Perceived effects of instructional pornography on the self, partner, and others

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People tend to perceive socially undesirable media, such as pornography, as having a more negative effect on others than on themselves. This study examined how this phenomenon, called the third-person effect, manifests when the pornography has positive connotations, as with instructional pornography. Participants (n = 229) were asked to rate how instructional adult films would affect them, their partner, and other people. Unlike non-instructional pornography, participants perceived instructional pornography as having a positive effect. Participants perceived other men and women as more positively affected by informational pornography than themselves, but perceived themselves as more positively affected than their closest friend. Participants with partners reported that they and their partner would be equally positively affected by instructional pornography. Findings are discussed in light of genre-specific pornography effects and the possible use of instructional pornography as an educational tool.

Keywords: third-person effects; pornography; education; sex; relationships

One of the most compelling aspects of pornography is how we perceive it to affect ourselves, our partners, and people in general. While reports of the outcomes from viewing pornography vary widely, from rape myth acceptance (Allen, D’alessio, & Brezgel, 1995; Malamuth & Check, 1985) through relationship distress (Bergner & Bridges, 2002) to more favorable attitudes toward sex (Adams, Oye, & Parker, 2003; Fisher & Barak, 2001; Hald & Malamuth, 2008), perceptions of these effects have been consistent. Researchers have found that people perceive pornography to have a negative impact on other people’s moral values, attitudes toward the other sex, and sexual behaviors, but perceive little to none of these negative effects on themselves (Gunther, 1995; Lee & Tamborini, 2005; Lo & Paddon, 2000; Lo & Wei, 2002; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996).

Independent of the accuracy of such opinions, perceptions regarding the effects of pornography are important because they often determine our consumption of, or desire to restrict consumption of, sexual content. Those who consume pornography tend to have fewer negative perceptions of its effects and are less supportive of pornography censorship (Gunther, 1995). Women tend to perceive stronger negative effects of pornography on others than men do, and subsequently women report greater support of pornography censorship (Chia, Lu, & McLeod, 2004; Gunther, 1995; Lo & Wei, 2002; Rojas et al., 1996), a finding often attributed to women’s lower exposure to pornography (Lo & Paddon, 2000; Thompson, Chaffee, & Oshagan, 1990; Wilson & Abelson, 1973).
general, the greater the perceived negative effect of pornography, the greater the desire to censor pornography in an attempt to protect people from its (perceived) harmful effects (Chia et al., 2004; Gunther, 1995; Lee & Tamborini, 2005; Rojas et al., 1996; Wu & Koo, 2001).

A potential explanation is the third-person effect (TPE). The third-person effect hypothesis (Davison, 1983) posits that people typically presume media to have a stronger negative influence on others than it does on themselves. Put another way: “A message will not have its greatest influence on ‘me,’ or ‘you,’ but on ‘them’” (Perloff, 2009, p. 252). The reverse, the first-person effect, occurs when media portray a socially desirable message (see Figure 1). When this is the case, people perceive themselves as more positively influenced than others (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). Research suggests that the underlying process prompting the first- and third-person effect is a self-serving bias, or what some scholars call ego enhancement (Eveland & McLeod, 1999) or impression management (Prentice & Miller, 1993). This describes a motivation to see oneself in a more positive light compared to others, creating a self–other bias wherein individuals perceive themselves to be either more positively or less negatively affected by media compared with others, depending on the valence of the media message.

The first- and third-person effect also helps explain when we perceive media to be harmful or helpful. For negative media messages, including violent pornography, misogynistic rap lyrics, media violence, and advertising for alcohol and cigarettes, the third-person effect has been found many times (Gunther, 1991; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997; Paul, Salwen, & Dupagne, 2000; Perloff, 1993; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; Shah, Faber, & Youn, 1999). In these cases, people tend to be concerned about the potential negative effects of these media on others, while assuming that they themselves are less negatively affected. The first-person effect for positive media messages, such as public service announcements and anti-drug ads, has also been found (Cho & Boster, 2008; McLeod et al., 1997; Perloff, 1993; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; Shah et al., 1999). In these studies people tend to believe that others ignore or are impervious to the message’s positive effects, while they themselves are receptive to them.

