

PORNIFICATION: THE CHANGING CULTURE OF SEX AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONGST YOUNG PERSONS IN RIVERS STATE

Nwakanma, Emmanuel

emmanuel.nwakanma@uniport.edu.ng

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Port Harcourt,
Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examines young persons' attitudes towards the proliferation of pornography and its effects on the society. Propelled by globalization, pornography is gradually becoming an acknowledged and normal part of our culture. Its availability, access and acceptance have made our environment to be inundated with sexually explicit sounds and images. Today, it is a lot easier to get pornography than to avoid it as the mainstream media readily make available all kinds of sexually explicit materials. The concern here is not 'why' pornography in the society rather it is 'how' pornography affects the society. Consequently, various scholars have concerned themselves with investigating how pornography affect people's behavior, particularly their sexual behaviour, attitudes towards men and women, and how pornography contributes to gender inequality, rape and other sex crimes prevalent today in our society. This study, using the survey design, combined theoretical and empirical data to expound on the effects of the growing porn culture in our society today. 300 persons between the ages of 15 – 35 years constituted the sample size of this study. The study revealed that pornography has become rampant in our society today and contributes to the rise of risky sexual behaviours amongst young persons in Rivers State. In the study, 70% ($n=210$) of the respondents agreed that pornography has affected negatively their attitude towards women and their understanding of gender differences. The study also revealed that many people feel pornography should be censured as 80.6% ($n=242$) of the respondents agreed that porn needs to be regulated in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Culture, Cultivation theory, Pornography, Pornification, Porn culture, Sexual behaviour*

Introduction

The easiest way to understand the concept of culture is to be aware of the differences between *nature* and *nurture*; nature includes our biological makeup while nurture explains our environment that oftentimes gives form to our identities (Culture, *nd*). Culture is the social aspect of human life; it is the way of life of a people which includes their values, practices, norms, beliefs, etc. For Linton (1945) and Oke (2004) the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from one generation to another. Paul (2005) coined the word 'Pornification', in her book: "*Pornified: How porn is transforming our lives, our relationships, and our families*", to explain the phenomenon of porn proliferation in our world today. Pornography, which is often used interchangeably with 'porn' or 'porno', includes all images,

movies, texts, etc, that illustrates or presents sex in a subtle or very open and direct way in order to cause sexual excitement. McNair (2009) further noted that pornification is the phenomenon attributed to the absorption of the styles or content of the sex industry by mainstream culture. As noted by Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenma (2007), Stetzer (2013) and Tyler & Quek (2016) pornography is everywhere today; on our screens, on radio, at the bookstore, on the streets, on billboards and Ads, and on thousands of sites on the internet. It is actually impossible to identify how it all happened, but sometime in the last couple of decades pornography became a common and readily accessible material to all and sundry. Should we be concerned about the gradual massive intrusion of pornography into our society? Paul (2005), in her book on pornography and its impact on human social relationships, argued for raised awareness of this growing cultural current and the corresponding devastation it holds for the society. For Paul (2005) the increasing occurrence and acceptance of sexual themes and explicit imagery in popular and mainstream culture manifests in our “nowadays” vocabularies, music lyrics, movie content, advert styles, and lifestyle generally. Pornography which used to be a furtive vocation; with its product created and consumed in the shadows, has now steadily elbowed its way into the glare of publicity (Paul, 2005: Stetzer, 2013).

Scholars, such as Hald & Malamuth (2008) and McKay & McKay (2009) have argued that the proliferation of pornography is a healthy liberation from the suffocating sexual mores of older generations while some others have argued that pornography is a bad and ‘user-destroying’ culture and a compelling culture that draws viewers into a new world of sexual ‘*mis*-education’ (Udegbe, 2014). Many even believe pornography should be totally illegal, while others argue pornography is just a harmless fun. However what do the data say? How do people feel about the proliferation of pornography in the society and what are the implications? The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of young people towards the proliferation of porn in our society and its manifest and latent effects on the society.

