



The relationship of “passionate attachment” for pornography with sexual compulsivity, frequency of use, and craving for pornography



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We developed a pornography-specific modification of the Passion Scale.
- Passionate attachment for pornography varied by weekly frequency of pornography use.
- Sexual compulsivity and craving are not proxy measures for passionate attachment.
- The modified scale may have clinical applications to aid assessment and therapy.

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ABSTRACT

We recruited a sample of 221 undergraduate males who used pornography regularly to complete a series of questionnaires assessing their “passionate attachment” to pornography, pornography use history, sexual compulsivity, subjective craving to use pornography, compulsive Internet use, social desirability and non-sexual sensation seeking. Both Harmonious Passion and Obsessive Passion subscale scores varied as a function of typical weekly frequency of pornography use, and both subscales were positively significantly associated with sexual compulsivity, current craving to use pornography, and compulsive Internet use. However, neither subtype of passionate attachment to pornography was significantly associated with non-sexual sensation seeking or with the tendency to present oneself in a socially desirable manner. Trait-like sexual compulsivity and presumably transient craving to use pornography appear related to, but are not substitute measures for, passionate attachment for pornography. Further research could evaluate the clinical utility of this questionnaire to measure clients’ preoccupation with and inclination to use pornography during assessment and psychotherapy.

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“Of all the worldly passions, lust is the most intense. All other worldly passions seem to follow in its train.” Gautama Buddha (563–483 B.C.)

1. Introduction

Pornography is available in many forms, but typically refers to written or pictorial material describing or showing explicit images of sexual acts with the intention of increasing sexual arousal. Over the last decade, the number of people viewing pornography on the Internet

has increased, due at least in part to the low cost, ease of access, and diversity of sexual content available via this medium (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000; Cooper, Delmonico, Griff-Shelley, & Mathy, 2004; Wallace, 2011). Although viewing pornography is a healthy sexual outlet for many individuals (Hald & Malamuth, 2008; Paul & Shim, 2008; Weinberg, Williams, Kleiner, & Irizarry, 2010), some people develop compulsive or addictive use of pornography, characterized by apparent inability to control their use, negative psychosocial consequences, and/or psychological distress (Griffiths, 2012; Ross, Mansson, & Daneback, 2012; Twohig, Crosby, & Cox, 2009).

Persistent but non-pathological use of pornography also could be viewed as a “passionate attachment” to a highly valued activity (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2008). According to Vallerand’s model, many people experience a strong inclination toward one or more activities that they enjoy and value (e.g., watching or playing sports, painting, reading, photography, playing or listening to music). As people spend more time and energy engaged in the activity for which they develop a passion, such attachments may become tied to their sense of self and serve multiple psychological needs.

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The key feature of Vallerand's model (2008) is his distinction of harmonious or psychologically healthy passions from obsessive or psychologically unhealthy passions. When one has a harmonious passion for a favored activity, the activity is an important but not overwhelming aspect of one's identity that is integrated with other aspects of one's life. In contrast, although an obsessive passion is also central to one's sense of self, engagement in the activity is less subject to one's control and causes conflict with other activities in one's life. Vallerand's model proposes that the same activity – in the present case, the use of pornography – could be a harmonious passion for one person, an obsessive passion for someone else, and have aspects of both harmonious and obsessive passion for another, depending on the centrality of and control one retains over engaging in the activity.

To assess these two types of passionate attachments, Vallerand et al. (2003) developed the Passion Scale. The Passion Scale asks respondents to rate the degree to which they agree or disagree with 14 statements regarding their engagement with a specific activity. Seven of the 14 items load on the Harmonious Passion subscale, and seven items load on the Obsessive Passion subscale, yielding two different subscale scores. In addition to evaluation of the generic (“this activity”) version of the Passion Scale, several teams of investigators have modified the questionnaire to focus on particular, presumably addictive activities.

For example, two studies of a gambling-specific version of the Passion Scale have found that scores on the Obsessive Passion–Gambling subscale – but not on the Harmonious Passion–Gambling subscale – were positively correlated with severity of gambling, frequency of gambling, emotional reactions when one is prevented from gambling, and self-perception as a heavy gambler (Ratelle, Vallerand, Mageau, Rousseau, & Provencher, 2004; Rousseau, Vallerand, Ratelle, Mageau, & Provencher, 2002). Researchers have also investigated passionate attachment to playing online games. For instance, Wang and Chu (2007) found that a self-report measure of online gaming addiction was correlated more strongly with Obsessive Passion–Online Gaming scores ($r = .69$) than with Harmonious Passion–Online Gaming scores ($r = .34$). As another example, Stoeber, Harvey, Ward, and Childs (2011) found that craving to play massive multiplayer online (MMO) games was significantly correlated with both Obsessive Passion–MMO scores ($r = .47$) and Harmonious Passion–MMO scores ($r = .40$).