In a similar pattern to the first- and third-person effect, people also tend to think others are more offended by controversial media than they themselves are. For example, when asked how offensive commercials for feminine hygiene products are, people generally report that they themselves do not find them offensive, but they perceive others as finding them highly offensive. For socially undesirable commercials, such as racist commercials, people tend to rank themselves as more offended than others are (Jensen & Collins,
Greater consumption of the type of media in question may result in being less offended by it. One study that looked at hard-core pornography found that greater pornography consumption was associated with being less offended by pornography (Zillmann & Bryant, 1982), but researchers have yet to explore perceptions of other people’s offendedness, nor how it varies by gender or relates to the first- or third-person effect.

While self—other effects gaps are persistent, the magnitude of these effects can vary based on the social distance of the other people in question (Duck & Mullin, 1995). Social distance occurs when two people are different ages and/or genders or are strangers to each other. The greater the social distance the stronger the first- or third-person effect tends to be. If the social distance is narrower, such as when two people are friends or have the same gender, then the perceived effect is usually weaker.

Although previous studies have found the TPE with regard to pornography, most of these studies have used broad terms like “pornography,” “X-rated films and magazines,” and “pornographic movies/magazines” (Gunther, 1995; Lo & Paddon, 2000; Rojas et al., 1996). Fisher and Barak (2001) argue that collapsing different types of pornography into one category “eliminates our ability... to consider effects of different types of sexually explicit content on the Internet, in any meaningful fashion...” (p. 315). Very few studies have looked at perceptions of specific genres of pornography. Hald and Malamuth’s study looked at perceptions of the effects of hardcore pornography, defined as containing “vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral sex, masturbation, bondage, sadomasochism, rape, urine sex, animal sex, etc.” They found that participants perceived little to no negative effects on themselves, but they did not measure perceived effects on others. Chia et al. (2004) measured perceptions of a “sex tape” featuring a Taiwanese politician, and found a third-person effect. Although celebrity sex tapes might arguably be considered a sub-genre of pornography, this study included only one film, and no genre comparisons were made. No previous studies have looked at how the TPE varies by sub-genres of pornography.

A sub-genre of pornography that warrants investigation is instructional pornography. Instructional pornography includes explicit adult films designed to arouse and instruct couples or individuals in sexual matters. These films can be purchased from popular magazines or adult DVD websites and include titles such as The Expert Guide to Positions and The Ultimate Guide to Sexual Pleasure. One website offering a selection of instructional films describes them as a “collection of explicit educational films [including] a wide range of informational and instructional content to inspire and enhance one’s sex life” (Glickman, 2010). Instructional pornography titles often include words like “guide,” and “how to.” Films with instructional titles are sometimes advertised as being for couples, tend to have little nudity on their covers, and are presented as more palatable forms of pornography for those not interested in hardcore genres. Instructional pornography is somewhat unique in that it has potentially positive (i.e. helpful for couples, informative, educational) as well as potentially negative (i.e. explicit, X-rated) connotations. Given the possibility for both, it is unclear if people will perceive a first- or third-person effect.

This study sought to understand perceptions of the effects of instructional pornography on the self and others. To explore this, it was first hypothesized that there would be significant mean differences between three film genres: mainstream films, non-instructional pornography, and instructional pornography. Specifically, it was hypothesized that non-instructional pornographic films would be perceived as having the most negative effects and mainstream films would be perceived as having the least negative effects. In keeping with past TPE literature, the second hypothesis was that people would rate others as more negatively affected by non-instructional pornography than they would rate themselves. The
first research question of this study examined perceptions of instructional pornography by investigating whether people rated close and distant others as more negatively or positively affected by instructional pornography than they rated themselves.

