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The Relationship Between Male Partner's Pornography Use and Couples' Attachment

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The Relationship Between Male Partner's Pornography
Use and Couples' Attachment

Andrew P. Brown

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Male Partner's Pornography Use and Couples' Attachment

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Adult attachment theory continues to play an important role in explaining pathology within couples. Pornography is becoming more and more pervasive since the inception of the internet. This study looked at the relationship between insecure attachment, accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement with frequency of male pornography use. Little is known about pornography use and its impact on couple dynamics. This study specifically looked at pornography use predicting insecure attachment within couples. The sample was taken from the **RELAT**ionship Evaluation (**RELATE**) and consisted of 189 couples. Male pornography use was found to be a predictor of insecure attachment and low levels of responsiveness in him. The female partner's assessment of her male partner's low engagement, responsiveness, and accessibility in their relationship was predicted by his pornography use. These findings may inform therapists of the possibilities for direction in therapy when a couple is struggling with insecure attachment development.

Key Words: Adult Attachment, Attachment Behaviors (Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement), Avoidant Attachment, Anxious Attachment, Pornography Use.

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Introduction

Since the inception of the internet almost two decades ago there has been a tremendous outpouring of information at lightning speed. Data, facts, opinions, movies, music, and pictures can all be retrieved at the click of a button. This modality of communication offers a never-ending opportunity of exploration into new and different worlds many of which are geared towards sexuality in the form of pornography. Compared to the time before the internet, people all over the world now have (in many cases unlimited) access to various forms of sexual information, social sex networks, and online sex communities. The number of pornographic websites has been estimated at roughly 7 million (Zhao & Cai, 2008). In addition to the number of available pornographic websites, the internet offers to the consumer the medium for accessibility and the means of maintaining anonymity. Pornography producers offer “affordable” pornography via pop ups, email spam, or low-cost initial viewing (in many cases there are free pictures on website home pages that anyone can access before having to pay to see pornographic images). Cooper and Griffin-Shelley (2002) called the accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of internet pornography the “Triple-A engine” effect (p.11) making the chance for addiction more possible and at the very least the use of pornography more likely. This massive outlet provided by the internet for accessing pornography is a variable that needs to be studied because of its wide range potential for influence. Researchers have looked at pornography addiction and its impact on couples and the individuals but few have studied pornography use and its connection to couple dynamics.

Understanding the impact of pornography on couples in general has great value especially when, according to Albright’s study (2008) using an online survey posted on MSNBC.com, 75% of men and 41% of women had looked at pornography on purpose.

Manning's (2006) review of the literature on pornography and family systems theory lead her to conclude that more research was needed in the area of pornography and family dynamics including how the husband and wife together are impacted by viewing pornography; she emphasized: "Examining the systemic impact of Internet pornography is relatively uncharted territory and the body of systemically-focused research is limited" (p. 156).

More research regarding pornography use in general would be beneficial for therapists considering Goldberg, Peterson, & Rosen (2008) reported a majority of marriage and family therapists have seen an increase in the number of clients presenting problems with cybersex and the majority of them have little or no training in this arena. Jones and Tuttle (in press) suggest that therapists need to assess for any cybersex addiction within a couple otherwise they will not be able to fully help the couple overcome the symptoms associated with it that the couple present during assessment (e.g. emotional detachment, depression, loss of sexual desire, etc.). But still little is known about couples that use pornography compared to couples that are presenting this issue (most likely in the form of addiction) to their therapists. More research bridging the gap between what is already known about addiction and what is unknown about pornography use will help therapists be better informed when assessing couples.

More research on pornography use and its relationship to couple dynamics is needed to help couple therapists better assess and diagnose if pornography use is a problem or not. This study was undertaken to better understand the kinds of relationships married couples have who are using pornography compared to those who do not use pornography. More specifically, this study focuses on the relationship between the extent of pornography use, attachment (Ainsworth, Blehai, Waters, and Wall, 1978, Hazan and Shaver, 1987, 1990) and select attachment behaviors (Bowlby, 1980, Johnson, 2004) in marriage. It is possible that the use of pornography may affect

the user in such a way that they avoid attachment related behaviors like accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement because the pornography consumes the person's attention and overtime the individual develops an insecure attachment with their spouse. However it is also possible that due to a lack of secure attachment the user turns to pornography for a pseudo attachment figure or to find diversion from lack of attachment, to self-soothe etc.. Because there can be different reasons attachment maybe disrupted in a marriage the goal here is to help therapists better recognize possible signs in a marriage that may indicate if pornography is being used so a more systemic approach can be taken in helping those couples get the right supports to treat the right problem. Using attachment theory as a basis for understanding healthy marital relationships, if therapists better understand how attachment is correlated with pornography use then assessment of attachment related problems within a couple can be more accurately diagnosed when the couple comes in for treatment.

Review of the Literature

The systemic research on pornography has been primarily conducted among couples where one partner has claimed an addiction to the material. Therefore much of the research that guided the theory for this study was derived from research articles addressing pornography addiction, however, this study's focus was on pornography use in general and not addiction.

Pornography Definition Research

The various sexual outlets offered by websites, videos, books, etc. provide a wide array of options for people to engage in sexual behavior, creating a research conglomerate that has made it difficult to narrow down specific information regarding pornography use. It is also difficult to research pornography due to the interwoven definitions of internet addictions and

sexual impulsivities used by fellow researchers. Studying the defined variables of hypersexuality, sexual compulsivity, cybersex, paraphilia-related disorders (PRD), and sex addiction, researchers have included pornography as a subtype of these constructs (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000; Goodman, 2001; Kafka, 2001; Reid & Wooley, 2006). Perhaps it is this very thing that makes it hard to research pornography. However “Pornography, if understood to involve the depiction of sexual activity, organs, and experiences” (Kalman, 2008, p. 593) for the purpose of helping the user obtain sexual arousal often resulting in climax is a variable in and of itself which merits scientific exploration.

