Examining the Impact of Pornography Consumption on Marriage Rates

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate whether pornography consumption actively contributes to the observed trend of declining marriage rates. Pornography, defined as sexually explicit material capable of evoking sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Poulson, 2013). Pornography has witnessed increasing acceptance in contemporary cultures. Recent data suggested a noteworthy trend: individuals turning to pornography as a means of escaping negative emotional states (Kor, 2014)

Statista statistics approximated that 20% of internet searches conducted on mobile devices pertain to pornography. It also estimated the 4% of the websites on the internet are pornographic. (Statista, 2019) The influence of internet pornography goes beyond individual lives, affecting both marriages and broader societal dynamics (Camilleri, 2021). In marriage life, one study stood out, provided that when adults watched X-rated movies within the past year, they were more likely to report less happy in their marriage, and have an extra marital affair. They also found that the negative relation between pornography and marriage has grown over time. (Price, 2014)

Outside of marriage, Wood looked at the specific term "marriageable men" to determine reasons for the declining number of marriages. A possible explanation he suggested was the decline in income for men was impacting women pursuing marriage with men (Wood, 1995). According to the United States Census Bureau marriage rates dropped from 16.3 in 2011 to 14.9 in 2021 per every 1000 women. Wood considers income to be a major factor of the decline in marriage rates while Preston looked at the opportunities women have for careers. (Preston, 1975) Preston found that in the year 1960 to 1970 in the age range of 22-24 women had the lowest proportions ever married considering the opportunities available for careers as alternatives. These two studies provided insight into possible reasons for the decline in marriage rates but fail to highlight the relatively new variable, internet pornography.

Due to the increase of cohabitation from the 1970s, it's important to consider the potential option of not getting married due to living with the significant other. Using data from the 1987-1988 Bumpass found that marriages beginning with cohabitation are more likely to break up compared to the counter parts of getting married to begin with (Bumpass, 1989).

In summary, this study seeks to answer the pivotal question: Does pornography consumption play an active role in the observed trend of declining marriages? I delved into the existing literature and examined societal shifts, I aim to contribute valuable insights into this multifaceted issue. The subsequent sections provide a comprehensive analysis on pornography and marriage rates.

Data section

Data used is from the GSS, or General Social Survey. This widely used survey in the United States that collects data on a wide range of social, demographic, and economic topics. National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The GSS has been gathered

annually or biennially since 1972, making it one of the longest-running surveys of its kind. The survey aims to provide insights into the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in the United States were on various social issues. The GSS uses a national probability sample, aiming to represent the broader U.S. population. Employing face-to-face interviews with a random sample of adults, typically conducted by professional interviewers. The survey asks a standardized set of questions to collect information on topics like political attitudes, social behavior, demographic characteristics, and more. It was designed to monitor trends and changes in American society over time.

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
PORN30	2333	1.183	.555	1	4
MARITAL	8393	2.476	1.655	1	5
TVHOURS	3633	2.948	2.538	0	24
EDUC	8371	13.443	2.916	0	20
AGE	8363	46.089	17.179	18	89
RINCOME	5286	10.132	2.958	1	12
RELITEN	8091	2.026	1.032	1	4
XMOVIE	3669	1.755	.43	1	2
YEAR	8394	2001.999	1.638	2000	2004

Primary outcome variable of interest was “Never Married”. This measured individuals in the sample who report being never married. The independent variable was measured by never, 1-2 times, 3-5 times, and more than 5 times consumption of pornography in the last 30-day period.

This was the sample question posed for the main independent variable pornography consumption:

“In the past 30 days, how often have you visited a web site for sexually explicit material?”

Marital status was split into 5 categories. Creating a variable was necessary to be able to isolate the never marrieds. Years 2000, 2002, and 2004 were when the GSS took place. Important to note that no one younger than 18 was used in this study.

Given the reliance on self-reporting for pornography consumption in this study, a potential bias was introduced. Respondents might have been inclined to underreport due to the negative connotation associated with pornography consumption. Consequently, the results had the potential to be understated and inaccurate, but they should not be dismissed.

Covariate variables I use in the model include age, education, income, gender, religiosity. They were measured in years of age, level of education, category of income, category of religious intensity.

Method Section

Beginning with the first model

$$(1)\ nevmarried_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 porn12_{it} + \beta_2 porn35_{it} + \beta_3 porn5_{it} + u_{it}$$

Where $nevmarried_{it}$, as the dependent variable, were of people married that i individual were married in t a given year. By employing categorical variables for the independent variable, I can effectively account for varying frequencies denoted by $\beta_1 porn12, \beta_2 porn35, \beta_3 porn5$. These variables were a self-reporting figure of how frequent pornography was used 1-2 times, 3-5 times, and 5 or more times in a 30-day period. ε being the error term. Categorical variables double to serve if pornography use at different levels change the likelihood of being married or not, or in otherwards if it was linear in parameters. This model also avoids violating no perfect collinearity due to separating the variables into categories that were only chosen once by one individual

$$(2)\ nevmarried_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 porn12_{it} + \beta_2 porn35_{it} + \beta_3 porn5_{it} + X_{it} + u_{it}$$

X_{it} a vector of controls for demographics such as TV hours, education, age, income, religious intensity, if they had watched an X-rated movie with in the past year. This controls allow me to further assume that phonography has a direct impact on never being married.

$$(3)\ mennever_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 porn12_{it} + \beta_2 porn35_{it} + \beta_3 porn5_{it} + u_{it}$$

Where $mennever_{it}$ were controlling for the sex of males only. Expected value of u were zero for all the independent values or in otherwards $E(u|x) = 0$

$$(4)\ mennever_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 porn12_{it} + \beta_2 porn35_{it} + \beta_3 porn5_{it} + X_{it} + u_{it}$$

With the 4th model adding the control variables.

