

The Role of Pornography in Sexual Offending: An Examination of Risk and Perceptions

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Objectives: Studies which have examined the role of pornography among individuals who sexually offend have produced no definitive relationship between the consumption of pornography and sexual offense behaviors. The present study had two central research questions: 1) Are there distinct differences among individuals and the perceived role of pornography in their sexual offenses when compared using risk levels as measured by the STATIC, STABLE, and the overall score? 2) What are the common themes among individual's experiences regarding pornography and how do they construct the role of pornography in their offending and in their lives post-release?

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 100 male individuals who were convicted of a sexual offense and who were incarcerated in a minimum-security correctional institution. Risk level data was provided for each participant by the Department of Corrections Sex Offender Services. A mixed-methods approach was used in order to explore the central research questions. A chi-square analysis was used to examine whether there were any key differences among individuals of varying risk levels as assessed by the STATIC, the STABLE, and when available, the combined overall score. A qualitative inductive analysis was performed using the NVIVO software program in order to explore the participant's stories and search for common themes which emerged from the data regarding the role of pornography and access to pornography post release.

Findings: Chi-square analyses revealed no significant quantitative differences between risk level and age of onset. There were no significant differences between risk level and the role of pornography in the offenses, type of pornography viewed, and desire for access post-release. The results of the qualitative analysis revealed several common themes: Porn as consuming, Porn as facilitating, and Learning control. Individuals frame pornography use in distinct ways and some individuals felt that access to pornography would decrease their risk of re-offense.

Implications: The results of this study have several implications for policy and treatment. First, it appears there is no relationship between the level of risk as measured by the STATIC and the STABLE and the role of pornography in sexual offense behavior. Thus, using risk assessment data to inform policies surrounding use of adult media would not be a best practice. Approximately half of the sample wanted access post release but some recognized that they lacked proper education or needed tools to assist them with healthy consumption. It may be useful for correctional institutions to move from addiction-based models of treatment to porn literacy models which can educate and inform on healthy use. Rather than a blanket restrictive policy, a harm reduction model of pornography which allows but restricts use and which promotes safe practices, may be more

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effective at reducing recidivism, preventing parole violations, and protecting the resources of correctional staff tasked with monitoring and supervision.

Karen Holt, PhD is an assistant professor at Michigan State University. She received her bachelor's degree and master's degree in forensic psychology and holds a master's and doctoral degree in criminal justice. Her research focuses on sexual deviance, sexual offending, and media and sexuality. Her work has been published in scholarly journals such as *Sexual Abuse, Violence and Victims*, and the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. She has presented her research at both national and international criminology conferences. Her professional membership affiliations include Michigan and international chapters of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA), the American Society of Criminology, the Latina Researchers Network, The Center for Gender in a Global Context, and The Research Consortium on Gender-Based Violence.

James Kissinger, MA, LLP is the Sexual Offender Services Manager for the Michigan Department of Corrections. James Kissinger has his master's degree in counseling psychology and serves as the Sexual Offender Services (SOS) Manager for the Michigan Department of Corrections. He received certification as a trainer in the Stable 2007 in 2015 and Acute 2007 in 2019. James has 11 years of experienced working with individuals who engage in sexually abusive behaviors. In 2009 James was invited to participate in a workgroup to redesign the MDOC's old SOP program into an evidenced based assessment and treatment program. The Michigan Sexual Offender Program (MSOP) and use of empirically validated risk assessment tools was born out of that process. His current role involves management and administration of SOS programs statewide within MDOC correctional facilities and community-based outpatient and residential treatment for parolees and probationers.

Corey Spickler, MS, LLP is the Program Manager for the Michigan Sexual Offender Services for the Michigan Department of Corrections. He received his bachelor's degree in Psychology from Taylor University in 2011 and graduated with his master's degree in Clinical Behavioral Psychology from Eastern Michigan University in 2013. Corey Spickler began working as a therapist with the Michigan Department of Corrections in the fall of 2013 with the Michigan Sex Offender Program (MSOP). He has over six years of experience working with a sexual offender population. In November 2017 Corey transitioned from prison-based services to the role of program manager for community based sexual offender services. He currently ensures program fidelity of community-based sex offender programming, working with contracted community vendors who provide sex offender treatment to probationers and parolees. Corey is trained in the scoring in interpretation of the Static-99R and is a certified trainer in the Stable-2007 and Acute-2007 dynamic risk assessment tool for sexual offenders. He is a member of the Michigan chapter and international chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)

Vicki Rousch, MA, LLP is the Senior Psychologist for the Sexual Offender Services, for the Michigan Department of Corrections. Vicki Rousch received her bachelor's degree in Family Life Education from Spring Arbor College, Master's Degree in Counseling from Spring Arbor University and a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology from Western Michigan University. She started working as a therapist with the Michigan Department of Corrections in 2008 and has been working with the sexual offender population for over 12 years. In 2018 she became a certified trainer in the Static-99R and is also trained in the scoring in interpretation of the Stable-2007. She is currently responsible for training staff within the MDOC, reviewing and auditing for the MSOP program and is active on the MSOP Leadership team. She is a member of the Michigan chapter and international chapter of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA).