

# No such thing as porn 'addiction,' researchers say

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Journalists and psychologists are quick to describe someone as being a porn "addict," yet there's no strong scientific research that shows such addictions actually exists. Slapping such labels onto the habit of frequently viewing images of a sexual nature only describes it as a form of pathology. These labels ignore the positive benefits it holds. So says David Ley, PhD, a clinical psychologist in practice in Albuquerque, NM, and Executive Director of New Mexico Solutions, a large behavioral health program. Dr. Ley is the author of a review article about the so-called "pornography addiction model," which is published in Springer's journal *Current Sexual Health Reports*.

"Pornography addiction" was not included in the recently revised

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual because of a lack of scientific data. Fewer than two in every five research articles (37 percent) about high frequency sexual behavior describe it as being an addiction. Only 27 percent (13 of 49) of articles on the subject contained actual data, while only one related psychophysiological study appeared in 2013. Ley's review article highlights the poor experimental designs, methodological rigor and lack of model specification of most studies surrounding it.

The research actually found very little evidence – if any at all – to support some of the purported negative side effects of porn "addiction." There was no sign that use of pornography is connected to erectile dysfunction, or that it causes any changes to the brains of users. Also, despite great furor over the effects of childhood exposure to pornography, the use of sexually explicit material explains very little of the variance in adolescents' behaviors. These are better explained and predicted by other individual and family variables.

Instead, Ley and his team believe that the positive benefits attached to viewing such images do not make it problematic de facto. It can improve attitudes towards sexuality, increase the quality of life and variety of sexual behaviors and increase pleasure in long-term relationships. It provides a legal outlet for illegal sexual behaviors or desires, and its consumption or availability has been associated with a decrease in sex offenses, especially child molestation.

Clinicians should be aware that people reporting "addiction" are likely to be male, have a non-heterosexual orientation, have a high libido, tend towards sensation seeking and have religious values that conflict with their sexual behavior and desires. They may be using visually stimulating images to cope with negative emotional states or decreased life satisfaction.

"We need better methods to help people who struggle with the high

frequency use of visual sexual stimuli, without pathologizing them or their use thereof," writes Ley, who is critical about the pseudoscientific yet lucrative practices surrounding the treatment of so-called porn addiction. "Rather than helping patients who may struggle to control viewing images of a sexual nature, the 'porn addiction' concept instead seems to feed an industry with secondary gain from the acceptance of the idea."

**More information:** Ley, D. et al. (2014). The Emperor Has No Clothes: A Review of the "Pornography Addiction" Model, *Current Sexual Health Reports*. [DOI: 10.1007/s11930-014-0016-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11930-014-0016-8)

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