2
5. You continue to use pornography even though you feel guilty about it.	0	1	2

APPENDIX E

Five-Factor LAMBI Scale of God Representations

Instructions: Using a wide range of the scale below, please rate how well each word describes God, a higher power, or divine life force—BASED UPON YOUR OWN, PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND BELIEFS (as opposed to what you "should" believe or what is theologically or philosophically correct). 1=Strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree.

1. Authoritarian
   a. Strict
   b. Punishing
   c. Wrathful
   d. Judging
   e. Stern
   f. Angry
   g. Restricting
   h. Controlling
   i. Commanding
2. Benevolent
   a. Forgiving
   b. Caring
   c. Merciful
   d. Accepting
   e. Compassionate
   f. Helping
   g. Gracious,
   h. Tolerant,
   i. Generous
3. Limitless
   a. Boundless
   b. Vast
   c. Infinite
   d. Immense
   e. Limitless
   f. Transcendent
   g. Absolute
   h. Supreme
4. Mystical
   a. Nature
   b. The Universe
   c. Energy
   d. Consciousness
   e. Cosmic
   f. Mystical
   g. Om
5. Ineffable
   a. Unimaginable
   b. Unknowable

c. Unknown
d. Incomprehensible
e. Inconceivable
f. Distant
g. Silent
h. Absent

APPENDIX F

External and Internal Shame Scale

Instructions: Below are a series of statements about feelings people may usually have, but that might be experienced by each person in a different way. Please read each statement carefully and circle the number that best indicates how often you feel what is described in each item.
Participants are asked to rate each item using a 5-point scale (0 = "Never" to 4 = "Always")

1. Other people see me as not being up to their standards
2. I am isolated
3. Other people don't understand me
4. I am different and inferior to others
5. Others are judgmental and critical of me
6. Other people see me as uninteresting
7. I am unworthy as a person
8. I am judgmental and critical of myself

APPENDIX G

Spiritual Assessment Inventory

Instructions:
1. Please respond to each statement below by writing the number that best represents your experience in the box to the right of the statement.
2. It is best to answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think
your experience should be.
3. Give the answer that comes to mind first. Don't spend too much time thinking about an item.
4. Give the best possible response to each statement even if it does not provide all the information
you would like.
5. Try your best to respond to all statements. Your answers will be completely confidential.
6. Some of the statements consist of two parts as shown here:
[2.1] There are times when I feel disappointed with God.
[2.2] When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue.
Your response to 2.2 tells how true statement 2.2 is for you when you have the experience of feeling disappointed with God described in statement 2.1

1=Not At All True, 2=Slightly True, 3=Moderately True, 4=Substantially True, 5=Very True

1 I have a sense of how God is working in my life A
2.1 There are times when I feel disappointed with God D
2.2 When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue RA
3 God's presence feels very real to me A
4 I am afraid that God will give up on me I
5 I seem to have a unique ability to influence God through my prayers G
6 Listening to God is an essential part of my life A
7 I am always in a worshipful mood when I go to church. IM
8.1 There are times when I feel frustrated with God D
8.2 When I feel this way, I still desire to put effort into our relationship RA
9 I am aware of God prompting me to do things A
10 My emotional connection with God is unstable I
11 My experiences of God's responses to me impact me greatly A
12.1 There are times when I feel irritated at God D
12.2 When I feel this way, I am able to come to some sense of resolution RA
in our relationship
13 God recognizes that I am more spiritual than most people G
14 I always seek God's guidance for every decision I make IM
15 I am aware of God's presence in my interactions with other people A

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16 There are times when I feel that God is punishing me I
17 I am aware of God responding to me in a variety of ways A
18.1 There are times when I feel angry at God D
18.2 When this happens, I still have the sense that God will always be with me RA
19 I am aware of God attending to me in times of need A
20 God understands that my needs are more important than most people'sG
21 I am aware of God telling me to do something A
22 I worry that I will be left out of God's plans I
23 My experiences of God's presence impacts me greatly A
24 I am always as kind at home as I am at church. IM
25 I have a sense of the direction in which God is guiding me A
26 My relationship with God is an extraordinary one that most G
people would not understand
27.1 There are times when I feel betrayed by God D
27.2 When I feel this way, I put effort into restoring our relationship RA
28 I am aware of God communicating to me in a variety of ways A
29 Manipulating God seems to be the best way to get what I want G
30 I am aware of God's presence in times of need A
31 From day to day, I sense God being with me A
32 I pray for all my friends and relatives every day IM
33.1 There are times when I feel frustrated by God for not responding D
to my prayers
33.2 When I feel this way, I am able to talk it through with God RA
34 I have a sense of God communicating guidance to me A
35 When I sin, I tend to withdraw from God I
36 I experience an awareness of God speaking to me personally A
37 I find my prayers to God are more effective than other people'sG
38 I am always in the mood to pray. IM
39 I feel I have to please God or he might reject me I
40 I have a strong impression of God's presence A
41 There are times when I feel that God is angry at me I
42 I am aware of God being very near to me A
43 When I sin, I am afraid of what God will do to me I
44 When I consult God about decisions in my life, I am aware A
to my prayers of his direction and help
45 I seem to be more gifted than most people in discerning God's will G
46 When I feel God is not protecting me, I tend to feel worthless I
47.1 There are times when I feel like God has let me down D
47.2 When this happens, my trust in God is not completely broken RA

Scales:
A = Awareness
RA = Realistic Acceptance (formerly = Healthy Ambivalence)
D = Disappointment (formerly = Defensiveness)
G = Grandiosity (formerly = Narcissism)
I = Instability (formerly = Splitting)
IM = Impression Management (new scale, experimental)