As previously discussed in the introduction, the absence of a cohabitation variable with our control set was a limitation that needs to be discussed. The unintended consequences of not accounting for cohabitation risked of an exaggerated perception of the impact of pornography on marriage rates. This can be concluded because of the negative bias direction associated with marriage rates and cohabitation. Due to the GSS not having data within the year set I move forward with these models. As well as cohabitation not being in the GSS female opportunities is another omitted variable possibility that would have the same direction of negative bias direction.

These three models were ran using a Logit model to run this model because of the nature of the dependent outcome variable “never married” and “men never married”. Using marginal effects, I am able to interrupt the coefficients to determine the relationships that pornography consumption has on whether people were married or never married.

Results

VARIABLES	(1) variable	(2) variable	(3) variable	(4) variable
porn1-2	0.243***	0.0945***	0.287***	0.161***
	[0.0364]	[0.0260]	[0.0358]	[0.0256]
porn3-5	0.246***	0.110**	0.270***	0.159***
	[0.0705]	[0.0542]	[0.0685]	[0.0517]
porn5	0.321***	0.125**	0.334***	0.169***
	[0.0736]	[0.0534]	[0.0736]	[0.0507]
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	8,394	8,044	8,394	8,044

Standard errors in brackets
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Key coefficient interpretations are as follows: Pornography consumed 1-2 times in a month's period decreased the likelihood of being married by a 24.3% using pornography compared to not using pornography. Porn consumed 1-2 times increases to 24.6% and 32.1% for pornography consumed from 3-5 times and 5 times and more in a month's period of time. These were all statistically significant at the base logit model.

When control variables were added to the model, I saw the change in the pornography consumed 1-2 times drop to a 9.04% holding the statistically significant at the 99% level. Pornography consumed 3-5 times and 5 times or more were 11% and 12.5% at the 95% statistical significance.

Models 2 and 4 were the different output variable being males only. When analyzing males as the output the numbers go up with and without controls. With the controls I was able to see the jump to 16.1% increase of the probability of not being married when consuming pornography 1 to 2 times a month. It decreases for the 3 to 5 times a month but then increases to 16.9% from 5 times and more a month.

Economically these finding are significant due to the sample size predicting the population. If using pornography 5 times or more is equating to the likelihood of never marrying by 16.9% then that can have major impacts on population sizes of the future years.

These results highlight that pornography does in fact impact whether a person is likely to get married, especially for males.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored the possibility that pornography consumption has a direct effect marriage rate declining. Using the GSS data I was able to find statistical significance that using pornography 1-2 times demonstrated an increased likelihood of not being married by a 9.04%.

This trend increased for those who reported using pornography 3-5 times and more than 5 times a month, with percentage of 11% and 12.5%. Notably, with controls and having males never married be the outcome variable when pornography consumed 5 times or more a week there was a 16.9% change in not being married as a male.

These findings underscore a troubling trend, particularly concerning the heightened frequency of pornography use. The observed statistically significant correlation, especially among males, prompts a critical question regarding its economic significance. This consideration becomes even more pertinent given the rapid growth of pornography on the internet

Furthermore, the rise of online pornography, a relatively recent societal challenge, warrants careful examination. The evolution of pornography from magazines to VHS to movies and more recently, online websites, suggest a continuously adapting impact on individuals and society. As technologies such as artificial intelligence a virtual reality expands, there needs to be a form of regulations to restrict the increased potent forms of pornography and accessibility through these evolving mediums.

Looking ahead, future research should explore into the economic implications of these observed trends, looking at the broader societal consequences and individual well-being. Policymakers should consider these findings when writing regulations, especially in context of the internets role in making explicit content available. Potential examples are the state of Utah with its recent policy's making websites require age limits (Utah, 2021). This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the updating potential use of pornography consumption and its potential impact on marriage rates.

Work Cited

Bumpass, L. L., & Sweet, J. A.. *National estimates of cohabitation*

Camilleri, C., Perry, J. T., & Sammut, S. (2021). Compulsive internet pornography uses and mental health: A cross-sectional study in a sample of university students in the United States. *Frontiers in psychology*, *11*, 613244.

Doran, K., & Price, J. (2014). Pornography and marriage. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, *35*, 489-498.

Kor, A., Zilcha-Mano, S., Fogel, Y. A., Mikulincer, M., Reid, R. C., & Potenza, M. N. (2014). Psychometric development of the problematic pornography use scale. Addictive behaviors, 39(5), 861- 868.

Malcolm, M., & Naufal, G. (2016). Are pornography and marriage substitute for young men? *Eastern Economic Journal*, *42*, 317-334.

Poulsen, F. O., Busby, D. M., & Golovan, A. M. (2013). Pornography use: Who uses it and how it is associated with couple outcomes. Journal of sex research, 50(1), 72-83.

Preston, S. H., & Richards, A. T. (1975). The influence of women's work opportunities on marriage rates. Demography, 12(2), 209-222.

Statista *How Much of the Internet Consists of Porn?*. https://www.statista.com/chart/16959/share-of-the-internet-that-is-porn/

Stevenson, B., & Wolfers, J. (2007). Marriage and divorce: Changes and their driving forces. Journal of Economic perspectives, 21(2), 27-52.

Ropelato, J. (2006). Internet pornography statistics.

Wood, R. G. (1995). Marriage rates and marriageable men: A test of the Wilson hypothesis. Journal of Human Resources, 163-193.

Utah Legislature. (2023, May 24). H.B. 999 – Pornography Addiction and Prevention Act.

United States Census Bureau. *Is Your State in Step with National Marriage and Divorce Trends?*.