



PORN

Their eyebrows furrowed together, lips bitten, faces flushed. I could see between their **darting eyes** that they were looking for the best way to answer the simple question I had posed: “What is your **relationship to porn?**” As they searched for the right way to respond, I couldn’t help but think of the **irony.**

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PREVALENCE OF PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography is a multibillion-dollar business that has roots in almost every component of modern culture. In 2016 alone, Pornhub, the leading online pornography site, had 23 billion visitors and 4.6 billion hours of videos streamed. According to Pornhub, the U.S. has the most viewers, making up 40 percent of the site's visits. Women make up 25 percent of the people viewing porn, whereas men dominate at 75 percent. The demographic viewing the majority of content is 18 to 34 years old.

Pornography is not a new phenomenon – from cave drawings to Greek statues, pornographic images have existed as long as human civilization itself. With the emergence of the Internet, pornography is now consumed in greater quantities than ever before. Instead of hiding a stolen Playboy under your bed or frequenting a dirty, smoke-filled store that sells adult magazines, pornography is now easily accessible for free on phones and laptops. Pornhub cites that 70 percent of its views were streamed from a mobile device in the U.S. last year. The quick access to cellphones has made porn viewership steadily increase, with 2016 yielding the largest numbers Pornhub has seen.

The age at which people first encounter explicit images has changed as well. According to the Center for Parent and Youth Understanding, children are first exposed to pornography around age 11. Unlike many of their elders, these kids are accessing pornography in high volumes, choosing explicit videos over still pictures. The industry is now progressing from simple video content to a world of virtual pornography where a 360-degree hardcore pornography experience will exist for viewers.

EFFECT ON THE BRAIN

Pornography, despite its widespread nature, does not come without consequences. Sex is intoxicating, and the immediate gratification that pornography offers rewards our basic sexual instincts. Studies are finding that viewing pornography can become an addiction. Like any addictive substance, the effect on individuals is not always uniform. Nonetheless, some Internet pornography viewers do exhibit behavior that classifies as an addiction. In a comprehensive report by the Witherspoon Institute, 50 scholars from a variety of professions signed to address the “social costs of

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pornography.” According to the report, because sexual arousal has the highest natural reward system, a person who is chronically viewing pornography drenches his or her brain with dopamine, a chemical that plays a huge role in reward-motivated behavior. This creates pathways in the brain for porn. As in any addiction, the viewers develop a tolerance to the content they are used to watching and cultivate a desire for different sexual experiences. Often, after hours of viewing porn, people find themselves searching for content they previously found disturbing or violent, according to the report.

“The stimulation of porn is very intense,” said Dr. Franklin Foote,

a professor of psychology at UM.

“Number one, we are expecting really intense sexual arousal. Secondly, for a person who sees pornography, after a while, the dopamine receptors get less intense so it takes more intensity to get to the same level of arousal. This leads to pornographic addiction and the issue of not being aroused by normal sexual intercourse.”

Fight the New Drug (FTND), a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating consumers about porn, explains the role of pornography in reducing the brain's gray matter, which is associated with making decisions. For men in particular, FTND has found that pornography leads to an increased risk of erectile dysfunction. Because the brain is desensitized, it is difficult for a man to become sexually aroused with a physical partner even when using pills such as Viagra.

NEW SEX EDUCATION

If chronic porn consumption has the ability to rework key parts of the brain, why is there still such a stigma around discussing it? College-aged students are the first in history to be exposed to pornography at such high volumes from such a young age. This makes pornography many students' first exposure to sex.

“We are literally growing up on pornography,” Nigel Richardson, a senior motion pictures and Africana studies student, said. “We are the generation of online pornography.”

Richardson was the first student at the university who immediately felt comfortable discussing pornography as a subject, coming prepared with a packet full of information. After stumbling across a Time article discussing the effects of porn, Richardson became involved with researching the subject. He even proposed a potential class at

PORN BY THE NUMBERS

Pornhub's most searched terms by gender in 2016:

MALE

MILF
Step-mom
Step-sister

FEMALE

Lesbian
Lesbian scissoring
Threesome

Pornhub's hours of porn watched in 2016:

4.6 BILLION HOURS

Pornhub received 23 billion visits in 2016, with:

64 MILLION visits per day

2.6 MILLION per hour

44,000 per minute

729 per second



UM that would discuss pornography.

As a film student, Richardson notes that there is a formula that every pornographic video follows that is similar to that of a sitcom or drama. The structure highlights the dramatization of the experience and the creation of unrealistic expectations. He described the content of pornography as having instances of violence, stereotypes and misogyny.

“Normal actors in porn are white. The subgenres and categories are minorities,” Richardson said. “They are deemed ‘exotic.’ When you think about degradation and objectification in pornography, you also need to think about black males because they basically become a large penis, or a black female who becomes a large butt or set of breasts. They become an object just for that purpose.”

The Latin female is spicy and sassy, the Asian, submissive and sexual, he added. In pornography, stereotypes are exaggerated for entertainment purposes. Furthermore, most pornography is produced by men, for men – creating content that heightens male sexual satisfaction often at the cost of a female, whether it be through violence or humiliation.

If porn serves as many people's first encounter with sex, what does that teach them about sex and sexuality? Although

we can separate the men and women on a screen from those we are attracted to and love in real life, pornography is wiring specific images in brains that are not yet fully developed. Sexual tastes are formed by experiences and if that experience is promoting power-dynamic roles, stereotypes and harsher forms of sex, that is what one's sexual preferences will lean towards.