Proliferation of Pornography and the Society

As noted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – CEPAL (2002), the progressive influence exerted by worldwide economic, social and cultural processes over national and regional areas, politically termed Globalization, is clearly impacting on the world. Globalization is not a new process, its historical roots run deep; yet the dramatic changes in terms of space and time brought about by the communications and information revolution represents a qualitative break with the past (CEPAL, 2002). Globalization has increased human interaction around the world due to technological advances and diminishing significance of State and territory borders (Ward & Aral,

2006). This increased interaction has brought about the spread and diffusion of cultures and ideologies. Globalization despite its benefits has its own negative effects which includes, *inter alia*, global illicit drug trade, global terrorism, global ecological problems, as well as the spread and mix of global porn culture. Propelled by globalization, pornography has found an audience definite among individuals in the far corners of the world with serious consequences (World, Public Radio International, 2009). The proliferation of pornography provides the grounds for real concerns on its effects on people and the society, especially in developing countries, like Nigeria, where the practice of safe sex is limited, counseling institutions are not well formed and health services are still at their rudimentary stage, etc. Many people have taken the advantage of this globalized world order for their pecuniary gains. Today, the sex trade on a global level is a phenomenal profit based industry which is generating billions of dollars each year. The United Nations has estimated that annual profits from the porn industry amount to \$7 – 10 billion (Atlink, 1995; Platt, 2001; McNair, 2009). Today porn is everywhere; its availability, accessibility and acceptance have made our environment to be inundated with explicit sounds and images. Paul (2005), Dines (2010) and Friedersdorf (2016) has noted that the sexualized mainstream media readily make available all kinds of sexually explicit materials, thus today; it is a lot easier to get pornography than to avoid it. The concern here is not ‘why porn’ in the society-but ‘how porn’ affects the society. Many social analysts are concerned about how pornography affect people’s sexual behavior, attitudes towards men and women, how pornography contribute to aggressive sexual behavior, rape and other sex crimes prevalent in our society.

Pornification and Implications on Social behaviour

Several research efforts have been made on the issue of pornography, its use and effects on the society. For the sake of balance and constructive empirical debate, diverse views on the issue shall be discussed. Dr. Gad Saad (2010) in his article, on ‘*the nature and nurture of consumption*’, has argued that pornography may just be good for us and the society. Leaning on the findings of Diamond (2009) in an International journal of law and psychology, he stated that there is an inverse causal relationship between an increase in pornography and sex crimes. And that there is no empirically found ill effects of pornography. Diamond (2009) posited that all arguments against porn were simply anecdotal. Scientific data has proven that the link between pornography (considered legal under the first amendment in the United States, unless judged ‘obscene’) and sex crimes and attitudes towards women is rather positive. Diamond (1999) in his studies of men who had seen x-rated movies, found that they were significantly more tolerant towards women than those who did

not see those movies, and that instead of pornography causing an increase in sex crimes availability has caused decrease in or no increase at all in sex crimes. Wilson (1978) contends that pornography not only has 'no' negative effects, but that it may have important positive instructional functions. He pointed out that survey and clinical data shows that porn has helped a lot of American couples who have significant sexual problems; of which a good percentage stems from 'poor sex information'. This is what pornography provides the society. That is, pornography provides desirable information often lacking in many people's sex education. Candida Royalle, the creator of *feminist pornography* also argued that pornography may just be great potential for great fun. For her, watching porn is not inherently harmful to men and women, asides those who have poor body image or has been sexually victimized. For Royalle (2012) pornography has benefits to every normal person; Counselors sometimes suggest it to help people become comfortable with a particular fantasy they or their partner have. It also gives ideas adventurous intimate partners or help couples get in touch with what turns them on and reboot their sexual life. Pornography for her cannot also cause addiction rather one can only be a compulsive viewer, which is largely a personality problem. Meaning that for such persons, if it were not pornography being used to act out ones compulsive nature, it might be anything else such as food or some other behavior. Differing researchers, such as Paul (2005), Dines (2010) and Layden (2010) have argued that literature 'praise-singing' pornography and its proliferation are extremely misleading. For them while causation may not be significantly proven, correlation between pornography and certain social problems is quite obvious. Sexualization of our society expresses itself in the acceptance of loose sexual morals in our society, increase in promiscuity, dearth of committed relationships, and devaluation of women, aggressive sexual behaviour and increase in sex crimes. The crux of the argument is that pornography presents information that is misleading; and people through vicarious learning want to act out what they are fed with daily.

