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Impact of internet pornography on body shame among emerging adults

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Abstract

Due to accessibility, affordability and growth in the past decade, internet pornography appears to be influencing emerging adults. That is, sexual expectations, desires, body image, sexual esteem and other behaviours are likely to be impacted by the consumption of internet pornography.

This quantitative study was followed to explore the gender difference and impact of online sexual screening on body shame. The sample consisted of total 100 students including 50 male and 50 female students) in the range of 18 to 25 years of age studying in different institutes of Delhi NCR region. Participants were assessed on two scales: Internet sex screening test by Delmonico (1997) and the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS): Body shame by McKinley and Hyde (1996). Data was analysed with the help of SPSS, using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. To analyse gender difference independent sample t-test was carried out, whereas to explore the relationship between the online sexual behaviour and body shame, correlation was tested. Simple liner analysis was used to identify the impact of online sexual behaviour on body shame

A significant gender difference was observed with regard to online sexual behaviour (Internet sexual screening) and body shame. Results also exhibited that body shame was predicted by internet sex screening that explained 9% of the variance. Males had more significant impact of sexual behaviour on internet on body shame It was also evident from the study that sexual behaviour on internet was positively associated with body shame.

Keywords: Pornography, sexual, self- esteem, aggression, body esteem, attitude, body shame

Introduction

Due to accessibility, affordability and growth in the past decade, internet pornography appears to be influencing emerging adults. The sexual expectations, desires, body image, sexual esteem and other behaviours are likely to be impacted by the consumption of internet pornography. Easy accessibility to internet has led to individuals create, re-create, supply and acquire pornographic material (Flood, 2007; Finkelhor, 2007; Haggstrom-Nordin, Sanberg, Hanson, & Tyden, 2006; Lo & Wei, 2005; Owens, 2012; Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor, 2007) [8, 15, 21, 28]. Pornography in the simplest terms refers to any sexually explicit material that is available either on an offline or an online platform and researchers studying pornography generally have focus on 3 kinds of pornography i.e., violent pornography, non-violent pornography and erotica (Kingston et.al., 2009) [13]. With the growth of internet, porn industry has become extremely anonymous yet affordable and accessible to the masses. The penetration of internet in everyday life has led to increase in viewership of online pornography. In India, the internet penetration rate in the year of 2019 was around 45% indicating that majority of the country's population had access to internet (Keelery, 2021) [11]. Given the high prevalence of pornography use among population, it is important to note that exposure to porn is often unintentional or accidental.

A nationwide study in U.S.A., identified that 66% of the internet users have had accidentally came across pornographic content. To analyses the effects of pornography, Attorney general commissions of United States produced a report (1989), indicates that exposure to non-violent pornography is related to the sexual violence and sexual coercion. Succinct studies have found that people have more inclination towards rape crimes as well as increased sexual callousness after watching pornography for longer period of times (Mullin & linz, 1995; Zillmann & Bryant, 1982) [19, 31].

A study conducted by Allen and her colleagues (1995) [1] highlighted the Gender differences in terms of the impact of pornography viewing on behaviour.

The study highlighted that the men who had the history of abuse towards women became more hostile towards them after watching pornography. Furthermore, a study conducted by Ybarra and Mitchell (2005) [30] also highlighted that those men who possess predisposing levels of risk towards sexually aggressive behaviour and intensive consumption of pornography, are more likely to be sexually aggressive as compared to their counterpart. Researchers have further identified that adolescent's exposure to pornographic material leads to greater sexually permissive attitudes (Braun-Courville & Rojas in 2009; Lo & Wei 2005) [2, 15]. In terms of gender difference in relation to female bodily objectification, studies show that emerging adults (males and females) who are exposed to internet pornography on a regular basis are more likely to consider females as objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009) [22]. The tendency for certain adolescents to accept internet pornography as realistic may exacerbate the objectification of women. Individuals may also adopt behaviours that encourage the treatment of women as objects due to the nature of pornographic scripts (Tylka & Van Diest, 2014) [26]. It was also observed that men were more frequent users of Internet pornography, led to belief in perceived realism and its utility (Hald *et al.*, 2008; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010) [7, 23].

Zillmann and Bryant (1989) [32] started to explore the psychological impact of pornography, indicating that viewing pornography can lead to addictive behaviour. They also highlighted that viewing non-violent pornography has impact on an individual's relationship with seeking out other forms of pornography. Exposure to violent pornography has more adverse effect (Intos-peterson & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1989) [9] as compared to other types of pornography.