To understand the role of offendedness in perceptions of pornography, the second research question examined the extent to which people find pornography in general to be offensive, and how this differs from their perception of other people’s offendedness. For the third and final research question, predictors of the first- and/or third-person effect for instructional pornography were explored. Predictors included socio-demographic variables, pornography use, interpersonal communication about pornography, and perceived offendedness. Pornography use was included because, as mentioned earlier, greater pornography use has been associated with smaller third-person effects. Another predictor was interpersonal communication about pornography. This variable was included because it was thought that greater communication about pornography could be indicative of more positive attitudes toward pornography or greater pornography consumption and subsequently weaker third-person effects. The third non-socio-demographic variable included as a predictor of first- and third-person effects was perceived offendedness. This was included because perceived offendedness tends to follow a similar pattern to the third-person effect, in that we see ourselves as differently offended from others. In other words, the more one sees others as offended by pornography, the more they may also see others as negatively affected by pornography. Combined, these variables will provide a better understanding of the factors that contribute to first- and third-person effects with regard to instructional pornography.

Method
Participants
A convenience sample of 235 people was recruited from an online survey program called Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT), but six were eliminated based on taking the survey too quickly (three or more standard deviations from the mean time). Only participants who were 18 or older and residing in the United States (as confirmed internally by AMT) were able to view the survey, which was open for recruitment for five days. The survey was advertised as being part of a study about movie ratings. If people agreed to participate they were given a link to an online survey questionnaire approved by the university’s institutional review board. They were informed that they would be answering some questions about their attitudes about movies and how these movies might affect people. They were also informed that they would be viewing DVD covers for adult films, but that no explicit nudity would be shown. No participants dropped out of the study after receiving this information. The survey took approximately 8–10 minutes to complete and participants were paid a $1.00 stipend for completing the survey.

The sample was 57% male and 43% female. The mean age was 31 years old (SD = 9.93) with a median of 28. Most people were in long-term relationships (53%, n = 120), followed by single (32%, n = 74), and dating (15%, n = 35). The most common education level was a high school diploma or equivalent (56%, n = 127), followed by a Bachelor’s degree (44%, n = 102). This is somewhat over-representative of people with Bachelor’s degrees or higher than in the US population, which is normally about 28% (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). In responding to an open-ended question, the majority of participants identified as straight (90%, n = 205), with 8% (n = 18) identifying as gay and 2% (n = 6) identifying as bisexual. Although the films were predominantly targeted at straight couples, participants identifying as gay or bisexual were not outliers on their ratings of the effects of either type of adult film, and were therefore included in the analysis.
Procedure

Participants were told that a new movie rating system for adults was being developed, and that their opinions on how certain movies may affect people were wanted. This false premise was used because supporting censorship of negative media is one of the most common outcomes associated with the third-person effect (Golan & Day, 2008), and movie ratings are essentially a form of censorship. Moreover, giving participants an outcome to contemplate is more likely to result in stronger, more evaluative attitudes (Bradburn & Sudman, 2004), than asking about attitudes with no potential outcomes. Participants were asked to view eight DVD covers and read a short paragraph describing the DVD contents. The descriptions were taken from the actual DVDs, but were shortened and edited to emphasize the instructional or non-instructional aspects of the adult films. Participants were then asked to rate the potentially negative or positive impact of each DVD on themselves and others. It was explained that movie ratings are based on how suitable movies are for certain audiences and that participants should not think about whether the person would enjoy the movie, but whether or not it could negatively or positively affect them. Effects were defined as “how the movie would affect or impact a person’s behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes.”

In order to understand if personal discussions about pornography play a role in the presence of the TPE, participants were also asked how often they talk with other people about pornography. Finally, participants were asked about their own pornography consumption and sexual attitudes as possible predictors of the TPE, and were encouraged to leave comments and feedback to help explain their answers.

Materials

Participants viewed DVD covers and descriptions for three instructional pornography films, three non-instructional pornography films, and two mainstream non-pornographic films, in random order. The mainstream non-adult films were used for a baseline comparison to the pornographic films, and only two were included to keep the survey brief. The Matrix and Slumdog Millionaire were selected because they were not rated as having any sexual content or nudity, which would allow for a non-sexual comparison to both types of adult films. A small third- or first-person effect was still expected with these films since the films were rated as having some violence and profane language (although no blood or extreme violence), but were also described in terms of positive messages about romantic love and resistance to oppression. The instructional adult films were chosen from the sex-education section of an adult film website, and all of the adult films were pilot tested with 15 participants who rated the extent to which each film could be considered instructional pornography or non-instructional pornography. The instructional DVDs included Matt and Khym: Better Than Ever, described as a “non-fiction documentary . . . with a real couple taking the time to rediscover the joys of married life and married sex”; Turn Ons!: How to Please Your Partner, described as featuring “real couples, real orgasms and plenty of encouragement to enhance intimacy . . . with information about oral sex, toy play, and anal stimulation”; and Tristin Taormino’s Expert Guide to Female Orgasms, with the description: “filmed in a much softer style than other adult films,” “highly accessible to those who might be a bit porn-shy.” All three of these DVDs featured straight couples on the cover, with no genital or breast exposure.

