

Relationship between Positive Sexuality and Problematic Pornography Consumption in Adolescents

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Introduction

There is a growing consensus that a positive approach to sexuality is important for adopting a positive perception of sexuality, promoting healthy relationships and preventing sexual violence (e.g., Williams et al., 2013). Thus, it is relevant to study the needs surrounding it (Fortenberry, 2013). There are factors that can have an impact on the positive experience of sexuality, such as pornography (Jhe et al., 2023). Pornography consumption can influence the development of sexual identities and preferences, having an impact on expectations regarding sexual relationships, pleasure, identity, body image and well-being (Davis et al., 2017), especially when consumption is persistent, repetitive and uncontrollable (e.g., Efrati, 2020). Thus, the aim of this research is to analyze the perception and positive experience of sexuality in adolescents and its relationship with problematic pornography consumption, as well as to identify patterns of pornography consumption.

Method

Participants

The sample includes 274 Portuguese adolescents aged between 12 and 18 ($M = 16.26$; $SD = 1.64$), 177 girls (64.6%) and 97 boys (35.4%). Most of the participants live in the Lisbon and Vale do Tejo area ($n = 192$; 70.1%) and attend the 3rd Cycle of Basic Education ($n = 86$; 31.4%) and Secondary Education ($n = 188$; 68.6%).

Instruments

- **Sociodemographic questionnaire** (with additional questions about pornography consumption habits)
- **Positive Sexuality in Adolescence Scale** (PSAS; Maes et al., 2022)
- **Short Version of the Problematic Pornography Consumption Scale in Adolescents** (PPCS-6-A; Bóthe et al., 2021)

Procedure

- Translation and adaptation of the instruments
- Pre-test with 10 adolescents
- Authorization from the DGE and the schools
- Approval by the Scientific and Ethics Committee
- Informed consent from parents
- Application of the instruments
- Data analysis

Results

- **193 adolescents report having consumed pornography (70.4%)**
 - Male – 89 (46.1%)
 - Female – 104 (53.9%)
- **First Consumption** of pornography ($M = 13.00$; $DP = 2.54$)

Sources of Consumption of Pornography

- Pornographic Sites – 138 (71.5%)
- Social Networks – 88 (45.1%)
- Films/series – 84 (43.5%)
- Animes – 30 (15.5)

Adolescents who say they have **never consumed pornography** have higher levels:

- Resilience against challenging sexuality-related experiences ($U = 5648.5$, $p < .001$) ($M = 29.35$; $SD = 6.34$)
- One's own control over sexual interactions ($U = 6670.5$, $p = .030$) ($M = 13.15$; $SD = 1.91$)
- Total score of the PSAS ($U = 5967.5$, $p = .002$) ($M = 133.69$; $SD = 20.63$)

Girls showed higher levels of:

- Positive approach to sexual relationships ($U = 5561.5$, $p < .001$) ($M = 46.45$; $SD = 3.99$)
- One's own control over sexual interactions ($U = 6098.5$, $p < .001$) ($M = 13.25$; $SD = 1.63$)
- Respectful approach to different sexual expressions ($U = 3646$, $p < .001$) ($M = 25.30$; $SD = 3.98$)
- Acceptance of one's own sexuality ($U = 6479$, $p < .001$) ($M = 22.92$; $SD = 4.80$)

Boys presented:

- Higher indicators of problematic pornography consumption ($U = 2677.5$, $p < .001$) ($M = 12.80$; $SD = 6.89$)
- Earlier consumption ($U = 3394.5$, $p < .001$) ($M = 12.38$; $SD = 2.50$)

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Correlation between the PSAS and the PPCS-6-A ($n = 193$)

	PPCS-6-A
Positive approach to sexual relationships	-.331*
Resilience against challenging sexuality-related experiences	-
One's own control over sexual interactions	-.269**
Respectful approach to different sexual expressions	-.280**
Acceptance of one's own sexuality	-
Total score of the PSAS	-.242**

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Discussion

- Because of the early onset of reported consumption (between the ages of 4 and 12), there is a possibility that adolescents have also reported unwanted exposure to pornography (Jhe et al., 2023).
- In general, adolescents had high scores for positive sexuality indicators, which may be related to the fact that they attend sex education classes and have several formal sources of sex education (e.g. school, health professionals), contributing to their access to adequate information about sexuality (e.g., Williams et al., 2015).
- Girls showed higher levels of positive sexuality. These results are supported by the existing literature, which states that girls have higher indicators of positive sexuality compared to boys. However, the literature shows that girls are less accepting of their own sexuality (Maes et al., 2022), contrary to the results obtained in this study. This divergence may be due to a decrease in stereotypes regarding the discovery of sexuality or an increase in self-efficacy among adolescents (Rostovsky et al., 2008).
- Boys scored higher in problematic pornography consumption. They also started consuming pornography earlier ($M=12.38$; $SD=2.50$) while girls started later ($M=13.53$; $SD=2.46$). The literature supports these results, since pornography consumption is more socially accepted in boys than in girls (e.g., Wolak et al., 2007), which may lead boys to seek out pornography more actively (Baker, 2016; Kar et al., 2015).
- Adolescents with higher indicators of positive sexuality consume less problematic pornography. These results may be associated with a greater awareness that the content is unrealistic and staged (Paulus et al., 2024) and that, as such, the images observed do not define healthy relationships (Vertongen et al., 2022).

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