The negative effects of pornographic consumption and depressive symptoms in Hispanic college students

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Introduction

Background
• Pornography accounts for nearly 30% of all web traffic (Shor & Seida, 2019).
• It was observed that 46% of men and 14% of women watched pornography during any given week; those numbers jumped to 56% and 26%, respectively when looking at monthly usage of pornography (Regnerus, Gordon, & Price, 2016).
• Grubbs, Stauner, and Exline’s (2015) findings suggest perceived addiction to internet pornography is related to psychological distress, and the perceived addiction may also play a potential role in maintaining or increasing distress overtime.
• Currently, there are few studies assessing depression and the negative effects of pornography use in a Hispanic college student sample.

Aims
Given this prevalence and a dearth of research on mental health correlates, the current study assessed the negative consequences of pornographic viewing relative to sex and symptoms of depression in a Hispanic college student sample.

Methods

Participants
Hispanic college students (N = 345; Mage = 20.13, SD = 3.92; 72.2% female) were recruited via SONA system, a web-based recruitment site.

Measures
• Sociodemographics. This questionnaire collected typical sociodemographic information (e.g., age, sex, education).
• Pornography Consumption Effect Scale (PCES). This 47-item (7 point likert scale each question) scale contains 5 subscales to assess an individual’s negative self-perceived beliefs on how pornography affects their sexual life (SL), attitudes toward sex (ATS), knowledge in sex (SK), life in general (LG), and attitudes toward the opposite gender (PATOG). The sub-scales of the negative dimension have an internal reliability of alpha greater than or equal to .82 (Hald & Malamuth, 2008). (Cronbach’s alpha = .90).
• Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). This is a multipurpose nine item question instrument for measuring the severity of depression and the degree to which it affects the patient’s ability to function in daily life. Internal reliability of the PHQ-9 is excellent with a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 and .86 in validity tests (Kroenke, K., & Spitzer, R., 2002). (Cronbach’s alpha = .91).

Procedures
• After IRB approval was granted, participants were recruited through an online web-based recruitment site. After participants reviewed and signed the consent form, they were asked to answer the subsequent questionnaires.

Approach to Analyses
• A linear regression model assessed the negative effects of pornographic viewing relative to sex and the PHQ-9.

Results
• Men reported more negative effects of pornographic viewing (β = -0.678, p = .01) than women.
• Men who reported negative effects of pornographic viewing also reported greater depressive symptoms on the PHQ-9 (β = 0.888, p = .01).

Discussion
• The negative consequences of pornographic viewing, such as negative perceptions of the opposite sex and interfering with one’s sex life, were reported more in men than women. However, past research has shown that men have indicated that pornography had a greater positive than negative impact on their lives (Miller, Kidd, & Hald, 2018). Our inconsistent findings may be a unique function of the U.S./Mexico border sample, in that students who commute to campus encounter more challenges to sexual activity of any kind, be they solitary or partnered, which may heighten reported perceived negative consequences. Alternatively, greater reports of negative consequences in males may result from increased frequency of viewing, such that viewing motives are heterogeneous and may impact sexual-related consequences (e.g., views of the opposite sex).

Discussion cont.
• Depressive symptoms were significantly associated with negative consequences of pornographic viewing. This could suggest, as in other studies, pornographic viewing as a short-term coping mechanism and subsequent trigger for negative emotions such as feelings of loneliness, sadness, and anxiety (Worden, Wilk, Kowalewska, Skorok, Łapiński, & Gola, 2018). Symptoms of depression may also be linked to the individual’s perceived addiction to internet pornography (Grubbs, Stauner, Exline, Pargament, & Lindberg, 2015). Perceived addiction may generate negative thoughts about oneself, which may be associated with depressive symptoms in the individual.

Limitations
• Limitations of this study include its reliance on self-report and its lack of generalizability to the young adult population of the U.S. because of the predominantly Mexican-American sample. Additionally, the present cross-sectional study does not allow the assessment of temporal relationships.

Future Directions
• Future research should aim for a more prospective study to assess the temporal relationships between viewing, consequences, and distress symptoms. Future studies should also include young adult non-college students (e.g. military), differences in sexual orientation of the viewer, and differences in types of pornography that is being viewed.

References

Tables

Table 1: Continuous Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20.13</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>17 - 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0 - 20</td>
</tr>
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<td>Pornography Consumption Effect - Subscale 1 Negative Effect</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.99</td>
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Table 2: Summary of linear regression predicting the negative consequences of pornographic consumption

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<th>Gender</th>
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<tr>
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<td>-.678</td>
<td>.115</td>
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Notes. Bold indicates p < .01

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