Like the instructional adult films, the three non-instructional adult films did not feature explicit nudity on the cover, but unlike the instructional films, they had neither educational claims nor mention of the benefits to couples. These included Babysitters, with
the description “hot group scenes . . . perfect proof why sometimes we like our porn more naughty than nice”; Superman XXX: A Porn Parody, described as “super threesomes, super-anals” and “evil and hot villains must be thwarted, so the excitement never cools down”; and Audrey: Sexual Freak 8, described as having “two fantastically dirty scenes,” “pure deliciousness in a sexually charged three-way,” and that it “explores the cast’s deviant intimacies and deepest fantasies.”

Measures

Perceived effects on self and others

To measure the perceived negative or positive effects of the movies, participants rated the potential effects on themselves and others of viewing each movie. Participants were asked to rate the effect of the movie on five loci of impact: themselves, adult men, adult women, their partner (if applicable), and their closest friend. Participants were asked about adult men and adult women in general in order to measure their perceptions of distant others, (both groups being “strangers” and one group being a gender other than the participant’s). They were asked about their closest friend and partner to measure their perceptions of close others. Only those identifying as currently having a partner were included in analyses of that variable. Participants rated effects on a seven-point Likert scale with one being “a very negative effect” and seven being “a very positive effect.” Participants were then asked how offended they were by pornography and how offended they perceived the other four groups to be on a four-point scale from “un-offended” to “very offended.”

Pornography use, sexual attitudes, and communication

Since personal pornography consumption may be an important control variable in how people perceive its effects, people were asked how often they view pornography on a seven-point scale from “never” to “very frequently.” Another potential moderator of the TPE is sexual attitudes, which was measured based on the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006). The communion sub-scale was selected both to keep the survey brief and because it is the only sub-scale in which there were no gender differences in the original study. The scale measures sexual attitudes associated with passion and excitement. This includes five statements such as: “Sex is a very important part of life,” “Sex is usually an intensive, almost overwhelming experience,” and “Sex is the closest form of communication between two people,” rated on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The communion sub-scale was reliable in Hendrick and colleagues’ study (Cronbach’s alpha = .79), and was found to be reliable in this sample (Cronbach’s alpha = .86). Communication about pornography was measured by asking how often the participant is involved in a conversation about pornography, on a four-point scale from “never” to “frequently.” Participants were also asked if they remembered ever having a conversation about the negative effects of pornography.

Demographics

Participants were asked their age, education level, political views, relationship status, gender, and sexual orientation, since previous studies have found that these factors contribute to support for censorship of pornography (Gunther, 1995; Lo & Paddon, 2000; Rojas et al., 1996).
Analyses

Both of the hypotheses were addressed through within-subjects ANOVA with Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc comparisons. Where sphericity was violated Greenhouse–Geisser corrected $F$ statistics were used. The research questions were analyzed with multiple linear regression. The alpha levels for all tests were set at .05 a priori.

Results

Descriptive results

Sexual attitudes for participants were mostly positive on the Brief Sexuality Scale. On the five-point scale the mean for women was 3.92 ($SD = .99$), and for men it was 4.14 ($SD = .66$). Most men and women had never talked about the negative aspects of pornography with their friends ($72\%, n = 165$). On average, men viewed pornography occasionally ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.24$) and women viewed pornography rarely ($M = 3.11, SD = 1.38$) on the seven-point scale from “never” to “very frequently.”