Attachment in Adulthood

Attachment is important to study from a systems perspective not only because the very nature of attachment is based on two people (smallest human system) but because attachment is related to the level of functioning within a marriage and a family. Dickstein, Seifer, St. Andre, and Schiller (2001) found that marital attachment security is highly associated with how well a family operates. Precursory results showed some association between marital attachment security and the effective functioning of both marriages and families. In a 2001 study, Gallo & Smith’s results showed the level of functioning within spouses and between couples were forecasted by attachment. They also found that the functioning of a marriage was impacted by the attachment style of the spouses. Hollist & Miller (2005) found the quality of one’s relationship appeared to be negatively impacted in midlife marriage if there was an insecure attachment. Davila, Karney, and Bradbury (1999) found both the individual and the relationship itself affect a couple’s attachment. Each person’s history with their own family, experiences with dating partners, and their perception of the current relationship impact the level of secure attachment representation each person feels.

Research (Bowlby, 1969, 1980, Ainsworth, 1978) has been conducted to understand and define attachment. Ainsworth (1967) Ainsworth and Wittig (1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) researched the various behaviors of attachment bonds and developed the avoidant, secure, and anxious constructs for children and their attachment figures. Afterwards others (Main, Kaplan, Cassidy, 1985, Hazan and Shaver, 1987, 1990) used that research to help define adult attachment styles (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). However it wasn't until 1990 when Simpson modified Hazan and Shaver's avoidant, secure, and anxious adult constructs in to Likert variables (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In addition to his conversion of these three constructs Simpson also found results that supported the adult attachment theory. Simpson found adult attachment styles can be seen within each person through attachment type behaviors: avoidant people tended to be less interdependent and committed to relationships than anxious or secure people and anxious people were less trusting of other people.

Bowlby (1980) explained that a person will stay as an attachment figure "So long as the attachment figure remains accessible and responsive..." (p39). Johnson (2004) explained the importance for both partners in a relationship to engage each other on a deep emotional level and for the other partner to be emotionally accessible and responsive (Bowlby, 1980) when their partner does engage them. She said, "...a new corrective emotional experience of engagement with one's partner is the essence of change in EFT." (p13) In a securely attached relationship both partner's **engage** each other in meaningful conversation taking emotional risks and confiding in each other. The listening partner is **accessible** to the other meaning they are available especially when the partner is in need of reassurance and help. Once available the partner must then **respond** in a caring and loving way, showing support to the partner by providing comfort, letting the partner know they are important to them. These three components,

accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement (A.R.E.), help form a secure attachment.

Pornography might decrease the accessibility, engagement, and responsiveness in a relationship and if there is a lack of these behaviors within the couple then this could be the building block of an insecure attachment or could be evidence of a possible insecure attachment already formed between the two.

Research has already been conducted to determine what impact the partner's discovery of the pornography addict has on them. Zitzman and Butler (2009) found that the discovery of pornography addiction by the non-using spouse coupled with the discovery of his concealing behaviors to hide his addiction created an attachment injury because the non-using partner felt the using partner was unfaithful to their relationship. Bergner and Bridges (2002) reported on the partner's painful experience of finding out about their spouse's pornography viewing behavior and feeling lost and confused about what to do. All of these feelings leave the partner insecure about the relationship because trust was damaged. In another study Reid and Woolley (2006) did EFT work with couples, where one partner was diagnosed with hypersexuality, they focused on the importance of addressing attachment ruptures between the two, they said, "When relationships are impacted by hypersexual behavior, usually *both* partners have suffered injuries." (p. 221) Therefore, pornography can possibly impact a marriage negatively, especially if an attachment injury is suffered in the discovery. This leads to another question, if it is possible that an attachment injury is experienced upon discovery of a partner's pornography use then is it possible that pornography when not discovered still affect a couple's relationship?

Pornography Use and Attachment

To understand how pornography use might be associated with attachment in marriage it is important first, to know how it may negatively impact the user and his partner. Zitzman and

Butler (2005), noted that a person using pornography compulsively may try to stop but usually does not succeed even though there are observable meaningful negative consequences for self and partner surrounding the behavior. This may be due to a need within the user to have a sexual encounter with himself (e.g. masturbation) in order to achieve a feeling of euphoria and escape, and over time creating a maladaptive way for dealing with life's problems. Thus, trying to stop using internet pornography can be very difficult for some because the user has become dependent on it as a coping strategy for dealing with other negative thoughts and feelings rather than sharing emotions and experiences through meaningful dialogue as a healthy coping strategy with their partner. In other words, pornography might be facilitating some users to avoid engaging their partners in sharing emotions and confiding deep concerns regarding problems in the relationship or personal life by providing a distraction for them to turn to instead. If the user is uncomfortable with emotional closeness and is less engaged in the relationship then they are likely to be less accessible and responsive to their partner because it's uncomfortable when the partner tries to engage them in emotional connection.

Pornography has been found to affect some users in several other ways too, including a misconstrued concept of sexuality and relationships (Manning, 2006). For instance, compared to non-users, pornography users are at risk for viewing marriage, fidelity, and children as less worthwhile pursuits in their lives. There is an increased risk for aggression, criminal behavior being seen as commonplace or acceptable such as rape, "accepting rape myths (e.g., believing rape isn't a serious crime or assigning responsibility to the victim)" (p. 156), voyeurism, child pornography, and other forms of sexual deviancy. Negative external consequences can also occur when one uses pornography. For instance, users might also experience poor relationship quality with their significant others (spouse and children) due to the negative messages being

communicated and reinforced through pornography. If a user views marriage, children, and fidelity as less important than they might be: less available to their family due to time (Manning, 2006) and emotional energy (Reid & Woolley, 2006) spent looking at pornography or simply emotionally unavailable to their family to nurture those relationships, they might respond in uncaring ways, and/or be less proactive in their family life, compared to those who do not use pornography, further weakening the attachment bond between parent and child and/or user and partner because the user is less accessible and responsive.