It is important to note that studies on the negative effects of pornography are concerned with the multiple outcome of the use of pornography. Paul (2005) and Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa (2007) for instance raised awareness of the changing cultural current of pornography and the corresponding social implications. In explaining the dangers of social problems associated with the increased use of porn and the public naivety about its implications, Paul (2005) made two central assertions: one, that the increased supply of pornography on the internet (260 million pages of it, by her count) creates increased demand, and secondly that much of the pornography available on the internet are largely "violent" to women. Her studies also revealed that the males who viewed pornography regularly confessed that porn has caused them sexual dysfunctions by making them

impatient for their partners to achieve orgasm, encouraged their partners to get surgical reconstructions or breast implants to look sexier, and made them have strange sexual attractions. Paul (2005) also discussed child pornography as another grand concern on the phenomenon of pornography. She cited statistics showing that the number of child pornography cases handled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's cyber crime unit's investigators in the United States increased 23 fold between 1996 and 2004, to more than 2600 cases per year. These are not exaggerations. These are children made to indulge in porn just to satisfy the sexual perverseness of some persons. Also young people are inundated with porn style images these days whether they want to be or not: the Calvin Klein billboard, maxim magazine covers, even the Britney spears reality show. Hence young boys want to emulate misogynists' rappers and sexist comedians while young girls also desire to emulate the starlets who show off bodies on the pages of magazines (Paul, 2005).

The Nigerian society is not in any way excluded from the proliferation of pornography and the porn culture. As a matter of fact, it is readily available even on the streets, magazine pages, adverts, music's, movies, video games, smart phones, mobile devices, hotels, cyber cafes and on the social media. These days no music sells without a sexual content. You cannot watch your TV these days without seeing a flash of pornography once in a while; Newspaper vendors must have a section displaying porn magazines; nude pictures flood the internet every day. And recently, people now make *seflie* or homemade sex videos to distribute online; leaks of sexual images and videos of people go viral on the internet every now and then. What more evidence do we need to say that our society is pornified? The greater concern here is that this is not unrelated to the increase in abnormal sexual behaviours, issues of poor body image and the rush for enhancement drugs and plastic surgeries, active and passive devaluation of women, increasing rate of sexual misconduct, rape and other sex crimes rampant in our society today. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature on the attitudes of young people towards pornography, the use of porn and the phenomenon of pornification in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

Whereas a number of theories such as the framing theory, the sexual involvement theory, the hypodermic needle theory, etc, have emerged over the years to explain the impact of media on human social behaviour, this study situates its thesis in the framework of the *Cultivation theory* which suggests that the entire value system made of ideologies, assumptions, beliefs, images and perspectives is formulated, to a great extent, by the mass media. Cultivation researches look at the mass media as a socializing agent and investigate whether users come to believe the media version

of reality the more they access it. Professor George Gerbner, a key proponent of the Cultivation theory, argued that the mass media, such as the television, has long term effects on human social behaviour; an effect which is typically gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant (Gerbner, 1973; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980). The Cultivation theory in its most basic form suggests that television is responsible for shaping, or 'cultivating' viewers' conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole. As noted by Maharjan (2018) the core of the Cultivation theory is premised on the assumption that media has the most persuasive power in society, people unconsciously believe whatever is shown in media, and that media influences attitudes, beliefs, meanings, perception and behaviour in a society. Gerbner (1973) argues that the mass media 'mainstreams' fantasy of what actually exists, and as a result people end up perceiving the real world in a distorted manner and view actuality through a 'television perspective.'