Effects of film type and social distance

The first hypothesis proposed that there would be significant mean differences between reports of the effects of mainstream films, instructional pornography, and non-instructional pornography. A three (mainstream vs. non-instructional pornography vs. instructional pornography) by five (self vs. adult men vs. adult women vs. closest friend vs. partner) within-subjects ANOVA with gender as a between-subjects variable revealed a significant main effect for film type: $F(2, 288) = 217.05, p < .001$, and a significant main effect by locus of impact: $F(4, 576) = 5.30, p < .001$. However, this analysis also revealed a significant interaction between type of film and locus of impact: Greenhouse–Geisser corrected $F(8, 1152) = 43.56, p < .001$, suggesting that the third- and first-person effect varies across the three movie types (see Figure 2 for means for all film types)

![Figure 2. Mean ratings of effects on self and others by film type. Note: error bars represent the standard error.](image-url)
by loci of impact). There were no significant interactions between film type, locus of impact, and gender.

**Social distance and mainstream movies**

Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc tests of simple main effects revealed that for mainstream movies, which were rated as having a slightly positive effect for all loci of impact, there were significant differences between self-ratings ($M = 5.39, SD = .94$) and ratings of distant others (adult men: $M = 5.22, SD = .83, p = .006$; adult women: $M = 5.21, SD = .87, p = .002$), with no significant difference between ratings of adult men and ratings of adult women. For close others there was a significant difference between self-ratings and ratings of one's partner ($M = 5.17, SD = .99, p = .002$), but not between self-ratings and ratings of one's closest friend ($M = 5.24, SD = .96$).

**Social distance and non-instructional pornography**

The second hypothesis was that people would rate themselves as less negatively influenced by non-instructional pornography than they would rate others. Post-hoc pairwise Bonferroni-corrected comparisons revealed that participants rated adult men ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.31$) as more negatively affected by non-instructional pornography than themselves ($M = 3.77, SD = .70, p < .001$), but there was no significant difference between self-ratings and ratings of adult women ($M = 3.54, SD = .62$). The difference between ratings of adult men and adult women were significant ($p = .013$). For close others, there were no significant differences between participants’ ratings of themselves and their closest friend ($M = 3.93, SD = .67$), or between participants’ ratings of themselves and their partner ($M = 3.80, SD = .67$), or between participants’ ratings of their partner and friend. The null hypothesis was only partially rejected in that participants rated male distant others as significantly more negatively affected than themselves, but rated female distant others and close others as neither more negatively nor more positively affected than themselves.

**Social distance and instructional pornography**

The mean ratings of effects on all loci of impact were positive and above the mid-point on the scale for instructional pornography. To address the first research question, Bonferroni-corrected pairwise post-hoc tests revealed that participants reported themselves ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.13$) as significantly less positively affected by instructional pornography than adult men ($M = 5.32, SD = .89, p = .001$) and adult women ($M = 5.29, SD = .90, p = .001$), with no significant difference between adult men and adult women. Participants rated themselves as more positively affected by instructional pornography than their closest friend ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.06, p < .001$). They rated themselves as more positively affected than their partners ($M = 4.92, SD = 1.20$), but the difference was not significant (see Table 1 for all $p$-values for differences between loci of impact by movie type).

**Perceptions of offensiveness of pornography**

Men and women reported low mean scores for how offended they are by pornography (see Table 2). To address the second research question about how we perceive ourselves and others to be offended by pornography, a within-subjects ANOVA with gender as a
between-subjects variable showed that perceptions of offendedness varied significantly by locus of impact: Greenhouse–Geisser corrected $F(3.36, 507.14) = 91.14, p < .001$. However, this analysis also revealed a significant interaction between locus of impact and gender: Greenhouse–Geisser corrected $F(3.36, 507.14) = 21.04, p < .001$. Bonferroni-corrected pairwise comparisons revealed that men were significantly less offended by

Table 1. $p$-values for differences between loci of impact by movie type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Adult men</th>
<th>Adult women</th>
<th>Closest friend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mainstream movies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effect on self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on adult men</td>
<td>.006**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on adult women</td>
<td>.002**</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on closest friend</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on partner</td>
<td>.036*</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-instructional pornography</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on adult men</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on adult women</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on closest friend</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on partner</td>
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<td>.000***</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td><strong>Instructional pornography</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effect on self</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effect on adult men</td>
<td>.001**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Effect on adult women</td>
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<td>.845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on closest friend</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on partner</td>
<td>.721</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $^* p < .05; ^*_p < .01; ^*_*_p < .001.$

