

Strong religious beliefs may drive self-perception of addiction to online pornography

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People who consider themselves very religious and view Internet porn even once may perceive they are addicted, according to a new Case Western Reserve University's psychology study.

"This is one of the first studies to examine the link between perceptions of [addiction](#) to online pornography and religious beliefs," said Joshua Grubbs, a doctoral student in psychology and lead author of the study.

The research, "Transgression as Addiction: Religiosity and Moral Disapproval as Predictors of Perceived Addiction to Pornography," will be published today in the journal, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

"We were surprised that the amount of viewing did not impact the perception of addiction, but strong moral beliefs did," Grubbs said. He defined Internet pornography as viewing online sexually explicit pictures and videos.

The study is part of a \$1.4 million project funded by the John Templeton Foundation to study spiritual struggles and stress. Project directors and psychologists Julie Exline, from Case Western Reserve University, and Kenneth Pargament, from Bowling Green State University, contributed to the study, as did Joshua Hook, from the University of North Texas, and Robert Carlisle, from Mesa (Arizona) Public Schools.

Grubbs, who attended a conservative university as an undergraduate, became interested in the topic after observing fellow students in distress because they thought something was terribly wrong with them after watching online pornography.

Grubbs also discovered that half of the more than 1,200 books about pornography addiction on Amazon.com were listed in the religious and spirituality sections. And many of the books were personal testimonials about the struggles with this addiction, he said.

To find out why people have self-perceptions of addiction, Grubbs conducted three studies in which he surveyed people about their strength of faith, religious practices and online viewing habits. Respondents also completed a survey to measure their perception of addiction.

Two studies involved a general student population of men and women (with an average age of 19) from non-secular (331 participants) and religious (97 participants) higher education institutions. A third study captured the views of an online adult population of individuals 18 and older (208 participants), with an average age of 32.

Across the three studies, Grubbs said, more than half of the participants reported being Christian or Catholic, heterosexual and Caucasian. About a third reported no religious affiliation.

Men generally reported having greater moral disapproval than women for viewing online pornography. Overall, the three studies showed no significant gender differences in being religious.

The respondents acknowledged viewing online pornography at least once in the past six months, Grubbs said. But the findings revealed no connection between hours viewed and how religious a person was.

The number of hours spent viewing were similar for each study: about 25 percent viewed [pornography](#) one to three times in six months; 13 percent, four to six times; about 8 percent, seven to nine times; and the remaining participants about 10 or more times.

The information may help therapists understand that the perception of addiction is more about religious beliefs than actual viewing, researchers concluded.

"We can help the individual understand what is driving this perception," Grubbs said, "and help individuals better enjoy their faith."

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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