



## Pornography in Contemporary Life

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### ABSTRACT

Pornography has aroused interest both in lay public as well as scientists, since time immemorial. It has got a significant influence on the individual, his interpersonal relations and the society. Present paper, reviews the pathway of porn addiction beyond the biological levels and has attempted to bring in multiple perspectives. A brief conceptualization of porn, the history, the array of pornographic material and the transition from "curiosity" to "addiction", has been briefly reviewed within the framework of subjective sexual experience.

**KEYWORDS** : pornography, subjective sexual experience, addiction, sexual offense, sexual trafficking.

### Introduction

Conceptualizing pornography has always been a difficult task. Defining and watching it has become a major concern. Gender, morale, culture and sexual expressions have made it further sensitive. Porn has become a guiding factor of sexual fantasies and arousal. The impact of porn on the individual and the family has been a major research venture ("Is Porn Good for Us or Bad for Us?", 2016)

Frederick Schauer (1982) viewed pornography as a particular sex aid. According to Feminists like Dworkin, "Desire for pornography is a symptom rather than the case of deviance" (West, 2012). The perspectives attempting to conceptualize porn could be subjective and objective. Henceforth, a stipulated definition may be detrimental. The step to generate a construct begins with the peripheral classification of pornographic material. The fundamental division would be soft core and hardcore. Pictures, videos, audios and reading material make its varied nature. The context plays an important role in defining a material as "pornographic" along with its sexual content ("Is Porn Good for Us or Bad for Us?" 2016). According to liberalists, watching porn is a part of sexual freedom. However, adopting a feminist perspective, it is a destructor of human dignity. The feminist would definitely consider the impact of Pornography in the past as well as in the present (Cox, 2000). The search for a construct reaches the dead end, when the societal thoughts, private, cultural and marginalized opinions are incorporated, giving an integrated account (West, 2012).

Pornography originated in older civilizations. The concept of "sexuality" has been present around the globe. Sexuality was indeed a major theme of aesthetic sculptural expressions. The taboo on sex never restricted the production of pornographic material all throughout the history. Society and sex, however, maintained a strained relationship. Research to explore the impact of porn within the individual and in his social circles has faced significant difficulties. The non-availability of a randomized sample and the sensitivity of the topic made researchers drop out of the projects at an earlier point. Adding on to this, the history of research on sex, gender and reproduction has been controversial with the works of researchers like Kinsey, who practically went beyond "research ethics and set standards" to find genuine results out of passion (Bullough, 2006). Presently, research ventures are not devoid of issues of randomization and generalizability. However, availability of the sample may not be a concern, though there might be some ethical and practical limitations. Venus of Willendorf is one of the earliest, portrayals of the naked body. It is situated at the banks of the river Danube in Austria. The Greeks and Romans had "constructs" of homosexuality and orgies. In fact, porn mostly becomes a reconstruction of "exotic, historic sexuality". Kama Sutra or the tale of love enjoys the status of a sacred scripture, at the same time recalls

the beauty of sexuality, love and passion in the Indian culture. A largest collection of erotica came from the city of Pompeii. Numerous sexually explicit images, sculptures and allied were found that indeed formed the decorations of sexuality of a civilization reminded by the prominent figure of the god Pan, engaged in sexual intercourse with a goat. In 1524, Fanny Hill rejoiced the title of "erotic engravings" that portrayed heights of sexual fantasy. The themes of bisexuality, masochism and groping were, however, condemned by the religious authorities at this juncture. The development of photography at a parallel level, nurtured the development of pornographic images. The term "pornography", gradually found its place in the English dictionary. Filmography also promoted the growth of porn. Thomas Edison's, movie named, "Kiss" was indeed the "beginnings" of a new journey. Gradually, illegally shot, produced and distributed stag films joined a movement that used narratives and vivid depictions of raw sexuality which encouraged 'staged voyeurism'. Films, when portrayed, much beyond a "kiss", the concept of x ratings were, developed. Subsequently, the 'playboy' magazine came to the collection of pornographic reads. With the advent of silent sex films, Lasse Braun became the crusader of pornographic films. Braun's business partner, Reuben Sturman, helped him for his "ventures". They introduced the "Peep show" booths that became treats for the eyes with every single penny. They later took the name called 'pay and spray booths'. This period to an extent was the golden age of porn in spite of legal prosecutions ("A Brief but Totally Fascinating History of Porn", 2015).