The Cultivation theory is a very significant model when considering the relationship between pornography and its influence on the society. Studies such as Seto, Maric & Barbaree (2001), Ven-hwei & Ran (2002), Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn (2004), Romito & Beltramini (2011) and Wright, Bae & Funk (2013) have argued along the lines of this theory on how sexualized media affect the society and that of heavy users. Seto, Maric & Barbaree (2001) found in a study that after exposure to pornography, whether of violent or non-violent genre, rape myths became increasingly accepted. Ven-hwei & Ran (2002) also found out that frequent exposure to pornographic features such as hierarchy, which places women below men; objectification, whereby women were depicted as inhuman objects; submission, whereby women comply to men's masochistic orders; and violence, whereby violent acts are applied to ensure women's sexual cooperation and women presented to enjoy such treatment, etc, reinforces patriarchal stereotypes of women as submissive to their male dominator. Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn (2004) also noted that fantasy media has been a pervasive force shaping physical appearance ideals and have been shown to negatively impact body image. Romito & Beltramini (2011) and Wright, Bae & Funk (2013) have also argued that women who consumed pornography had more positive attitudes toward extramarital sex, adult premarital sex, and teenage sex. This study argues that pornography has become prevalent in our society today and influences the values, responses and sexual behaviour of young persons. The ability of the sexualized mainstream media to shape people's values and general beliefs about the world creates the chances

of normalization of risky sexual behaviour, sex crimes, gender inequality and intimate partner violence in the society.

Methodology

This study adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. According to Lampard & Pole (2005) the survey research approach enables a group of people to be studied by collecting and analyzing data from a few considered to be representative of the entire group. The target population of the study consists of the entire undergraduate students of the University of Portharcourt. Three hundred (300) students were purposively selected for this study. The instrument of data collection used is the PCAS (Porn Culture Assessment Schedule) questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questions bordered on the personal life of the respondents, sexual values, self-image, attitudes towards pornography and effects of porn. The instrument was administered on the respondents, in a stratified manner, with the support of assistants who helped in distributing and retrieving the questionnaires after completion by the respondents.

Results

Table 1: Age distribution of the respondents and responses to research questions

Characteristics (Male N=150, Female N=150)												
Age distribution (Mean Age= 23.7)		Freq		Per (%)								
15-19		94		31.3								
20-24		74		24.7								
25-29		100		33.3								
30-34		32		10.7								
VARIABLES		SA	%	A	%	SD	%	D	%	U	%	N
Porn has become very common in our society today; and is not censured strongly as it was years back?		176	58.7	65	21.7	35	11.7	16	5.3	08	2.7	300
Porn has serious negative effects on the society; like promoting risky sexual behaviours, rape, etc?		118	39.3	131	43.7	26	8.7	17	5.7	08	2.7	300
I have used porn and it affected negatively, my:												
• Attitude to women and gender differences?		128	42.7	82	27.3	59	19.7	14	4.7	17	5.7	300
• Sexual attitude and expectations?		167	55.7	71	23.7	26	8.7	22	7.3	14	4.7	300
• Body image and sexuality?		118	39.3	128	42.7	29	9.7	20	6.7	05	1.7	300
Pornography should be regulated; to control its multiplicity, premised on its negative consequences?		184	61.3	58	19.3	34	11.3	19	6.3	05	1.7	300
<i>Note: percentages may not be 100.0 because of rounding. The column titled (N) is the same as total number of respondents.</i>												

Source: Fieldwork (2018, August).