Non-using spouses may experience attachment avoidant behaviors exhibited by the using spouse which may be indicative of pornography use. Landau, Garrett, and Webb (2008) reported a typical experience at their clinic when talking to the wife of a suspected pornography addict on the phone for the first time, discussing her relationship with her husband since he started using pornography: “He is irritable, snappy, unhappy, picks fights, and real cold. I noticed he doesn’t like to be touched. I don’t know him anymore.” (p. 499) The coldness, irritability, lack of touch, and lack of knowledge of the user’s current status can lead to greater distress on the partner and a decrease in emotional connection overall. In the words of another wife (past client of mine) regarding their several years of marriage while her husband was using pornography, “I feel like I’ve been fighting so hard to find him.” Ainsworth et al. (1978) said, “It is when a figure is perceived as having become inaccessible and unresponsive that separation distress (grief) occurs, and the anticipation of the possible occurrence of such a situation arouse anxiety.” (p. 21) Perhaps this distress about the relationship drives an anxious attachment because the non-using spouse feels distant and untrusting resulting in a lack of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement behavior.

In 2003, Bridges, Bergner, and Hesson-McInnis reported that approximately one-third of the women in their study reported agonizing over their partner's pornography viewing and having a negative perception of their partner's use. For instance, women viewed pornography use as a sign of their partner being less respectable as a man, such as being more selfish and less trustworthy. Some women even thought of their husbands as being mentally and/or emotionally ill. Manning and Watson (2008) found that in general women who discover their husband's sexual addiction or who have it disclosed to them benefit from Connection, Advocacy, Validation, Education, and Direction (ie. C.A.V.E.D. theory). If these types of feelings, perceptions, and needs exist among some wives after they discover their husband's sex addiction, it may be helpful for couples and therapists to be aware of such behaviors leading up to a confession of pornography addiction so that early prevention and or treatment can hopefully lessen the degree of attachment injury.

In addition the spouses are also affected personally by their partner's porn use. Wives of male users have reported lowered self-esteem and body image acceptance as a result of their partner's pornography use. Albright (2008) had congruent findings between men who use pornography and their female partners, results showed women having a decrease in positive regard for their bodies and the men reporting negative appraisal of their partner's bodies. Albright also found some corresponding effects from the use of pornography for partners including, wives/partners feeling pressured to re-enact sexual positions and actions seen in pornographic films. The spouses also reported having less sex with their partner in general which corresponds with the husbands' reports of a lack in sexual drive focused on their partner. If the couple is having less sex and the wife is feeling undervalued it's likely she will decrease her

level of accessibility and responsiveness with her partner and engage him less in emotional connecting conversations.

In a study completed in Norway, 398 couples were mailed a survey about their pornography use. Researchers (Danebeck, Traeen, and [Månsson](#), 2009) found couples that did not use pornography tended to be less lenient with sexuality than couples using pornography or couples where at least one partner used pornography. Danebeck, Traeen, and [Månsson](#) (2009) also reported the female partners had a lack of positive self-image and the male users had difficulties in the area of sexual arousal. This research is additional support to what has generally been found regarding the female's self-perception in association with her husband's pornography use. But it also gives new, albeit not surprising, information regarding men using pornography and arousal during sex with their partners. Sex is one way attachment can be measured; it is the partner reaching out for the other to bond physically. In men, physical connection can sometimes be more important than verbal connection. If a partner is hypersexual they might be avoiding reaching out to their partner and instead using some form of sexual behavior outside the relationship to meet physical needs and to escape an already difficult relationship where they are likely struggling to communicate their emotional needs (Reid and Woolley, 2006). If a person that is hypersexual struggles to communicate emotional needs it is likely the individual will also struggle in being accessible and responsive to their partner because they don't know how to or are afraid to.

When it comes to sex and attachment, Impett, Gordon, & Strachman (2008) found that those people with attachment avoidance styles were more likely to have intercourse to avoid the partner getting frustrated and having an argument. They also found those with avoidant attachment styles are likely to have sex to meet their own goals. Kirkpatrick & Davis (1994)

discovered avoidant men typically viewed their relationships less positively than men who have secure or anxious attachment styles. Zitzman and Butler (2009) marked that a result of pornography use can be to detach emotionally and intimately the user from their partner during sexual encounters. Zitzman & Butler go on to explain how pornography can invoke the sexual response cycle from desire to resolution without the demonstration of attachment behaviors. Knowing that pornography users potentially have less sex with their partners and that they tend to view their spouses less favorably physically suggests it is plausible that these are indicators of an avoidant attachment style by the husband which would mean there is a greater likelihood of having less secure attachment behaviors (A.R.E.) between the user and their partner.

Special Case of Both Partners Using Pornography

In marriages where both use pornography it is possible that neither one is engaging their partner emotionally or sexually nor are they accessible and responsive when the other partner is engaging them because they are using pornography to escape from relational problems and to meet their underlying need for connection, or perhaps they don't see attachment behaviors as related to pornography use. Perhaps couples where both use pornography and are more permissive sexually lack an ability to be intimate in healthier ways and therefore are using pornography as a substitute for emotional closeness to enhance the relationship rather than use more attachment promoting behaviors to draw closer. To date, there is no research on how both spouses using pornography affects attachment behaviors in their relationship.