For some students, pornography has not greatly influenced their sexual experiences. “Obviously I do watch porn, but it doesn't affect me in going about my day normally,” senior Ryan Donahue said. “I've known since a very young age that it is acting and, knowing this, I don't allow it to impact what actual sex is ... I guess you try to emulate what you have seen in porn. Does it work? No. Did I learn that quickly? Yes.”

Porn as America's new sex education creates other concerns besides how people learn to have sex. Most pornographic scenes do not use condoms and, in a country that isn't even meeting the general requirements when it comes to sex education, most students are learning what to do – the before and during – from pornographic videos. For relationships, sexual safety, level of comfort and consent, pornography can draw an unsafe picture for the sexually inexperienced.

EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS

Pornography's influence on the brain is harbored in false perceptions. The conflict between expectation and reality that pornography produces can create pressure on romantic relationships. According to FTND, not only do couples face body insecurity from pornography, but they also experience reduced sexual and relational satisfaction. Changing sexual preferences and perceptions combined with erectile dysfunction leads to uncomfortable experiences for couples.

“The film is edited and the actors are acting,” Foote emphasized. “The size of the man's penis and the female's breasts are unusually large and the other big factor is how women have an orgasm – the actors are screaming and thrashing around.”

The secrecy of pornography can be another deterrent to a relationship's health. If a partner is hiding his or her pornography use, the relationship tends to suffer. Some partners find pornography to be an act of adultery or become insecure once they discover a partner's porn habits, the Witherspoon Institute claims. For example, if a male is watching pornography with a specific ethnicity and body type, his partner often begins to question and feel distress over his sexual appetite.

The disconnect between intimacy with a physical partner and the sexual arousal a person obtains through pornography is additionally seen in



Exposure to too many pornographic images can make it harder to get aroused. This is one of the many signs of addiction.

female dissatisfaction. Because it is a male-dominated industry, the sexual desires of men are emphasized both on the production and consumption sides.

"Typically, women like sex play and romance and intimacy stuff, but this typically isn't shown in pornography. We often see the jackhammer approach to vaginal penetration," Foote said. "Pornography models the wrong kind of behavior for relationships and sexual satisfaction for both parties."

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CAMERA

Staged with lighting and makeup, porn makes sex look effortless and perfect, but the uncomfortable situations that happen in reality are normal – porn just cuts them out.

"Don't dwell on it. It is not what it seems," Anddy Entrena, a 28-year-old adult film entertainer, said. Entrena was 19 years old when he got into pornography. He was introduced to it through his older brother and started out doing nude photography but progressed quickly to the video market. Entrena currently works as a tattoo artist and an amateur skateboarder, but continues to do pornography work on the side.

"I hate doing it. It is out of necessity," Entrena said. "As soon as my life is secure, I am definitely going to leave it out." Entrena has transitioned from doing a scene every other day to every other month and has slept with about 215 different women. "When I was younger, I was a lot more active, I was a swinger with my ex-wife. Before, I wouldn't care. Now, I care more. I went three years without having sex and I felt like I had womanized a lot of people in my life and then I was like, 'I can't do this anymore.'"

Entrena says that a typical day on set includes taking blood samples to check for STIs and signing paperwork to give consent. Before they start to film, the producers ask if you need anything to loosen up. "They want you to be sober, but they will let you do what you have to do," Entrena said.

Pornography's impact does not end with the people watching it from their screens.

"Oh yeah, it [porn] has had an impact," Entrena said. "There is a big reason I hate doing porn. I feel like every time I do porn, a piece of my soul disappears. It now takes a lot for me to get turned on by other people."

Despite being involved in the porn industry and seeing some of

the consequences, Entrena admits to watching porn for a mental release.

"Porn can be bad, but at the same time, if some people don't have that leisure to talk to someone or the confidence to do something sexual with someone, porn serves that purpose," Entrena said.

POTENTIAL POSITIVES

There is not enough research on pornography for professionals to be able to say how much is too much. Many people such as Entrena find watching pornography to be healthy in small doses. Whether as a stress release, confidence booster, stimulant for new ideas or an activity to boost arousal with your partner, pornography can have its benefits. It can also be a safe environment to explore sexual ideas without the intent of actually participating in that explicit form of sex.


"I see porn as an outlet for people who have fetishes but have no way to do that. It allows people to have fantasies and to act in them. It also makes them feel like less of a stigma," Richardson said.

Because research has not confirmed what constitutes a healthy amount of pornography viewing, it is up to a viewer to understand his or her habits and their effect on his or her life. Until concrete numbers are found, a blanket statement about the harm of pornography cannot be made.

MOVING FORWARD

Porn – the brain-rewiring, pleasure-seeking, perception-distorting, guilty pleasure that is so prevalent yet forbidden in modern society – points to how we have failed to have open and honest conversations about sex.

"I don't think there should be a stigma on masturbation, porn, or being interested in sex," Richardson said. "Keeping it as a taboo does not have any positive influence. We need to talk about it."

There are reasons terms like "hooking up" are vague and there are reasons we love the idea of sex but cringe when someone mentions porn. When sex is ingrained into the media and conversations we are participating in everyday, how can you not be curious about sexuality? Understanding sex begins with talking about it; barefaced and blunt. 

**If you struggle with a pornography addiction, contact the Counseling Center at 305-284-5511*



Distraction zooms out on what happens behind the camera at a porn shoot. From lighting to poses, everything is staged.