Although the generic Passion Scale has utility when one wants to assess a sample of respondents engaged in different activities, we agree with Rousseau et al. (2002) regarding the advantages of developing activity-specific modifications of the questionnaire by re-phrasing items so that they apply more clearly to an explicitly stated target activity. Therefore, as part of a larger study designed to assess the subjective experience of craving for pornography (Kraus & Rosenberg, in press), we administered a pornography-specific modification of the Passion Scale and other psychological measures to a sample of undergraduate males who used pornography regularly. Based on the assumption that passionate attachment to pornography would result in using pornography more frequently, we expected Obsessive Passion for pornography – and, to a lesser extent, Harmonious Passion for pornography – to be associated with frequency of typical weekly pornography use. Secondly, because sexual compulsivity reflects a potentially pathological pattern of behavior and can apply to multiple sexual activities (Kaplan & Krueger, 2010), we expected a measure of this construct to be significantly but only moderately correlated with Obsessive Passion (and less so, if at all, with Harmonious Passion). Thirdly, we view passionate attachment as a relatively stable preoccupation or inclination, rather than as an intense but transient urge or desire to use pornography; nonetheless, based on Stoeber et al. (2011), we expected both types of passion to be correlated moderately with a measure of current craving to use pornography. Fourthly, as an evaluation of the degree to which passionate attachment to pornography is not merely a feature of sensation seeking per se, we also correlated passion subscale scores with non-sexual sensation seeking. Finally, because embarrassment might lead some young males to misrepresent their passionate attachment to

watch pornography, we evaluated the association between passion scores and a measure of social desirability bias.

2. Method

2.1. Measures

2.1.1. Passion Scale–Pornography

We adapted the phrasing of the 14 items on the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) to refer specifically to pornography use (see Table 1, first column, for a complete list of items). In addition to substituting the vernacular term “porn” in place of the term “this activity” in the original items on the Passion Scale, we re-phrased five of the original items to enhance clarity of meaning and reduce awkward phrasing (i.e., “Using porn fits in with the other activities in my life;” “I cannot imagine living without porn;” “I almost feel obsessed with using porn;” “I am enthusiastic about using porn;” and “When the urge is so strong, I can't help myself from using porn”). Participants indicated how strongly they agreed with each item using the following seven response options (presented without numerals): “disagree completely,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree a little,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree a little,” “agree somewhat,” and “agree completely.” We assigned numbers 1 through 7 to the response options such that higher scores indicate greater levels of harmonious and obsessive passion on each subscale. Readability statistics for the Passion Scale–Pornography indicated that the modified questionnaire items were easily readable (Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level = 6.1; Flesch Reading Ease = 67.8% on a scale of 0 [most difficult] to 100 [easiest]). Cronbach's α in the present sample was .79 for the Obsessive Passion–Pornography subscale and .78 for the Harmonious Passion–Pornography subscale.

As a follow-up to this main study, we had 44 undergraduate males, who used pornography at least once in the past six months, complete the Passion Scale–Pornography on two separate occasions – approximately one week apart – both times immediately following brief exposure to pornography-related stimuli (described below). Correlations of participants' Harmonious Passion and Obsessive Passion scores at Time 1 with their respective subscale scores at Time 2 indicated that the Harmonious Passion scale had adequate test–retest reliability, $r(42) = .76, p < .001$, and the Obsessive Passion scale had good test–retest reliability, $r(42) = .86, p < .001$.

2.1.2. Pornography Craving Questionnaire

The 12-item Pornography Craving Questionnaire (Kraus & Rosenberg, in press) reflects five elements of craving for pornography (i.e., perceived control over use, current desire to use, psychophysiological reactivity, intentions to use, and mood changes). Sample items include “If the situation allowed, I would watch porn right now” and “If I watched porn right now, I would have difficulty stopping.” Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with each item using the following seven response options (presented without numerals): “disagree completely,” “disagree somewhat,” “disagree a little,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “agree a little,” “agree somewhat,” and “agree completely.” Higher scores denote greater current craving for pornography. Item loadings from a principal components analysis, a high internal consistency reliability coefficient, and a moderate mean inter-item correlation ($r = .46$) supported the interpretation of the Pornography Craving Questionnaire being comprised of a single scale. Correlations of craving scores with selected sexual history and personality variables supported the criterion and discriminant validity of the questionnaire. In addition, craving scores demonstrated good one-week test–retest validity ($r = .82$), and significantly predicted the number of times undergraduate males used pornography during the following week. Cronbach's α in the present sample was .91.

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