

Behind Closed Doors: Pornographic Consumption on Sexual Attitudes within a Religious Conservative Context

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Abstract: Porn consumption (PC) remains widespread among Filipinos, alongside sexual double standards (SDS) and sexual objectification (SO), despite their adherence to the religious beliefs of their environment. Given this prevalence, there is limited local literature on the effects of PC on SDS and SO in the Philippine context. Therefore, this study provided an explanatory quantitative approach that utilized the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to explore the moderating role of religious conservatism (RC) on the effects of porn consumption on SDS and SO. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional study involving a sample of 323 Filipinos, aged 18 to 60, who have consumed pornography, which was gathered through convenience and purposive sampling methods and facilitated through an online survey. Interestingly, sex differences were found in the moderating role of religious conservatism. Therefore, the present findings partially support the study's hypothesis that religious conservatism strengthens the effects of porn consumption on sexual double standards and sexual objectification. In particular, women uphold sexual double standards more when they consume pornographic content and are religiously conservative. Contrastingly, sexually objectifying behaviors are more evident in men when they watch porn and are religiously conservative. While the present study revealed novel findings, it has encountered potential limitations, such as the lack of variability in the participants' demographics. Practical implications, limitations, and recommendations are also discussed in the paper.

Keywords: porn consumption; sexual double standards; sexual objectification; religious conservatism; Filipinos

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual double standard (SDS) remains contextually evident in societies, especially in cultures in which unequal gender roles exist, where men are viewed and evaluated more positively than women in terms of standards of sexual behaviors and sexuality (Endendijk et al., 2019; Milhausen & Herold, 2002). Moreover, SDS is linked to low female sexual assertiveness (Kim et al., 2019), victim-blaming

(Mckinlay & Lavis, 2020), and pro-rape attitudes (Moyano et al., 2017; Sierra et al., 2010). On the other hand, sexual objectification (SO) is a dehumanizing perception of women where they are seen as mere physical objects meeting the desires of others, mainly men, and are considered as someone who lacks certain qualities like mental capacity, undermining their autonomy and focusing more on their physical attributes (Kellie, Blake, & Brooks, 2019; Szymanski et al., 2010). This study adds to the scarce research on the perpetuation of SDS and SO in the Philippines, as prior

studies focused mostly on their impacts and outcomes **in relation with porn consumption.**

Pornhub, the world's largest porn site, has announced that the Philippines has been its top consumer for consecutively four years, spending an average of 13 minutes and 28 seconds on the site, with the most searched term "*Pinay*," which translates to *Filipino woman* (Pornhub Insights, 2018a; Pornhub Insights, 2018b; Pornhub Insights, 2021). Porn Consumption (PC) is defined as intentionally looking at pictures or videos of naked individuals engaging in sexual behaviors (Morgan, 2011, as cited in Ortiz et al., 2016), and is associated with individuals' perception of women as sex objects (Peter and Valkenburg, 2007), increased aggressive sexist attitudes (Hald et al., 2013), and promotes men's objectification and evaluation of women's bodies leading to unwanted sexual advances (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2017). Despite this, the Philippines' strong commitment to religious liturgical words and religious fundamentalist practices make the nation generally a conservative religious environment (Austria, 2004).

Religious conservatism (RC) is a form of social conservatism that places importance on maintaining in-group cohesion, while individuals who practice behaviors that deviate from the norms are considered to be out-group members (Terrizzi et al., 2012). Previous research found that conservatism and fundamentalism have an impact on sexual prejudice and an individual's sexual viewpoint toward gender roles, along with increased acceptance of aggression toward people who violate religious norms (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Etengoff and Lefevor, 2020).

With the scarcity of local literature on the potential effects of porn consumption and RC, the present study explored their influencing roles in SDS and SO by incorporating the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This posits that individuals learn behavior through observation of their environment, along with personal factors and behavioral patterns or cognitive processes (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2001).

With this, the researchers aimed to address the following research questions: Does religious conservatism strengthen the association between porn consumption and (1) sexual double standards and (2) sexual objectification?

2. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional online survey using a regression-based moderation analysis was employed to test whether religious conservatism strengthens the positive association between porn consumption and sexual attitudes (sexual double standards and sexual objectification). The participants of the study are Filipinos aged 18-60 years old residing in the Philippines who consume pornography videos on the internet. The following self-report instruments assessed the participants' porn consumption (Busby et al. (2020) Pornography Usage Measure), sexual double standard (Berrocal et al. (2019) Sexual Double Standard Scale Hetero-referred version), sexual objectification (Bareket and Shnabel (2019) Modified Sexual Objectification of Other Gender Questionnaire), and religious conservatism (Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) The Revised 12-Item Religious Fundamentalism Scale). Through convenience and purposive sampling, 323 out of 542 participants completed the survey with Google Forms, in which anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results show that religious conservatism (RC) alone is a stronger predictor than porn consumption in predicting sexual double standards (SDS). In contrast, porn consumption alone is a stronger predictor in predicting sexual objectification (SO). Additionally, a positive correlation exists between SDS and SO, **indicating** that the two are related, with SDS being internal and SO being external manifestations of sexist behaviors.

