

PORN LITERACY

Porn literacy involves using skills to analyze and evaluate the material you view. If you are a consumer of porn, here are some questions to help you think about:

- What role does it play in your life and relationships?
- What messages about yourself or about potential (or current) sexual partners do you receive from porn? And how do these messages align with your values and real life actions?
- What feelings come up for you before, during, and after you watch porn? Is it a positive, entertaining experience, or does it cause you some level of distress or guilt?

“[I]f the next generation of Americans is raised with an acute awareness of what healthy sexual expression can look like, they can use porn to aid in the development of healthy sexual identities without encountering problems current young adults are facing. Gone will be the days of porn being a contributor to young people’s inaccurate perceptions of healthy body types and sexual relationships, as well as sexual disorders and sexual violence.”

— Sophie Dorosin, Washington University at St. Louis

How you answer these questions is unique to who you are. It might also be informed by the type and amount of porn you include in your life.

PORN IS FICTION

While porn may be entertaining, it is important to remember all porn are works of fiction; they are not documentaries. Many hours of footage are edited to make a single film. Mainstream porn usually omits context, affection, communication, safer sex, and consequences. For example, you rarely see actors on a leisurely date or talking about sexual histories or the risk of disease. Actors often are selected for their “atypical” bodies (e.g. large penises, “perfect” breasts) and their performances rarely give insight into how real people feel and communicate during a sexual experience. Safer sex is rarely portrayed and is almost never discussed.

[Porn] twisted my view on women, made me view them as sex objects, and I wouldn’t respect women the way they should be respected. I was always thinking about sexual acts every time I met a new girl or my friends. People think porn is just sex on film, some with fetishes, but refuse to acknowledge the fact that it corrupts the way the viewers think, which may or may not influence their behavior.

— Anti-pornography.com

IS ETHICAL, FEMINIST PORN MORE SEX POSITIVE?

Some people prefer to seek out “ethical” or “feminist porn.” This type of porn includes diverse body types, real orgasms, and reduce degrading images of people who identify as women.

Ethical, feminist porn acknowledges that people who identify as women are part of the viewing audience and makes an effort to address their sexual interests and appetites. Fans of feminist porn consider this genre to be a sex-positive form of expression. Porn opponents would argue there is no acceptable form of porn.

“Recognizing the role of fantasy in sexual arousal and coming out of shame about sexual desires opens the door to a more frank and honest discussion about women’s bodies, consent, and safer sex. In my opinion, feminist porn represents a diverse cross-section of people and is woman-friendly, queer-friendly, open to many interpretations of beauty, and is, at best, political and woman-owned.”

— Feministe blog

GET HELP IF NEEDED

Some people experience sexual difficulty as a result of their porn consumption. Often this looks like inability to achieve or maintain an erection with sexual partners. This can happen when people become dependent upon porn to become sexually aroused.

Performance concerns and negative body image may also result from porn consumption. This can happen when people compare themselves to unrealistic performances and bodies often portrayed in porn.

Some people see porn as a potential addiction. This can happen when people spend more and more time on their computers viewing porn and turn to increasingly more extreme pornographic material, resulting in negative consequences.

If you are confused by your porn use, it might be helpful to talk to a friend. If your use is having a negative impact on your personal and/or academic life (for example, you are skipping classes or saying “no” to social invitations in order to watch porn in your room), please consider:

- Making a [Healthy Sexuality Coaching appointment](#) with a professional sex coach. Appointments are available through the eTang Portal: uhs.berkeley.edu/etangportal
- Calling [UHS Student Mental Health](#) at (510) 642-9494 for an appointment to talk to a counselor.

Learn more at uhs.berkeley.edu/sexualhealth