

Increasing Singles Intimacy to Reduce Pornography Use: An Experimental Proposal

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Abstract

Research on pornography use is one that encompasses a broad section of human behavior and emotions. Much can be evaluated regarding use based on motivations, demographics, and coping skills. However, attempts to control this behavior is difficult with so many contributing factors. These factors are even more difficult when related to singles due to lack of research or even motivations to discontinue use. The following experimental proposal seeks to evaluate treatment for pornography use in singles through psychoeducation of building relational intimacy. The PREP “Within My Reach” program is designed for singles to teach relational intimacy skills. This between-group design will seek to evaluate the effectiveness of this treatment on social support, pornography use, and depression on single, never married males. All of these dependent variables will be measured through the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Cyber Pornography Use Inventory – 9 (CPUI-9), and Level 2 Depression Symptom Measure, respectively.

Keywords: pornography, intimacy, singles, social support, depression

Increasing Singles Intimacy to Reduce Pornography Use

Due to the complexity of the helping professions, research can be the language that can speak understanding where there is confusion. The topic of pornography use has garnered much attention and research due to its negative impacts (Grubbs, Stauner, Exline, Pargament, & Lindberg, 2015) as well as its prevalence in society (Regnerus, Gordon, & Price, 2016). Causes for pornography use is a crucial aspect of understanding. Among the singles population, isolation and loneliness play major roles in increasing depression and pornography use. However, there is a large gap in understanding specific interventions that can mitigate pornography use among singles. It is hypothesized that increasing intimacy skills within singles will mitigate isolation and loneliness and thus pornography use. Evaluating the impact of PREP's "Within My Reach" intervention on pornography use will be one step forward in understanding how to help this often overlooked demographic.

Literature Review

For a long time, intimacy has been viewed through the lens of a marriage relationship (Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). However, with the changing society in both culture and technology, there is a stronger push toward understanding intimacy through different lenses. These have included evaluating intimacy sought through online relationships (Chan & Lo, 2014), multiple relationships (Kahn, Zimmerman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Getzels, 2014), pets (Khalid & Naqvi, 2016), and even robots (Borenstein & Arkin, 2016). However, there is beginning to grow an interest in understanding the impact of healthy intimacy among singles (Kahn, Zimmerman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Getzels, 2014; Maher & Winston, 2017). While the causes for the development or lack of intimacy can

be argued, it has been found that a lack of intimacy has an impact on loneliness and isolation (Lee, & Goldstein, 2016). Isolation and loneliness has also been found to be a major predictor of pornography use (Evans, 2010). Thus, it is hypothesized that since singles are prone to isolation and loneliness (Lee, & Goldstein, 2016) which can be a cause for continued pornography use; then increasing in intimacy will reduce loneliness and pornography use.

Isolation and loneliness can be the most easily identified sources for pornography use. Griffiths (2001), who had done much research on this topic, highlights that perceived anonymity and disinhibition increase the likelihood of internet sexual addiction. Other research shows that there are many factors which point toward isolation and loneliness. These include unmet needs in couples and lack of acceptance (White & Kimball, 2009), a direct link with loneliness and pornography use (Yoder, Virden III, & Amin, 2005), failure to achieve intimacy (Marshall, 1989), and lack of social ties (Mesch, 2009). There are direct links with pornography use and loneliness in other addictive behaviors (Evans, 2010) as well as a link in negative social interactions and porn use (Kim, LaRose, & Peng, 2009).

All of these problematic outcomes become manifest in isolated singles. Albright (2008) found that those who reported being married were 20% less likely to consume pornography than singles. However, there is confounding research to suggest that pornography use does not significantly relate to participants' relational stage (Emmers-Sommer, Hertlein, & Kennedy, 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). Little of this research focuses on isolated individuals, just merely those in romantic relationships. Thus, an evaluation of isolation and loneliness in relation to pornography use is needed.

Model and Hypothesis

Based upon the information presented it is reasonable to posit that there is need for further research in several areas. First, there is a connection between lack of intimacy and isolation and loneliness. However, within singles, there is little that connects their non-romantic relationship intimacy with isolation and loneliness. Also, while there are links between isolation and loneliness and pornography use, attempts to understand this focus only on isolation and loneliness as an outcome of pornography use. It is posited that there should be a focus on increasing intimacy in singles which will both decrease the correlated aspects of pornography use, isolation/loneliness, and depression.