Fantasy became the secret ingredient to "Pornographic excitement". Sexual taboo along with raw sex made the content further attractive. Porn within a story framework became further catchy. Technology made it even more irresistible with the addition of video calls, live shows, virtual reality, etc. The porn industry has in fact reached the status to deliver "tailor made porn". The past and present of porn are equally attractive in the market. However, globalization has redefined the storytelling pattern within pornography where theatre, sexuality, cultural violence and a lot of other ingredients were added. Internet sites are competing against one another to make the "subjective sexual experience" of watching pornography, a delightful experience.

Reflecting once again, primary distinction of pornography is from erotica. Apart from that, the classification includes hard core and soft core. Even when both forms contain nudity, the specificity of the display of sexual parts and visible penetration makes hard-core pornography distinct in nature ("What Distinguishes Erotica from Pornography?", 2011). Pornography encompasses a wide variety of sub-genres where the heterosexual pornography is no longer the prototype. In a way, it brought a revolutionary change in the normative sexual orientation within the virtual world. It is in fact

fascinating to observe that the sexual preferences of an individual may be totally different, 'online'. A substantial portion of pornography has become non-normative, featuring certain unconventional scenarios and sexual activity. It may portray violence, destruction, incest, pain and anything unconventional. The shrewd approach taken by the industry of porn in generating the products of consumption using surveys and other marketing strategies exemplifies the very same demand that it owns. Variety makes the individual "explore and experiment" the reality of his or her fantasies where the spark may begin from curiosity. The choice of a video or a script or an act may depend on the threshold of sensation seeking as well as the personality dimensions to an extent.

Porn exerts influence on the individual in a continuum. It ranges from the state of curiosity to addiction. The transformation towards addiction could be understood by exploring the subjective sexual experience. Subjective sexual experience could be conceptualized as the personal meaning attributed to sexual instincts, activities, attraction and the intimate connection between the individuals. Even when porn has got an influence at an interpersonal level, the change begins within the individual. Pornography has become a significant part of the mass culture. It has owned a say in sex related behaviors. Watching porn has broken the ties of taboo. Kvale, Træen, Lewin and Štulhofer, 2014, investigated the associations among the frequency of viewing Internet pornography, beliefs about how realistically pornography portrays sex, self-perceived effects of one's pornography use, genital appearance satisfaction, and sexual self-esteem in young Scandinavian adults. Majority of men and minority of women consumed pornographic videos at least once in a week out of which, most of them preferred computers over tablets and mobile phones. "Pornographic realism" became the predictive factor for the "positive perception" of pornographic use. There was a hypothesized relationship between self-perceived positive effects of pornography and higher sexual self-esteem, partially attributed to the higher genital appearance satisfaction among men who watched mainstream pornography. Genital appearance satisfaction was linked to higher sexual self-esteem for women, but it was not related to self-perceived effects of pornography use. Results indicated the role of pornography in expanding personal sexual scripts for women and men. Also, it might exert a modest influence on sexual self-esteem among young male adults.

The ideas of sexuality carry a significant level of curiosity, right from the encounter with puberty. However, porn in different variances has become an accepted learning source to explore the same. Ironically, this status of porn is condemned and accepted. When one could explore their apprehensions about sex via Porn, easy access may carry a hidden detrimental outcome. The body and the mind gradually get related to porn. The reality and virtual reality begin to get altered or even united. Porn has become available in multiple devices, which may further facilitate addiction. Kim, 2015, explored adolescent perceptions and attitudes toward smartphone pornography. The study investigated the subjective factors influencing the perceptions and attitudes of adolescents who were into smartphone pornography. Adolescent's perspectives on the consumption of smartphone pornography were collected through interviews. The participants included were Korean middle school students who have had the experience of watching pornography on smartphones. The results suggested that, adolescent's perceptions and attitudes toward smartphone pornography vary, but could be categorized according to prominent features. The specificity of technological preference over porn consumption is an important element so as to rate the intensity of the consumption. When masturbatory pleasure could be accomplished via both the modalities, frequency may have a better connection with smartphones.