In summary, it is likely that compared to non-users, pornography users are more avoidantly attached to their partners and demonstrate less accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in their marriage. Users will likely perceive their partners as less accessible, responsive, and engaged because the user's emotional needs are not being met. It is probable that

the non-using spouse is also demonstrating less accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in the marriage if they are suspicious of pornography use or have been hurt by the discovery of their partner's pornography use. They may also be anxiously attached to the user because of loss of trust. It is also probable that before a non-using spouse even knows about the pornography use they experience the user as more distant from the relationship and therefore the non-using spouse demonstrates fewer accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement behaviors because they no longer feel emotionally connected to the user. It is therefore likely the non-user will perceive their spouse low on accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement if they are experiencing attachment injury or emotional distance. Because of the measurement tools used in this study we will not be able to determine if spouses are aware of their partner's pornography use but suffice it to say whether the spouse knows or not, fewer A.R.E. behaviors are expected to be demonstrated in the relationship by both partners.

Purpose of the Study and Hypotheses

The literature reviewed and clinical observations suggest that more research needs to be done to understand what is happening to attachment in marriage when pornography is used (Manning, 2006). More specifically: Are pornography use and attachment-related behaviors connected? Pornography users (especially frequent users) may be more likely to emotionally and physically connect less with their spouses, as demonstrated by talking less, and being less responsive to their spouses when the spouse engages them in conversation because emotional closeness is potentially more difficult. As for the partner of the user it is likely for them to not trust their partner completely because the partner is less confiding, takes fewer emotional risks, and withdraws more often. Therefore, the non-using partner may begin to withdraw and hold back sharing feelings. This study seeks to further research in this area by seeking to find, using

an attachment lens, if there is an association between pornography use, marital relationship attachment styles, and behaviors in couples where the male uses pornography. Both partners will be asked the same questions regarding attachment behaviors and attachment and their answers compared with couples who do not use pornography. Due to the nature of the measurement methods we will use, the spouses may or may not know about their partner's pornography use.

To understand the type of attachment behaviors occurring in a couple using pornography compared to those who do not can lead to more informed therapeutic interventions to help clients develop a more secure attachment by eliminating potential barriers such as pornography. Also, this research may begin to inform the public, in a preventative manner, potential signs that may be related to problems with pornography before a serious attachment injury occurs or insecurity is established or continues.

Since secure attachment is based on accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement between partners, the following hypotheses were tested comparing couples who do not use pornography to couples in which the male uses pornography:

1. The male's frequency of pornography use will predict avoidant attachment for him and anxious attachment for his partner.
2. The male's frequency of pornography use will predict his accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in a negative way.
3. The male's frequency of pornography use will predict his female partner's assessment of his accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in their relationship in a negative way.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were adults age 18 and over who took the RELATE questionnaire from January 2009, the time the pornography measurement variables were added, through February, 2011. Statistics from the current data set show: A total of 209 couples (206 heterosexual and 3 Gay Male couples). The overall mean age for males = 29.48 (SD= 9.15, minimum= 18, maximum= 68), and for females = 27.22 (SD= 8.81, minimum= 18, maximum= 66). According to the men, their relationship status consisted of 27.6% married, 39.2% engaged or committed to marry, 31.6% in a serious dating relationship, and 3 didn't answer (1.4%). According to the women, their relationship status consisted of 27.6% married, 37.8% engaged or committed to marry, 31.1% in a serious dating relationship, and 7 didn't answer (3.3%). Minimum amount of time a couple had been together was 0-3 months and the maximum amount of time was more than 40 years. The average length of the relationship for couples in a serious relationship or an engaged relationship was 7-12 months. The average length of the relationship for married couples was 1 to 5 years. For males 85.6% of the sample was Caucasian, and the remaining 14.4% included: Native Americans, Asians, Latino/a, African American, mixed/Bi-racial, other, with 1.9% leaving the answer blank. For females 78.5% of the sample was Caucasian, and the remaining 21.5% included: Native Americans, Asians, Latino/as, African American, mixed/Bi-racial, other, with 3.8% leaving the answer blank. For males: 43.8% made \$19,999 or less, 28.8% made between \$20,000 and \$59,999, the remaining 24.5% made \$60,000 or more, and 2.9% did not answer the question. For females: 60.2% made \$19,999 or less, 21.5% made between \$20,000 and \$59,999, the remaining 14.5% made \$60,000 or more, and 3.8% did not answer the question. Number of males that have a GED, Diploma, or some college but are

not currently enrolled was 13.1%, 43.1% are enrolled in college or have an associate's degree, 24.4% have their bachelor's degree, 17.7% are enrolled in a graduate program or completed their graduate degree, and 1.9% did not answer or have less than a high school diploma. Number of females that have a GED, Diploma, or some college but are not currently enrolled was 7.5%, 53.6% are enrolled in college or have an associate's degree, 15.8% have their bachelor's degree, 19.6% are enrolled in a graduate program or completed their graduate degree, and 3.8% did not answer.

Religious representation for males in the sample was as follows: LDS- 65.6%, Protestant- 11.6%, None- 9%, Catholic - 6.3%, the remaining 7.5% included: Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Other, and participants that chose not to answer the question. The religious representation for the female partners in the sample was similar: LDS- 63%, Protestant- 12.2%, None- 5.8%, Catholic- 10.1%, the remaining 8.9% included: Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Other, and participants that chose not to answer the question.

Measurements

Specific variables and scales were used from the online **RELATIONSHIP Evaluation** found at www.relate-institute.org. RELATE is a 300 plus item questionnaire that has been developed over a period of years by social scientists using statistical, qualitative, educational, and psychological standards to ensure validity (Busby, Holman, and Taniguchi, 2001).

Reliability measures along with a brief description of each scale is provided below.

Participants for this study were selected if they answered the Brief A.R.E. questions and were in at least a casual dating relationship with the person they were taking the test with as opposed to being merely acquaintances or friends. For this study a total of 126 male's never used

pornography, 78 male's used pornography, and 5 did not answer. To avoid any possible confounds all females who used pornography and their partners were removed from the study as well. (see Appendix A for actual questions taken from RELATE)

“Frequency of Porn Use” Question

Frequency of porn use was measured asking: “During the last twelve months on how many days did you view or read pornography (i.e., movies, magazines, internet sites, adult romance novels)?” Answer Selection- 0=None, 1= Once a Month or Less, 2=2 or 3 days a month, 3=1 or 2 days a week, 4=3-5 days a week, 5=Almost Every day.

Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement (Brief A.R.E.)

Accessibility Scale: has three questions created to find out how available the participant is to his/her partner. For instance, one of the questions is, “*I am rarely available to my partner.*”, which is then reverse scored for the accessibility scale which equates higher scores with more accessibility. The Accessibility Partner Scale is similar to the accessibility scale only the questions have had minor changes in wording to reflect questions about the participant's partner's level of accessibility. As seen in the following question taken from the scale, “*My partner is rarely available to me.*” This question is also reverse scored for the accessibility partner scale which equates higher scores with more accessibility shown by the partner. The response selection for both scales is on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Accessibility Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .72 and a test-retest coefficient of .70. The Accessibility Partner Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83 and a test-retest coefficient of .77. (See Appendix A for the full scale)

Responsiveness Scale: This scale has three questions that address the participant's ability to respond emphatically to his/her partner such as, “I listen when my partner shares her/his deepest

feelings.” The Responsiveness Partner Scale has the exact same questions with exception for minor word change to reflect their perspective on the participant’s partner’s ability to respond to him/her, “My partner listens when I share my deepest feelings.” Both scales are answered on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores equal more positive responsive behavior. The Responsiveness Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .74 and a test-retest coefficient of .69 and the partner scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83 and a test-retest coefficient of .72. (See Appendix A for the full scale)

Engagement Scale: This scale measures a participant’s proactivity in engaging his/her partner emotionally in the relationship. For instance, one of the questions asks, “I can take emotional risks in our relationship.” The partner scale asks a similar question for the participant to answer about his/her partner, “My partner can take emotional risks in our relationship.” Both questions are answered on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Higher scores equal more positive engagement behaviors demonstrated. The Engagement Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .67 and a test-retest coefficient of .67 and the partner scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .67 and a test-retest coefficient of .64. (See Appendix A for the full scale)

Attachment Avoidance and Anxiety. The avoidant attachment and anxiety attachment scales are from an established measure called the Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) published by Simpson and colleagues (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Both scales are scored in a positive direction meaning the higher the score the more secure attachment a person has.

The Avoidant Scale

This scale has 8 items that measure a participant’s level of avoidant attachment. For instance, one of the questions asks, “I find it relatively easy to get close to others.” Questions are answered on a 7 point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Higher scores equal more secure attachment. The Avoidant Attachment Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .809. (See Appendix A for the full scale)

The Anxiety Scale

This scale has 9 items that measure a participant’s level of anxious attachment. For instance, one of the questions asks, “I rarely worry about being abandoned by others.” Questions are answered on a 7 point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Higher scores equal more secure attachment. The Anxiety Attachment Scale has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .828. (See Appendix A for the full scale)

Results

Significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the male’s frequency of porn use to predict the male’s avoidant attachment ($R^2 = .02$, $F(1,202) = 4.190$, $p < .042$, $\beta = -.143$, $p < .042$). See Table 1 for details.

Table 1

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Male Avoidant Attachment							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.02	$F(1,202)=4.190$	-0.138	0.068	-0.143	-2.047	$p < .042$

N = 206

No significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the male's frequency of porn use to predict his female partner's anxious attachment, ($R^2 = .017$, $F(1,195) = 3.35$, $p < .069$, $\beta = -.130$, $p < .069$). See Table 2 for details.

Table 2

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Female Anxiety Attachment							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.017	$F(1,195) = 3.350$	-0.142	0.078	-0.13	-1.83	$p < .069$

N = 202

No significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his accessibility ($R^2 = .013$, $F(1,199) = 2.694$, $p < .102$, $\beta = -.116$, $p < .102$). See Table 3 for details.

Table 3

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Male's Accessibility							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.013	$F(1,199) = 2.694$	-0.066	0.04	-0.116	-1.641	$p < .102$

N = 203

Significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his responsiveness ($R^2 = .023$, $F(1,199) = 4.657$, $p < .032$, $\beta = -.151$, $p < .032$). See Table 4 for details.

Table 4

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Male's Responsiveness							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.023	$F(1,199) = 4.657$	-0.088	0.041	-0.151	-2.158	$p < .032$

N = 203

No significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his engagement ($R^2 = .009$, $F(1,199) = 1.792$, $p < .182$, $\beta = -.094$, $p < .182$). See Table 5 for details.

Table 5

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Male's Engagement							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.009	$F(1,199) = 1.792$	-0.066	0.049	-0.094	-1.339	$p < .182$

N = 203

Significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his female partner's evaluation of his accessibility ($R^2 = .051$, $F(1,193) = 10.387$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -.226$, $p < .001$). See Table 6 for details.

Table 6

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Female Partner- Male's Accessibility							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.051	$F(1,193) = 10.387$	-0.166	0.052	-0.226	-3.223	$p < .001$

N = 200

Significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his female partner's evaluation of his responsiveness ($R^2 = .049$, $F(1,193) = 9.838$, $p < .002$, $\beta = -.220$, $p < .002$). See Table 7 for details.

Table 7

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Female Partner- Male's Responsiveness							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.049	F(1,193)=9.838	-0.154	0.049	-0.22	-3.137	p<.002

N =200

Significant findings were found using a linear regression to calculate the ability of male's frequency of porn use to predict his female partner's evaluation of his engagement ($R^2 = .056$, $F(1,193) = 11.431$, $p < .001$, $\beta = -.236$, $p < .001$). See Table 8 for details.

Table 8

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Female Partner- Male's Engagement							
	R Squared	F value	B	SE	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Frequency of Porn Use	0.056	F(1,193)=11.431	-0.171	0.051	-0.236	-3.381	p<.001

N =200

In summary, hypothesis one and two were partially supported and three was completely supported: Hypotheses 1- Frequency of pornography use predicted his avoidant attachment but did not predict his female partner's anxious attachment. Hypothesis 2 - The male's frequency of pornography use did not predict his accessibility nor his engagement level in the relationship but it did predict his level of responsiveness. Hypothesis 3- The male's frequency of pornography use predicted his female partner's evaluation of his level of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in their relationship; Each regression showing significance had R^2 values between .02 and .056 which means less than 5.6% of the variance in attachment and attachment behaviors were predicted by the independent variable- male's frequency of pornography use.

Table 9

Means and Modes of Pornography and Attachment Variables

	N		Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing			
Frequency of Porn Use*	204	5	.66	0	1.007
Male's Avoidant Attachment**	206	3	5.0722	5.75	.97547
Female's Anxiety Attachment**	202	7	5.1370	5.44	1.09771
Male's Accessibility***	203	6	4.2282	4.00	.57344
Male's Responsiveness***	203	6	4.3530	5.00	.59114
Male's Engagement***	203	6	3.9425	4.00	.70319
Female Partner- Male's Accessibility***	200	9	4.2383	5.00	.73849
Female Partner- Male's Responsiveness***	200	9	4.3600	5.00	.70601
Female Partner- Male's Engagement***	200	9	3.9483	4.00	.72067

*range of scale = 0-5 (higher= more porn use), **range of scale= 1-7 (higher numer= more secure attachment), ***range of scale = 1-5 (higher = more positive attachment behavior)

Table 10

Pearson Correlations Matrix for Frequency of Use and Attachment Scales

	Male's Avoidant Attachment	Female Partner's Anxiety Attachment	Male's Accessibility	Male's Responsiveness	Male's Engagement	Female Partner- Male's Accessibility	Female Partner- Male's Responsiveness	Female Partner- Male's Engagement
Male's Frequency of Pornography Use	-.143*	-.130	-.116	-.151*	-.094	-.226**	-.220**	-.236**
Male's Avoidant Attachment		.099	.254**	.386**	.401**	.168*	.207**	.341**
Female's Anxiety Attachment			.225**	.251**	.162*	.390**	.403**	.330**
Male's Accessibility				.649**	.551**	.459**	.466**	.440**
Male's Responsiveness					.573**	.458**	.533**	.440**
Male's Engagement						.384**	.412**	.540**
Female Partner- Male's Accessibility							.781**	.655**
Female Partner- Male's Responsiveness								.668**

**p < 0.01 (2-tailed).

*p < 0.05 (2-tailed).

Discussion

These results suggest there is a relationship between the frequency of a male's pornography use and attachment for both him and his female partner. The more male users looked at pornography the more likely they were to score lower on the avoidant attachment scale equating more insecurity than males who viewed pornography less or not at all. Perhaps the male partner is afraid to get emotionally close to his female partner and pornography provides an outlet for him to get some of his needs met spuriously such as relief from fear, loneliness, frustration and other negative emotions because emotional closeness is scary and easier to avoid. Those who are avoidantly attached have a difficult time depending on others (Simpson, 1990) which could suggest possible characteristics of his relationship as well. It is easier, albeit not ultimately effective, and less scary for him to depend on pornography to be there as opposed to his partner and therefore the pornography user avoids getting close. The inter-play of pornography use and avoidant attachment could be evidence of a negative cycle; if the male feels nervous or scared to get close emotionally he might turn to porn to escape, as he turns to pornography it takes him away from the relationship and facilitates more avoidance, as he continues to avoid he feels more negative emotions and turns to porn to escape.

The male partner's frequency of pornography use predicted his female partner's low evaluation of his accessibility in the relationship. The female, to some degree, is mindful of her partner's unavailability to her and the difficulty she has getting his attention as described by one wife in the research by Landau, Garrett, and Webb (2008). However, frequency of porn use did not predict the male's accessibility to his partner. Due to the availability and anonymity afforded by the internet, it exponentiates the possibilities of the past to look at porn any time of day and in any place, meaning a male pornography user may be accessible to his partner when they plan to

do things together but during other times of the day look at pornography. Another possible reason frequency of pornography use did not predict accessibility for the male could be the pornography user is not aware of a lack in his accessibility.

Another interesting finding is the relationship between a male's frequency of pornography use and his level of positive responsiveness to his partner. The more often a male looked at pornography the more likely he was responding to his partner less effectively. It is possible the male who is using pornography isn't reaching out to his partner and is not listening when his female partner is sharing her deep feelings, or it may be that the user is more likely to respond less effectively and consistently to his partner either to: maintain distance due to fear or lack of desire to get close, he does not see the importance of responding in a positive way, or does not know how to respond in a positive way to meet his partner's needs; these concerns might be augmented by his pornography use where he is more likely to learn the objectification of women rather than women portrayed as human beings with feelings and thoughts of their own compared to males who do not use pornography and are at lower risk of developing these beliefs. It is then, no surprise, that the female's low evaluation of her male partner's positive responsiveness in their relationship was also predicted by his frequency of pornography use. It is likely that both are experiencing similar concerns within the relationship regarding the male partner's ability to listen and reach out to his partner.

The male partner's frequency of pornography use predicted his female partner's low evaluation of his engagement in the relationship even though his frequency of pornography use did not predict his own evaluation of his low level of engagement in the relationship. The female partner may sense and observe the male struggling to put effort into the relationship and having a hard time risking enough to share deep feelings. This may indicate to the female partner that her

male partner might have some reluctance with emotional closeness. The lack of emotional closeness the female partner experiences from her male partner might be due to the user being distracted by pornography which does not model emotional closeness or it could be due to a lack of awareness on his part about the importance of opening up and sharing feelings. Lack of engagement might be enhanced by having pornography as an outlet for escape from negative feelings as opposed to talking it over with his significant other.

It is no surprise that significance was found between pornography use and women rating their male partner's lower in A.R.E. and no significance was found between pornography use and men rating themselves on their A.R.E.. Women tend to be more aware of relationship dynamics and therefore might be more sensitive to attachment building behaviors when compared to their male counter-parts.

The male partner's frequency of pornography did not predict his female partner's anxious attachment level. Perhaps the reason for this is because there aren't enough indicators to the female partner that the relationship is in trouble or maybe she views the lack of accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement as "the male thing" to do rather than a threat to the security of their relationship. This makes sense, the risk or danger of developing a lack of intimacy or insecure attachment going undetected for years before a couple comes in to see a therapist. Most of the current literature supporting this theory addresses couples that have reported pornography as a concern or an addiction therefore the spouses in those studies were already aware of their husbands' porn use. For those wives there was more insecurity in their relationships. This study did not assess the female partner's knowledge of her male partner's porn use which could have been a mediating variable to predict anxious attachment. Future research might want to consider that component as a possible variable predicting insecure attachment.

In this study cause and effect was not determined and it is possible that these results show us a positive feedback loop between the female and male partner. As the male demonstrates low accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in the relationship his female partner might become more distant or pursue him for more closeness. The male partner is not aware of his low levels of A.R.E. and how a lack of those behaviors might be affecting his partner, but rather he might simply experience her distance or pursuing behaviors. As the male experiences more distance or pursuit from his female partner he might turn to pornography to escape the pressure to engage in the relationship and talk about the distance she feels. As he continues to escape to pornography he continues to become more distant by not being accessible, responsive, and engaged. The female partner senses more distance from the male and continues to distance herself or pursue more. As this feedback loop continues to move the couple's attachment might become insecure or more insecure resulting in lower levels of functioning within the marriage, less function in family operations, and perhaps lower quality of the marriage in general.

These results must be read within the proper context of the sample which included a majority of younger couples either married, engaged, or in a serious dating relationship. It is possible that at this stage in their relationship the couple might be giving a more glowing report of how their attachment behaviors are and the cycle of pornography use and attachment could be worse. It is also possible that for younger couples pornography use isn't affecting them as severely as theorized, perhaps because of its pervasiveness it is more widely accepted or there are other variables that are part of the young relationships supporting the attachment between the couples such as a desire to make the relationship work.

Another contextual concern for this sample that needs mentioning is the over-representation of LDS participants and the under-representation of other religions and those

who chose no religion. The LDS church discusses the harm of pornography at both the local and global levels. This could affect either an already existing shame surrounding pornography use or it could cause a sense of shame in the pornography user. If a pornography user feels a sense of shame or even guilt then he might be more likely to withdraw. Following attachment theory if the partner withdraws it can send a message to his partner that he is less accessible, responsive, and engaged in the relationship then the other partner is likely to pursue. If a person uses pornography but does not feel a sense of guilt or shame then it is possible he will not withdraw as much because he has nothing to hide.

Having weak results, especially regarding the males, adds a unique opportunity for interpretation of these results. Using a wide range of participants in different lengths and types of relationships could be the reason for low R^2 values because pornography use might have a diverse impact in relationships that are different. For instance, Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis (2003) found that women in less committed relationships found pornography use less distressing than women in more committed relationships. Thus the varying lengths of relationships in this study could be one reason why the results aren't as strong as if we studied couples in a less varying range. On the flip side the fact that significance was found in a varied sample such as this suggests there is some connection between pornography use, attachment, and attachment behaviors and warrants more research.

In general, more research is needed to determine the vast array of dynamics within couples where pornography is used. This study used a very simple and crude measure for pornography use. More precise measures including spouse's knowledge of partner's use would be one suggestion for expanding the research of this topic. Unfortunately, there is no other research literature on pornography use and couple's attachment to which we can compare these results.

That makes this study especially unique and suggests lower-level use of pornography (i.e. not addiction) may also be related to couple dynamics.

Limitations and Future Research

This study included 3 male homosexual couples which was too few to calculate any statistics for this subgroup. This study is not generalizable to the U.S. population due to the high Caucasian representation, 80-85%, compared to the national average of 66% (<http://facts.kff.org/chart.aspx?ch=362>, May 23, 2011). The over-representation of religious participants (65% LDS compared to the 1.7% representation in the U.S.) and the under representation of people who claim no religious affiliation are also limitations (7% in the study compared to 16.9% in the U.S. (<http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, May 23, 2011)). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to reference Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis's study (2003) finding religious orientation not to be a determining factor in the level of distress women felt regarding their partner's pornography use but rather the level of commitment in the relationship and the duration of use (marriage as opposed to dating, more frequent use and greater length of use) predicted the female partner's distress level. However, we do not know how religion might impact male pornography users. In some religions pornography is taught to be something that should be avoided, which might affect the male user's sense of guilt which could trigger a sense of shame and lead to more avoidance in his relationship. This leads to further research questions regarding religion and religiosity and how they may be related to pornography use and its associated issues such as insecure attachment.