The model being utilized is a between-group experimental design (see appendix). This model seeks to understand the impact that a psychoeducational approach to developing intimacy in singles (independent variable) has on three elements. These three elements include social support, pornography use, and depression (dependent variables). While pornography use will be the focus of this study, co-variables of depression and social support will also be evaluated based on their close links between each other (Starcevic, 2015; Levin, Lillis, & Hayes, 2012). From these conceptions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁

A psychoeducation treatment teaching intimacy to singles will have positive increase in the amount of social support for those individuals.

H₂

Increasing levels of social support and intimate relationships through psychoeducation treatment will reduce perceived pornography addiction and use.

H₃

Depression levels will be moderated (lowered) by the levels of intimacy skills learned through psychoeducation treatment.

Method**Participants**

Participants will include single (never married), male clients ages 18-40 who pursue clinical counseling for the purpose of overcoming pornography use. Several local counseling agencies will be utilized in order to gather a base population. Recruitment will be with partnership with the counselors who are a part of the study and the agencies they work for. Random assignment will be utilized to funnel individuals into two groups. These two groups will be those who receive standard treatment for pornography use and those who receive treatment through the Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP). Focusing on males instead of both males and females is designed to attempt to eliminate the gender variance with pornography use.

Procedure

The participants in this research will be gathered through a volunteer basis through the help of several local counselors working in a variety of counseling agencies. One group will be assigned treatment for pornography use (control group; Tx; 0). The other group will also be treated but also include an additional treatment of PREP's "Within My Reach" individually based treatment (treatment group; Tx+; 1). Thus, there is no need for a wait list control group. While the majority of research evaluates the impact of the couples based PREP, there is beginning to emerge research to show the efficacy of the individually based "Within My Reach"

program. This program has found success in working with singles (Visvanathan, Richmond, Winder, & Koenck, 2015), military (Stanley, Allen, Markman, Rhoades, & Prentice, 2010), low-income individuals (Antle, Sar, Christensen, Ellers, Barbee, & van Zyl, 2013), and inmates (Antle, Karam, Christensen, Barbee, & Sar, 2011).

Measures

The procedure will also include a pretest-posttest group design. The participants, as part of the treatment intake, will be given several measures that will be evaluated at the completion of treatment (six months after initial treatment). These measures include the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988), Level 2 Depression Symptom Measure (Narrow et al., 2013), and the Cyber Pornography Use Inventory – 9 (CPUI-9; Grubbs, Volk, Exline, & Pargament, 2015). Each of these measures will be used to reflect the dependent variables of social support, depression, and perceived pornography addiction (use) respectively. Comparison will focus only on posttest measures in order to adjust or reduce error variance that could occur with comparing pretest to posttest (Hepner et al., 2015). The pretest will be used to select only those individuals with a low to moderate depression rating, low perceived social support rating, and a moderate to high perceived pornography addiction rating.

Validity

In evaluating the validity there is potential threat to having a low power due to amount of participants recruited. By only operating in the local area with several private practices as well as having such a narrow participant window (single, never married males), there could be not enough data to avoid a Type I or Type II error. By attempting to have 20 individuals in each group, these outcomes should have statistical validity. There also is the threat that occurs due to

unreliability of treatment administered. Since there is training required for implementation of the PREP “Within My Reach” program, this error is accounted for. However, in the control group, there is much variation for types of therapy that counselors implement for treatment of pornography use. Using counselors who center from the cognitive behavioral approach, this can be mitigated to some degree.

Internal validity appears strong due to the multiple assessment measures chose. Random assignment into two groups with one being a control group bring up a high level of certainty in the internal validity of this study. The pretest and evaluating the notes of the administering counselors can help maintain the internal validity. Due to the somewhat unconventional treatment of social structure and intimacy for pornography use mitigation, there could be a risk of having clients in the treatment group drop out more readily. Contamination could occur through clients learning similar skills through a church or other social group setting. Awareness of these threats are important and will be monitored in order to keep internal validity high.

Random sampling from the local population allows for a high external validity. Due to sampling participants from only male, single, never married clients within an age range (18-40), the application to others within this demographic is high. However, race, economic status, intelligence, and religion were not taken into consideration in this study. Therefore application across those populations is suspect.

Future Considerations

There is a need to begin to help a somewhat overlooked demographic. Individuals are delaying marriage later in life (Martin, Astone, & Peters, 2014) as well as feeling societal pressures of singleness and marriage (De Paulo, 2006). Single individuals have a large need to

learn to develop intimacy within their relationships, romantic or not. Further research is needed to apply non-romantic intimacy skills for reduction of many other negative coping skills beyond pornography. Additionally, there is a need to broaden this study to evaluate the different demographics such as race, economic status, gender, and even religiosity. It is hoped that through a greater understanding of how to begin and build relationships that individuals can live lives within community that has been put in place by God.

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