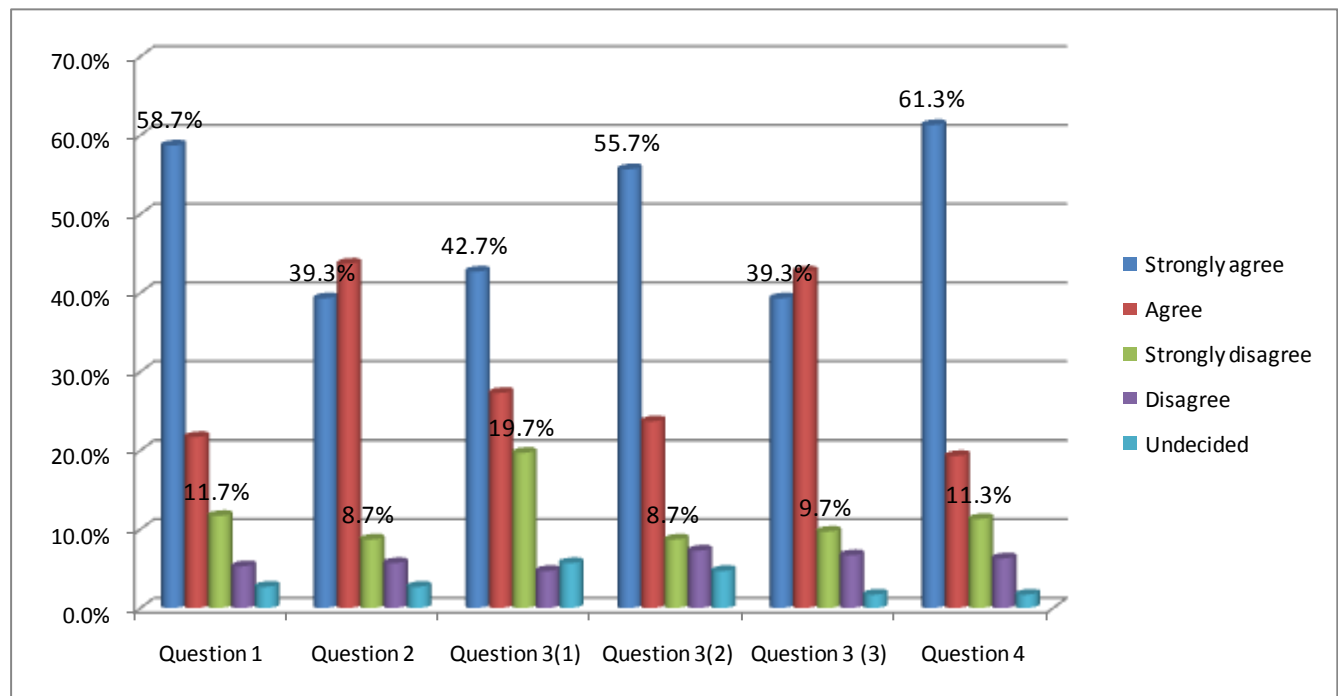


Figure 1: Chart showing response rate to research questions

Source: *Fieldwork (2018, August).*

The survey revealed that 58.7% (n=176) of the respondents strongly agreed that pornography is common and widespread in our society today and is not censured like it was many years back. Another 21.7% (n=65), equally agreed to this. 11.7% (n=35) and 5.3% (n=16) strongly disagreed and disagree, respectively, to the position that pornography is widespread, while only 2.7% (n=8) of the respondents were undecided. The implication of this is that there is greater agreement (80.4% of the respondents) that pornography is rampant today. And this corroborates the observation and hunches of this study.

On research question two, 39.3% (n=118) of the respondents strongly agreed that pornography definitely has negative effects on the users and the society. Another 43.7% (n=131) equally agreed. While 8.7% (n=26) and another 5.7% (n=17) were at variance with the position that porn has negative effects on the society. Only 2.7% (n=8) of the respondents were undecided. A larger number of the respondents (83%), agreeing to the position that porn affects the society negatively, implies that there is a popular affirmation that porn has negative effects on the individual and the society. Many of the respondents relayed their personal experiences with pornography and how it influenced their attitude towards sex, gender and permissiveness to violent sex, etc.