Sexual arousal experienced by the individual by involving in pornographic videos may become an integral part of masturbatory experience. The patterns of sexual arousal are category specific in

itself (Chivers, Rieger, Latty & Bailey, 2004). Henceforth, involvement of porn makes it further complicated. At intra level, it becomes the source of sexual gratification, at an inter level; it may become the guide of the act. This could be conscious or subliminal. The body gets a source of pleasure, which in turn enhance different emotions, highlighting the fact that, porn exerts an influence beyond the biological model of addiction. It becomes the template of sexual performance and personal sexual ideas for the individual that merge real and virtual aspects of sex. It might become a platform where he could experience a virtual version of his sexual fantasies that would be a "taboo" offline. Indeed, the act of sex is beyond bodily pleasure. Pornographic addiction is not a one day phenomena where it is more or less of a process that involves the nature of the individual, the modality of porn and predominantly the personal meanings attached via subjective sexual experience at multiple levels.

Speaking distinctively, the role of personality in determining the sexual behaviors and activities are indeed noteworthy. Personality traits indeed predict sexual preferences and practices. Eyesenck's personality of sexuality has indeed become the backbone of accommodating evolutionary perspectives in explaining individual differences in human sexuality. However, personality traits haven't yet been directly associated to sexual perversions, aggression or risk taking behaviors (Barnes, Malamuth & James, 1984).

When the aspect of watching porn is perceived from a moral lens, there are multiple viewpoints regarding the same. When one thinks, it is a part of his sexual freedom, the question of addiction comes into the picture. The subliminal role it initiates travels all the way till addiction that could potentially threaten his or interpersonal relations and sexual identity. Reflecting on the classical approaches, exposure to sexually explicit materials could be based on two important theoretical perspectives. When modeling theory explained the possibility of people copying pornographic acts in their own behavior, catharsis theory propagated the idea that, porn is indeed a safer channel for letting out the sexual tension. However, more recent researches have brought in the idea that, sexually explicit material may result in attitudinal changes, that may question the so called "safer channel" (Davis and Bauserman, 1993 (Kelly, 1998). It could nurture the hidden fantasies of the individual to an extent such that, the virtual reality may not be differentiated from the real "sex life". Attributes about the self and the partner may drastically be altered and porn may become the permanent template of his or her sexual life (Bergner and Bridges, 2002). Internet pornography could create a culture that could more or less shape the prospective sexual behavior of the individual (Hald, Kuyper, Adam & de Wit, 2013). The psyche could be more or less guided by the dramatic content of porn.

When morality comes into the picture, one can always argue that, it is highly subjective, however, when humanity becomes the issue, watching pornography could be given a serious second thought. When one might own the "right" to rejoice a little bit of nudity, it shouldn't be at the cost of forcing someone to be dragged into that sexual content. In the beginnings, research on the possible behavioral effects of sexually explicit materials has focused primarily on sexual and aggressive behaviors. Pornographic contribution towards sexual aggression travels on the same continuum of pornographic addiction. However, it may be unethical as well as impractical for researchers to conduct real world studies to determine if individuals may behave in a sexually aggressive manner, after getting exposed to porn for a significant period of time. Studies have however explored the relation between sexual aggression and pornographic content by involving research "confederates". Males exposed to aggressive pornography did in fact express sexual aggression compared to their non-aggressive pornography exposed counterparts. Even when some studies have demonstrated porn being a source of abundant sexual information, (Duncan and Donnelly, 1991; Duncan and Nicholson, 1991 (Kelly, 1998), many others report that the availability of sexually explicit materials should be regulated (Kelly, 1998). Porn has expanded into

a commercial level, such that it holds a due share in abduction and human trafficking. In fact, the new advancements in porn have indeed promoted cybersex that would promote sexually problematic behaviors in the areas of obsession and compulsion (Cooper, Delmonico, Friffin-Shelly and Mathy, 2004). Every click on a porn site increases the demand for a particular sexual content that in fact will increase its availability, even when most people think that porn exerts influence on a third person than his or her self (Lee, 2005). Thus, violence, aggression and incest, when preferred, it poses a threat on the life of someone living outside the virtual world and this may become a vicious cycle (Romito & Beltrami, 2011). When unrealistic pornographic themes get carried through cartoons and animated figures, it promotes the growth of rape, torture and humiliation. It could also create a culture where women learn to fantasize rape and men tend to accomplish the same (Barnett & Hilz, 2017). Henceforth watching porn is a private affair; however, the call is beyond a simple preference or attitude.

## COMMENTS

The present paper summarizes certain important aspects on the construct of porn, its impact and finally the choice of watching it, also acknowledging the concept of subjective sexual experience. Undertaking different perspectives, article, reviews the pathway of curiosity to addiction.

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