Table 2. Mean scores for how offended one is and how offended others are by pornography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of adult men</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of adult women</td>
<td>131</td>
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<td>.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of closest friend</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of partner</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of adult men</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of adult women</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of closest friend</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of partner</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values are mean scores on a 4-point scale (1 = unoffended, 4 = very offended).
pornography than they perceived adult women to be ($p < .001$), and less offended than they perceived their partner to be ($p < .001$). Men perceived women in general as significantly more offended than their partner ($p = .001$). There was no significant difference between their reports of how offended they are by pornography and how offended they perceive adult men or their closest friend to be. Women reported themselves as significantly more offended than adult men ($p = .008$) and significantly less offended than adult women ($p < .001$). There was no significant difference between their reports of offendedness and their perception of their partner’s or closest friend’s offendedness.

**Predictors of perceptions of instructional pornography**

The third research question explored predictors of the first- or third-person effect for instructional pornography. Multiple linear regressions examined predictors of perceived effects of instructional pornography on the self, distant others, and partner. No regression was run on predictors of perceptions of effects on friends, because there was no information about the gender of the friend. For all regressions in this study there were no serious violations for absence of multicollinearity, homogeneity of error variances, normality of residuals, and linearity. Although sexual attitudes were measured, they were excluded from the regression due to being highly skewed. Gender and relationship status were dummy coded, with zero for men and one for women, and zero for single and one for partnered.

The first regression was conducted to evaluate self-reports of the potential effect of instructional pornography. Predictors included age, gender, relationship status, education, political views, frequency of pornography use, frequency of interpersonal communication about pornography, and self-report of how offended one is by pornography. Results showed that viewing pornography more frequently and being less offended by pornography predicted more positive reports of perceived effects of instructional pornography on the self ($F(8, 101) = 4.60, p < .001$), although only 22% of variance was explained by this model. There was no significant model for predictors of perceived effects of instructional pornography on distant others. Predictors of perceived effects of instructional pornography on one’s partner were also analyzed. Predictors included age, gender, relationship status, education, political views, frequency of pornography use, frequency of interpersonal communication about pornography, and perception of how offended one’s partner is by pornography. A small but significant model showed that perceiving one’s partner as less offended by pornography predicted more positive effects on said partner ($F(8, 73) = 4.47, p < .001$). Twenty-eight percent of variance was explained by this variable (see Tables 3 and 4 for regression details).

**Discussion**

**Perceptions of non-instructional pornography**

As hypothesized, there were significant mean differences for participants’ ratings of effects of all three types of movies. Mainstream films and instructional pornography both had neutral or positive rating for effects, but non-instructional pornography had neutral or negative effects ratings. Also, as expected, non-instructional pornography was rated as having a negative to slightly negative effect on distant others, particularly men, but having a neutral effect on the self. Participants rated the negative effect as being stronger for men than for women. These findings are in line with most TPE research (Gunther, 1995),...
and research showing that people perceive men to be more negatively affected by pornography than women are (Poulsen, Busby, & Galovan, 2013). However, participants were expected to rate close others as being more negatively affected than they are themselves, but less so than distant others, which was not the case. Instead, participants rated their closest friends and their partners as being as affected by non-instructional pornography as they themselves are. This may indicate more lenient attitudes about pornography, and indeed recent research has suggested this may be the case (Carroll et al., 2008). These results could also be explained by respondents being more aware of their friend’s and partner’s actual exposure to pornography, or lack of it, and therefore perceiving fewer negative effects.