Research question three examined the respondents' perception and experiences on various adduced effects of pornography on individuals. 42.7% (n=128) of the respondents (93.75% being males),

agreed that porn has affected negatively their attitude to women and gender differences. They indicated how it made see women as sex objects and a gender with low worth. 27.3% (n=82) also agreed that viewing porn has affected them negatively. 19.7% (n=59) and 4.7 (n=14) disagreed that viewing porn has had no effects on their attitudes towards women and gender differences. 55.7% (n=167) and another 23.7% (n=71) of the respondents revealed that viewing porn affected their sexual expectations. They expected their partners to be capable of long hours of sex, accept and enjoy all manner of acrobatics during sex. Some expressed the effects of pornography on their permissiveness towards violent sex. Some of the males in the study agreed they believe women enjoy rough sex. 16% (n=48) of the respondents disagreed that porn has in no way affected their attitude towards sex and sexual expectations. 80.6% (n=242) of the respondents also agreed that porn has affected how they see their body. The males expressed the pressure to have massive genitals, macho bodies and seductive eyes. The females expressed their concern of achieving the “perfect” body shape; that is the ‘sexy’, straight, flat tummy and fair complexioned body.

On the last research question, 61.3% (n=184) and 19.3% (n=58) of the respondents agreed that porn needs to be regulated to arrest the manifest and latent consequences the proliferation of porn looming in the society; which expresses itself in the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children and issues of sexism in the country, etc. 11.3 (n=34) of the respondents strongly disagreed to this view, closely supported by 6.3% (n=19) that also disagreed. Only 1.7% (n=5) of the respondents were undecided.

Discussion of findings

Many studies have investigated the effects of pornography on individual behaviour and the society. In 2004, researchers examined whether watching porn affected three aspects of social behaviour: contraception use, extramarital affairs and paying for sex. The study revealed that although watching pornography didn't affect condom use, but people who watched more porn tended to have more sexual partners, more extra marital affairs and were more likely to pay for sex (Boenkhe, 2013). Studies such as Hodgeskiss (2005); Farley (2007); Peter (2008) and Nwakanma (2015) have also linked the proliferation of pornography to increase in prostitution. For Farley (2007) and Nwakanma (2015), prostitution is on the increase in our society today and pornography is a foremost advertiser for its increase. Men learn how to use women by looking at and masturbating to porn; often developing a taste for prostitution. Legal brothels show porn in the waiting area to speed men along in their purchase of women. Hodgeskiss (2005) also argued that the growth of internet pornography

has seen the demand for prostitution in Australia soar. Pornography has also been linked to unrealistic attitudes about sex, beliefs that women are sex objects and the hypersexualization of women and girls, and the commodification of such images for the global market. In the same vein children and young people who view pornography have also been noted to tend to hold less progressive gender role attitudes (Woodward, 2011; Fidgen, 2013; Okolosie, 2015). Buchanan (2013) revealed that Pornography also affects people's image about their body. Pornography and pornification has made most of us believe what a 'good' body looks like or what sexy or handsome looks like. This has affected body perceptions of a lot of people. Pornographers present men with large male organs and women with voluptuous-firm breasts with smashing sexy bodies to match. And this redefines what people see about their body. Today there is a high demand for body part enlargement and surgical operations to get a 'desirable' body. Some 2000 labiaplasty operations were performed by the NHS in 2010, which represents a 'fivefold' increase in 10 years, and this could be the tip of the iceberg with thousands more seeking surgery privately. This could be considered a result of phony sexual ideals presented by pornography (Buchanan, 2013).