Due to the small R^2 values in this study we know there are other factors in addition to the current findings that also help predict insecure attachment, therefore future research might look at the following questions: Is religion a moderating or mediating variable between pornography

use and insecure attachment? Does religiosity, how dedicated a person is to their religion, affect pornography use? Would a more representative sample of the U.S. population (i.e. fewer LDS participants, more minority and non-religious representation) yield different results? Other questions for future direction might include: Would the female's evaluation of her partner's accessibility differ if the couple is living together? Would his evaluation of accessibility differ for the same reason? And finally, how would the male user evaluate his female partner? How would that compare to her own evaluations of her accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement in the relationship?

Clinical Implications

These findings have implications for therapists as well. If a client presents concerns about using pornography then the therapist might want to explore his attachment to his spouse as a possible treatment in learning how to explore his feelings and sharing them. Through an attachment lens, if the couple appears to be avoidantly or anxiously attached the clinician may ask the client about pornography use. By exploring pornography use with the client they can determine if it's a behavior that needs to stop or not. If it's affecting the presenting concerns for therapy then maybe treatment surrounding the porn use might need to be implemented.

Assessment of any attachment injuries is also critical. Using Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement as the building blocks of a secure attachment, clinicians can explore with clients additional avenues of assessment that might help them understand if the couple is securely attached or not. Exploration with both partners regarding their needs that aren't being met (A.R.E.) and how they can meet each other's needs would also be appropriate for treatment. As discussed earlier, if the client is using pornography, this information may help the clinician know

other risks the male client is exposed to such as being less accessible, responsive, and engaged in his relationship with his partner. The male client may need help learning how to overcome fears of opening up emotionally. More exploration on how he responds to his partner when she needs him would also be beneficial. Perhaps it would be beneficial if part of the standard set of questions therapists use during the assessment phase included questions regarding pornography use.

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Appendix

Relate Subscales and Items for Study

Relationship Status

Please answer the following about your current relationship.

133a. What is your relationship to the person about whom you will be answering the “partner” questions below?

1. I am casually/occasionally dating her/him.
2. I am in a serious or steady dating relationship with her/him.
3. I am engaged or committed to marry her/him.
4. I am married to her/him.
5. We are friends but not dating.
6. We are just acquaintances but not dating.

134m. (Only answered by married participants). How long have you and your partner been married?

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. 0 to 3 months | 6. 6 to 10 years | 11. More than 40 years |
| 2. 4 to 6 months | 7. 11 to 15 years | |
| 3. 7 to 12 months | 8. 16 to 20 years | |
| 4. 1 to 2 years | 9. 21 to 30 years | |
| 5. 3 to 5 years | 10. 31 to 40 years | |

“Frequency of Porn Use” Question

“During the last twelve months on how many days did you view or read pornography (i.e., movies, magazines, internet sites, adult romance novels)?” Answer Selection- 0=None, 1=Once a Month or Less, 2=2 or 3 days a month, 3=1 or 2 days a week, 4=3-5 days a week, 5=Almost Everyday

Brief Accessibility, Responsiveness, & Engagement (A.R.E.)

Accessibility

911. *I am rarely available to my partner.*

912. *I am there for my partner when he/she is struggling.*

913. *It is hard for my partner to get my attention.*

1= <i>Strongly Disagree</i> 2= <i>Disagree</i> 3= <i>Undecided</i> 4= <i>Agree</i> 5= <i>Strongly Agree</i>

AccessibilityPartner

902. My partner is rarely available to me.

903. My partner is there for me when I am struggling.

904. It is hard for me to get my partner's attention.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Undecided 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Responsiveness

914. I listen when my partner shares her/his deepest feelings.

915. I provide reassurance when my partner needs to know that she/he is important to me.

916. Even when we are apart, I reach out to my partner.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Undecided 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

ResponsivenessPartner

905. My partner listens when I share my deepest feelings.

906. My partner provides reassurance when I need to know that I am important to her/him.

907. Even when we are apart, my partner reaches out to me.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Undecided 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

Engagement

917. I can take emotional risks in our relationship.

918. It is hard for me to confide in my partner.

919. I struggle to feel close and engaged in our relationship.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Undecided 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

EngagementPartner

908. My partner can take emotional risks in our relationship.

909. It is hard for my partner to confide in me.

910. My partner struggles to feel close and engaged in our relationship.

1= *Strongly Disagree* 2= *Disagree* 3= *Undecided* 4= *Agree* 5= *Strongly Agree*

Avoidant Attachment Scale- higher scores indicate less avoidant attachment feelings/behaviors

755. I find it relatively easy to get close to others.

756. I'm not very comfortable having to depend on other people.

757. I'm comfortable having others depend on me.

758. I don't like people getting too close to me.

759. I'm somewhat uncomfortable being too close to others.

760. I find it difficult to trust others completely.

761. I'm nervous whenever anyone gets too close to me.

762. Others often want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.

1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Undecided 5= Somewhat Agree
6= Agree 7= Strongly Agree

Reverse Coded variables- 756, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762

Anxious Attachment Scale- higher scores indicate less anxious attachment feelings/behaviors

763. I rarely worry about being abandoned by others.

764. Others often are reluctant to get as close as I would like.

765. I often worry that my partner(s) don't really love me.

766. I rarely worry about my partner(s) leaving me.

767. I often want to merge completely with others, and this desire sometimes scares them away.

768. I'm confident others would never hurt me by suddenly ending our relationship.

769. I usually want more closeness and intimacy than others do.

770. The thought of being left by others rarely enters my mind.

771. I'm confident that my partner(s) love me just as much as I love them.

1= Strongly Disagree	2= Disagree	3= Somewhat Disagree	4= Undecided	5= Somewhat Agree
6= Agree 7= Strongly Agree				

Reverse Coded variables- 764, 765, 767, 769