**Perceptions of instructional pornography**

In contrast to non-instructional pornography, instructional pornography was rated as having a mostly positive effect, suggesting the genre is perceived as somewhat socially desirable. The findings for instructional pornography contradict and confirm past research. In most TPE research, participants perceive distant others as being more negatively affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of extent Partner offended by pornography</th>
<th>$ B $</th>
<th>$ SE $</th>
<th>$ \beta $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of extent Partner offended by pornography</td>
<td>$ -.49 $</td>
<td>$ .15 $</td>
<td>$ -.42^{**} $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornography use</td>
<td>$ .26 $</td>
<td>$ .11 $</td>
<td>$ .27 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal comm. about pornography</td>
<td>$ .06 $</td>
<td>$ .16 $</td>
<td>$ .04 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>$ .01 $</td>
<td>$ .02 $</td>
<td>$ .04 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female gender</td>
<td>$ .29 $</td>
<td>$ .33 $</td>
<td>$ .12 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status (single = 0, partnered = 1)</td>
<td>$ .30 $</td>
<td>$ .35 $</td>
<td>$ .09 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>$ -.15 $</td>
<td>$ .11 $</td>
<td>$ -.15 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political views</td>
<td>$ .02 $</td>
<td>$ .14 $</td>
<td>$ .01 $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $ R^2 = .36 $, Adjusted $ R^2 = .28 $. 
$p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$. 

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Table 3. Summary of multiple regression analysis for self-reports of effects of instructional pornography on the self.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$ B $</th>
<th>$ SE $</th>
<th>$ \beta $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extent self offended by pornography</td>
<td>$ -.35 $</td>
<td>$ .16 $</td>
<td>$ -.24^{**} $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pornography use</td>
<td>$ .35 $</td>
<td>$ .11 $</td>
<td>$ .38^{**} $</td>
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<td>Interpersonal communication about pornography</td>
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<td>$ -.08 $</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>$ .09 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female gender</td>
<td>$ .50 $</td>
<td>$ .26 $</td>
<td>$ .20 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status (single = 0, partnered = 1)</td>
<td>$ .24 $</td>
<td>$ .23 $</td>
<td>$ .10 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>$ -.07 $</td>
<td>$ .09 $</td>
<td>$ -.07 $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political views</td>
<td>$ -.06 $</td>
<td>$ .12 $</td>
<td>$ -.50 $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $ R^2 = .28 $, Adjusted $ R^2 = .22 $. 
$p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$. 

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Table 4. Summary of multiple regression analysis for perceived effects of instructional pornography on partner.
by pornography than they themselves are, but this study showed that participants perceived distant others as being more positively affected by instructional pornography than they themselves are. Despite this contradiction, the findings support the underlying ego-enhancement mechanism of TPE, but suggest that the valence of these perceptual gaps differ as a function of genre and social distance. For example, if participants had reported the instructional pornography as more positively affecting themselves than others they would have been suggesting that they have more to learn than others do, which would run counter to the ego-enhancement motivation underlying the TPE. So while it is surprising that participants reported others as more positively affected than themselves, this may actually be consistent with the underlying mechanisms that cause TPE.

Although past research has not typically found people to perceive others as more positively influenced by media than themselves, this could also simply be due to the types of media that have been studied. Most TPE research has been on “negative” media, such as violent video games and pornography, and little attention has been paid to sub-genres of media which may have a positive or self-help slant, such as instructional pornography.

In keeping with past first-person effect research, participants rated themselves as slightly more positively affected by instructional pornography than their closest friend. This is what would be expected for socially desirable media and suggests that people may see themselves as more open to pornography or benefitting from it more than their friends are. As perceptions of this sub-genre were positive, this suggests the possibility that men and women could be more supportive of instructional pornography as an educational or erotic aid. One participant commented, “Pornography can be a great tool in spicing up your sex life, especially as you age and need more visual help in getting ‘ready’” (female, age 60).

Unlike the findings for non-instructional pornography, there was no significant difference between perceptions of effects of instructional pornography on men and women. This suggests that people do not think men or women differ in how positively they would be affected by this type of pornography. This contradicts past research which has found that people perceive pornography to more negatively affect men than women (see Lo & Wei, 2002; Poulsen et al., 2013), and suggests that gender is not a major factor in perceptions of instructional adult films.

One of the most surprising findings was that participants essentially rated themselves in between distant and close others on the effects scale. In the majority of research on the third- and first-person effect participants rate distant others as more affected than close others; and they rate close others as more affected than themselves. The fact that a first-and third-person effect was present suggests that some genres and messages may result in more complex self—other perceptions than past research has revealed. If this is the case it may be that some aspects of the genre are made salient when considering distant others, while other aspects are made salient when considering close others. However, because this finding has not been found elsewhere in the literature, there is a possibility that it could be due to sampling error, particularly since the number of responses about close others was smaller than those about distant others. More research into combined first- and third-person effects with regard to instructional pornography is needed to determine whether these findings are consistent, and to try to understand their cause.