The access to mass media on internet has significant impact on the formation of ideas, attitude and self-image. As internet pornography is a part of mass media available on internet, it has a direct and negative impact on body image and self-esteem. One component of body image is body esteem, which has a direct correlation with body shame. This indicated that lower sense of body image can lead to higher body shame experienced by an individual.

For the present study body shame refers here to the policing that people put their body through by comparing themselves to the cultural norms. There are less empirical data on the impact and influence of online net pornography on body image (Owens, 2012) [21]. Kvaem, Tren, and Iantaffi (2015) conducted a study on homosexual and bisexual males in Norway to investigate the relationship between self-perceptions, internet pornography, and preferences for pornographic performers' appearances, as well as sexual self-esteem. According to the findings, individuals who think of themselves as attractive and have an ideal body type, as well as those who watch pornographic materials for longer periods of time, have a stronger favourable impact on their self-esteem. The literature also suggests that appearance focused social comparison by women have a negative impact on the domains of body satisfaction (Leahey, Crowther, & Michelson, 2007).

Against this backdrop, the present study aimed to address the following objectives:

1. To investigate the gender difference with respect to online sexual behaviour and body shame.
2. To explore the relationship between internet pornography and body shame.
3. To identify the impact of Internet pornography on body shame.

Method

The present study adopted a quantitative approach with an aim to examine the impact of internet pornography on body shame. It also aimed to investigate the gender difference between males and females on these variables.

Sample

The sample consisted of total 100 students (including 50 male and 50 female students) in the range of 18 to 25 years of age studying in different institutes of Delhi NCR region. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Individuals who consume internet pornography and falling in the age range of 18-25 years were included in the sample and who did not watch video pornography using internet were excluded from the study.

The demographic information was collected on the basis of gender, residence, relationship status, family structure, age when they first access the internet and age of accessing porn (Table 1). The participants comprised of 50% males and 50% females. Majority of the participants were single (64%), living with their family members (52%) in a nuclear family structure (73%). 63% of the participants had started using internet by the age of 11-15 years and majority of them had starting access to the porn by the age of 16-20 years (52%).

Table 1: Sociodemographic details of Sample

Baseline characteristic	Male		Female	
	n	%	n	%
Gender	50	50	50	50
Residence				
Alone	1	2	8	16
With Roommate	16	32	22	44
Living with Partner	1	2	0	0
Living with Family	32	64	20	40
Family Structure				
Nuclear	39	78	34	68
Joint	11	22	16	32
Relationship Status				
Single	32	64	32	64
In Relationship	15	30	15	30
Engaged	0	0	0	0
Frequently Dating/Casual Relationships	3	6	3	6
Age of Accessing Internet				
5-10	6	12	9	18
11-15	32	64	31	62
16-20	11	22	8	16
21-25	1	2	2	4
Age of accessing internet porn				
5-10	3	6	5	10
11-15	21	42	19	38
16-20	26	52	26	52
21-25	0	0	0	0

Measures

To identify problematic sexual behaviours Internet Sex Screening Test scale (Delmonico, 1997) [3] was utilised. It is a self-assessment tool comprised of 34 items based on true and false responses. It helps to determine if an individual may be struggling with pornography. ISST scale can be further assessed on five dimensions i.e., online sexual compulsivity, online sexual behaviour-social, online Sexual Behaviour- isolated, online sexual spending, interest in online sexual behaviour.

A subscale namely Body shame of OBCS (Objectified Body Consciousness Scale constructed by McKinley and Hyde (1996). The OBCS has 24-items with three subscales i.e., body surveillance, body shame, and appearance control beliefs. In the present study, Body shame subscale was utilized to access one’s shame of not conforming to cultural standards in regards to their body.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS v16.0. Participant’s demographic was reported as frequency and percentages. The comparison between genders across different variables was conducted by using t-test. The relationship between different variables were examined by computing person correlation coefficients.

Results

Internet sex screening

To examine the gender difference in the struggle with internet pornography, t-test was utilized. Findings revealed that male participants had higher mean score (M= 7.64) on Internet Sex screening test in comparison to their female counterpart (M=5.5). There was a significant difference in struggle with internet pornography between male (M= 7.64, SD=.89) and female (M=5.5 SD = 3.8); (t (98) = 2.7, p = 0.00).

Table 2: Mean, SD, and t-value on the internet sex screening.