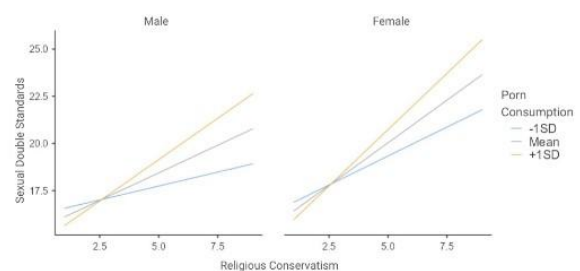


Fig. 1. Estimated Marginal Means Plot for Sexual Double Standards

As seen in Figure 1, when RC increases, an individual's SDS also increases. This is present in both genders; however, it can be seen that women have higher SDS than men. This may be explained through SCT wherein individuals tend to internalize the norms set by their religion or religiously conservative environment (e.g., what is written in the Scriptures), which increases their SDS. As religious conservatism imposes strict adherence to their teachings, it can be seen that women are more affected by this, which results in higher SDS than men.

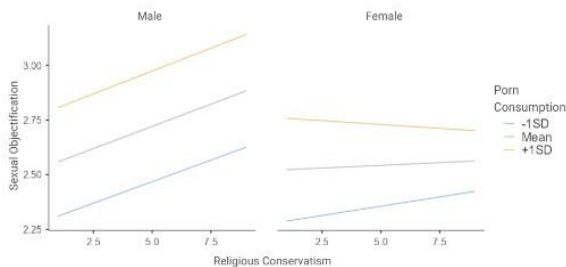


Fig. 2. Estimated Marginal Means Plot for Sexual Objectification

The study also reveals that PC is a strong predictor of SO, while RC alone is not. However, RC and SO show a positive correlation, suggesting that higher RC levels precede higher SO levels. Figure 2 shows that SO increases as RC increases in both sexes. However, women's SO may plateau or decline related to SDS levels, which are influenced by traditional gender roles and internalized norms such as modesty and submission to authority. Based on SCT, men observe and internalize patriarchal gender roles of male dominance and female submission, which are reinforced by authoritative figures. Men also tend to internalize the objectifying behaviors portrayed in pornography.

A three-way relationship also exists between sex, religious conservatism, and porn consumption in predicting both SDS and SO, which highlights the difference in results for both genders.

The present findings bear several practical implications. The results of the objectifying behaviors internalized from pornography may potentially raise awareness among individuals in making informed decisions on responsible internet usage. Another potential implication is for stakeholders, such as the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) and policymakers, to strengthen

compliance of internet service providers in monitoring online activities and filtering exploitative explicit content, as well as revisit current policies on unregulated pornography. Moreover, the study has possible implications for counselors in providing educational guidance integrating an understanding of healthier alternatives for sexual behaviors. Given the speculative gender differences in the effects of porn, it could have possible implications for integrating gender-specific themes in current sex education programs. Moreover, future scholars could utilize other frameworks and explore possible antecedents that contribute to the effects of porn consumption on sexual double standards and sexual objectification.

The present study encountered potential limitations. The lack of variability in the sample's demographics, particularly age, religious affiliation, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status, may have affected the results. Therefore, it is recommended that future scholars account for these factors to strengthen the generalizability of this study, as well as to make comparisons across demographic variables. Additionally, future researchers could utilize qualitative or mixed methods, as well as other instruments that could capture a particular spectrum of pornography use and religious conservatism.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the research highlights religious conservatism as a moderator between porn consumption and sexual attitudes in the Philippines. The results confirmed that the higher individuals adhere to religious conservative values, the more they exhibit sexual double standards and sexual objectification. Notably, women tend to internalize and accept more sexual double standards due to traditional norms shaped by religion, while men demonstrate a greater tendency for sexual objectification.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following people whose guidance and support made this study possible.

To Ms. Monica Renee Policarpio *RN, RPsy*, who continues to challenge us to explore ideas beyond our comfort and for believing in us and our topic. We are grateful for her exceptional feedback and guidance on each research process.

To Dr. Maribel Dominguez MD, PhD, RPsy, whose valuable advice and encouragement guided us all throughout the writing of this study.

To De La Salle University-Manila, for equipping us with the skills and values to become Lasallian achievers for God and country.

To the participants, for their interest and genuine support of our research topic. We appreciate their efforts in going the extra mile by reaching out to their other connections.

Completing our thesis study was made possible by our family and friends' unconditional support. Each of us would like to extend our special mention.

Lastly, we thank God for His blessings that provided us with sources of strength and inspiration.

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