Despite the on-going argument on pornography, quantifying the effects of pornography on general behaviour has remained difficult. For Limmer & Horvath (2013), most of the studies on porn-effects are simply correlational; and it is impossible to establish causation from correlation. She suggested researchers should focus on identifying peoples' characteristics, vulnerabilities and strengths, and how and why they might be related to their experiences of pornography. The main objective of this study was to assess the perception of young people on the proliferation of pornography in our society. The findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents of this study agree that pornography has become rampant in our society. They also affirm that pornography has negative effects on its viewers; 42.7% (n=128) of the respondents (93.75% being males), agreed that porn has affected negatively their attitude to women and gender differences, 27.3% (n=82) also agreed that viewing porn has affected them negatively while the remaining 19.7% (n=59) and 4.7 (n=14) disagreed strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that viewing porn has had no effects on their attitudes towards women and gender differences. This corroborates the arguments of Milburn, Mather & Conrad (2000), Layden (2010) and Luscombe (2016) that broader concerns about porn's effect on society include the fact that it often celebrates the degradation of women and normalizes sexual aggression. Milburn, Mather & Conrad (2000) and FightTheNewDrug (2017) also noted that the pervasiveness of porn in the society contributed to the objectification of the human body, rape culture and basic desensitization to sexual material. In the same vein Layden (2010) and Wright, Tokunaga & Kraus (2016) noted that evidences abound that shows how porn make users more likely

to support violence against women, to believe that women secretly enjoy being raped and to actually be sexually aggressive in real life. Zillmann (2000), Layden (2010) and DeKeseredy (2015) further posited that watching scene after scene of dehumanizing submission makes it start to seem normal. It sets the stage for lopsided power dynamics in couple relationships and the gradual acceptance of verbal and physical aggression against women. Porn for Zillmann (2000), Hald, Malamuth & Yuen (2010), Layden (2010) and DeKeseredy (2015) treats humans as nothing more than 'discardable' sex objects to be acted upon for selfish pleasure.

55.7% (n=167) and another 23.7% (n=71) of the respondents also revealed that viewing porn affected their sexual expectations. 16% (n=48) of the respondents disagreed that porn has in no way affected their attitude towards sex and sexual expectations. Stewart & Szymanski (2012) had noted in a similar research that extreme porn consumers are more likely to prefer masturbating over pornography than being in a partnered sex. It can even get to the point that regular sex with a partner is not enough to arouse or satisfy porn consumers. Pornography users can also expect their sexual partners to perform as equivalent as the actors in the porn do. This corroborates the finding of this study that the use of porn is associated with warped sexual expectations in users.

This study also revealed that many people feel pornography should be censured and controlled in Nigeria. 61.3% (n=184) and 19.3% (n=58) of the respondents agreed that porn needs to be regulated to arrest the manifest and latent consequences of proliferation of porn looming in the society; which expresses itself in the prevalence of sexual violence against women and children and issues of sexism in the country, etc.

Conclusion

Globalization has made sex a mainstream victual, and its preponderance is having a disturbing effect on the society. Being a polarizing issue, it is easy for people to take extreme sides when approaching it; for instance, some strongly believe pornography is deadly while other extremes believe and see porn as just a healthy expression of our sexual nature (McKay & McKay, 2009). Neither extreme is helpful, especially when it is based on beliefs and sentiments; hence the myriad of anecdotal articles attempting to find a causal relationship between pornography and its effects on the society. Irrespective of the controversies surrounding pornography and its attendant tendencies, it is still imperative to empirically understand its implications, especially on the society. As Limmer & Horvath (2013) have noted that owing to its pervasive nature, more efforts should be devoted to finding correlations and significant relationships between pornography and negative effects on users

and the society. This research has concerned itself with examining the perception of young people on the proliferation of pornography and its effects on users and the society as a whole. The last two decades have revealed a proliferation of porn in our society and causing concerns as to how it could be connected to rising cases of body shaming, sex crimes, queer sexual behaviour, violence against women, body enhancement and plastic surgeries, and risky sexual behaviour. The findings of this study revealed that the concerns surrounding the negative implications of pornography is valid and that it may be creating a new culture of sex. Pornography, as revealed in this research, has great negative effects on the society; it affects peoples' sexual expectations, their attitudes towards the opposite sex and influences risky sexual behaviours. Therefore, no matter how inconvenient it may be for those who benefit from pornography, there is need to protect our society from this detrimental demonstration of sex and sexuality.

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