	Male		Female		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Internet sex Screening	7.64	.89	5.5	3.8	-2.78	0.00

Body Shame

To examine the gender difference on body shame, t-test was utilized. Which indicates that male participants had higher mean score (M= 31.76) on body shame in comparison to their female counterparts (M= 26.54). The difference between male and female participants on body shame was found to be significant {male (M= 31.76, SD=7.15) and female (M=26.54 SD = 9.08); (t (93) = 3.19, p = 0.02}.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and t score and Gender differences on the scale of body esteem

	Male		Female		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Body Shame	31.76	7.15	26.54	9.08	3.19	0.02

Correlation and regression among internet sex and body shame

Pearson Correlation was utilized to examine the relationship among Internet sex screening and body shame. The linear regression analysis was employed to predict Body Shame based on individual struggle with pornography. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between problems with internet sex and body shame. A significant regression equation was found (F (1,98) = 10.526, p<. 0.02), R2 0.097. Hence, body shame was predicted by internet sex screening by 9% of the variance.

Table 4: Correlation coefficients of corresponding variables on males and females

Variable	Internet sex screening	Body shame
Internet sex screening	1	
Body shame	.31**	1

Table 5: Predictor of internet sex screening on body esteem (N=100)

Criterion Variable	Predictor variable	R square	F	Beta
Body shame /esteem	Internet sex screening	.09	10.52**	.31

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the gender difference among struggle with internet pornography and body shame along with the impact of pornography on body shame. Findings reveled that males had significant struggle with internet pornography and body shame in comparison to their female counterpart. It is indicated that both males and females are at low risk of sexual behaviour on internet but male’s sexual behaviour tends to interference more with significant aspects of their life as compared to females. Most studies have argued that risk of sexual behaviour on internet varies across the gender. The findings of the study are in line with the research which showed that boys were often exposed to pornography at a very young age and tend to spend increasingly more time per week on watching pornography (Hald, 2006; Hammaren & Johansson, 2007; Mossige *et al.*, 2007) [6, 10, 18]. Their findings indicated that among male and female, males were more prone to watch internet pornography than females.

Findings indicated that males are more prone to experience shame of not conforming to cultural standards as compared to females. The findings are consistent with the available literature which indicates that reason can lie in the fact that culturally many females' beauty is positively correlated to their body weight.

Positive correlational was found between body shame/esteem and Internet sexual screening. This relationship was further analyzed using regression analysis. The analysis indicates that online sexual behavior (Internet sexual screening) of an individual is a significant predictor of their body shame/ esteem. The reason for the link between body shame esteem and online sexual behavior can be media portrayal of ideal body image. The desire to be thin plays a vital role in the dissatisfaction that males and females face with their own body (Strahan, *et al.*, 2006, Thompson, 1992; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) [25, 27]. These beauty standards are further promoted and propagated in media (Fallon, 1990; Kilbourne, 1987; Strahan, *et al.*, 2006; Wolf, 1991) [4, 12, 25, 29]. Images and messages that convey cultural norms for weight and appearance are very pervasive and quite salient to women (Strahan, *et al.*, 2006) [25] as compared to those directed towards men (Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999) [16]. A study conducted by Heinberg and Thompson in year 1995 found out that women having low sociocultural internalization were less dissatisfied with their body than those with higher sociocultural internalization. In reference to pornography the most popular magazine Playboy has seen a dramatically dip in the BMI of their models. From Playboy centerfolds to Miss America Pageant contestants reported a significant inclination toward a thinner standard (Garner *et al.*, 1980) [5].

Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of internet pornography on body esteem considering impacts of their interrelationships and gender differences. The objectives of the study were formulated based on prior researches and theoretical considerations. It was evident from results that

the person age of internet access and pornography access were quite close to each other. It was also observed that men had more significant impact of sexual behaviour on internet and this had also led to an impact on their shame to not be able to conform to societal norms. It was also evident from the study that sexual behaviour on internet showed a positive correlation with body esteem. Despite its methodological flaws, the design of this study gives data that may help researchers better comprehend pornography consumption in the literature. Researchers, attorneys, parents, and campaigners are increasingly concerned about the effects of pornography on a person's life. After the ICD-11 (W.H.O., 2019) ^[24] classification of excessive pornography viewing as an illness, more research will help facilitate to understand the effects of internet pornography on individual's behaviour. Future studies may be carried out to investigate factors associated to pornography.

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