**Pornography and offendedness**

Men perceived adult women and their (mostly female) partners to be much more offended by pornography in general than they are themselves, and rated themselves between
slightly offended and unoffended. One probable explanation for this is that pornography is largely targeted at men (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999), and there has been a decades-long public debate about whether or not pornography degrades women. Women also perceived other women to be more offended by pornography than they are themselves, demonstrating a gap between perceived and actual offendedness. Men and women greatly overestimated how offended adult women are by pornography (as demonstrated by women’s self-reports in this study). This finding indicates that perceptions of women’s disdain for pornography are overestimated, even by women themselves. Increasing awareness that people, especially women, are less offended by pornography than is perceived may help individuals and couples communicate more openly about their attitudes about pornography, and could perhaps decrease shame for women who are interested in viewing pornography. More research into how offended people are, or perceive others to be, by different genres of pornography would provide a better understanding of the relationship between offendedness and pornography use.

Predictors of perceptions of instructional pornography

The variables measured in this study were not able to explain a lot of the variance for perceived effects of instructional pornography, but some predictors did emerge. For self-reports of the effects of instructional pornography, being a consumer of pornography and being less offended by it were the only significant predictors. This could be related to past TPE findings that show users of a certain type of media are less in favor of restricting that media (Hoffner et al., 1999). It may also point to the notion that people who actually use pornography have a personal awareness of the lack of negative effects they have experienced from viewing pornography. Personal offendedness as a predictor of the effects of instructional pornography on oneself and on one’s partner may be explained by a more lenient attitude about pornography in general, which may allow for more acceptance of its positive effects. A person who feels that their partner is offended by pornography in general would be likely to think that the partner would not be positively affected even by the instructional genre of pornography. Although offendedness explained only a small amount of the variance, it hints at a potential barrier to the use of instructional pornography as an educational tool. Because offendedness was a predictor of perceptions of pornography’s effects on one’s self and on one’s partner, researchers and therapists interested in promoting instructional pornography as an educational tool may need to untangle which aspects of pornography are perceived as offensive and investigate more ways to overcome this barrier. One participant offered her thoughts on the matter: “I’m not offended by minor porn, but hard core is weird and uninteresting to me” (female, age 53). This finding also highlights the importance of studying different sub-genres of pornography, and how attitudes may vary by genre.

Limitations

There are some limitations to consider when interpreting the results of this study. As with any research with a convenience sample, the external validity is somewhat limited. Participants in this study had higher education levels than the US population as a whole, and there is some evidence that people with higher education tend to perceive a stronger third-person effect (Paul et al., 2000). However, more than half of the participants had less than a Bachelor’s degree, so education may have been a minimal factor in the results. Another limitation is that, in keeping the survey short, participants were not asked about
other variables that may play a role in their attitudes about pornography, such as erotophilia and religiosity. Nonetheless, their responses provide valuable insights into how the first- and third-person effects work within this sub-genre of media. Finally, the study did not differentiate the types of effects participants were considering when answering questions about the movies. For example, it is unclear what exactly the perceived positive effects were for instructional pornography (e.g. arousal, improved sexual technique, positive attitudes towards sex?) and non-adult mainstream films (e.g. entertainment, motivation to overcome obstacles?). TPE research could be greatly augmented by future studies disambiguating the perceived effects of different media genres.

Conclusion
This study contributes to our understanding of perceptions of instructional pornography, a unique genre in which material is simultaneously controversial and potentially beneficial. The majority of TPE research has found that people rate themselves as more positively affected by socially desirable media and less negatively affected by socially undesirable media, but these findings suggest that these outcomes can be found simultaneously, at least for instructional pornography, with participants perceiving distant others to be more positively affected, but perceiving themselves to be more positively affected than close others. This research also shows that not all pornography is perceived as negative and that people can and do distinguish between different genres and expect different outcomes for themselves and others. The findings from this study also point to positive attitudes towards instructional adult material, which may help lead the way in promoting the use of educational and erotic aids for couples and individuals.

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Notes on contributor
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References


