



How Human Values Relate to Attitudes Toward Pornography: A Portuguese Survey

Rita Castro & Samuel Lins

To cite this article: Rita Castro & Samuel Lins (2021): How Human Values Relate to Attitudes Toward Pornography: A Portuguese Survey, International Journal of Sexual Health, DOI: [10.1080/19317611.2021.1888839](https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2021.1888839)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2021.1888839>



Published online: 25 Feb 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



How Human Values Relate to Attitudes Toward Pornography: A Portuguese Survey

Rita Castro and Samuel Lins

Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Pornography consumption is increasing. Nevertheless, in Portugal, research is scarce, namely its relationship with psychosocial variables. We investigated the relation between human values and attitudes toward pornography consumption. Values were measured through the Basic Values Survey and attitudes toward pornography consumption were assessed with the Scale of Attitudes Toward Consumption of pornographic materials. The results showed that positive attitudes were associated with personal values (pleasure, sexuality, emotion, power, and prestige). Instead, the negative attitudes were associated with social values (religiosity and support). The consideration of values can help clinicians and sexual educators to better discuss and integrate pornography consumption.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 August 2020
Revised 5 February 2021
Accepted 7 February 2021

KEYWORDS

Pornography; values; attitudes; Portugal

Introduction

Pornography can be defined as any material that presents sexual images and/or behaviors that promote sexual arousal or fantasy (Rasmussen, 2016). In Portugal, pornography is largely consumed (Público, 2019). Nevertheless, a research made in September 2020 on EBSCO, Scopus, SciELO, and Web of Science databases, with the descriptors “pornography” and “Portugal”, showed only nine papers focused on pornography, revealing that studies about this topic are scarce in the country.

In addition, pornography’s study has been mostly focused on its possible prejudicial effects (Baumel et al., 2019) and less is known about the relation with psychosocial aspects (Baumel et al., 2020). We aimed to deepen the understanding in this sense exploring the psychosocial dimension. This led us to our objective: examine the relation between Basic Human Values and the attitudes toward pornography consumption.

Values are a framework that guide action and express needs (Gouveia, 2019). So, they can impact the perception and interaction with pornography. For this study, we adopted the Functional Theory of Human Values, that

integrate theories from Inglehart and Schwartz with a solid theoretical and empirical background (Gouveia, 2019).

The Functional Theory of Human Values presents human values as having two main functions: orientation and motivation. The type of orientation, the goal of needs, can be personal (focused on the individual itself, intrapersonal goals), central (focused on life’s purpose) or social (focused on the community, interpersonal goals).

The type of motivator, the cognitive representation of needs, can be humanitarian (idealistic, life as opportunities) or materialistic (pragmatic, life as challenges). The intersection of these two functions results in 18 values under six subfunctions (Figure 1) (Gouveia et al., 2014; Vilar et al., 2020).

Personal goals

Excitement values (emotion, pleasure, and sexuality) with a humanitarian motivator refer to physiological needs for emotion, gratification, and sex being related to innovation and changing norms. Promotion values (power, prestige, and

		Type of orientation – circle of goals		
		Personal goals	Central goals	Social goals
Type of motivator – level of needs	Humanitarian needs	Excitement <i>Emotion Pleasure Sexuality</i>	Suprapersonal <i>Beauty Knowledge Maturity</i>	Interactive <i>Affectivity Belonging Support</i>
	Materialistic needs	Promotion <i>Power Prestige Success</i>	Existence <i>Health Stability Survival</i>	Normative <i>Obedience Religiosity Tradition</i>

Figure 1. Structure of Basic Human Values.

success) with a materialistic motivation translate a focus on material achievement, success, and recognition from others (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014).

Central goals

Suprapersonal values (beauty, knowledge, and maturity) based on humanitarian motivation reflect the need for cognition and knowledge prioritizing abstract ideas. Existence values (health, stability, and survival) have a materialistic motivator representing the basic physiological need for health and safety (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014).

Social goals

Interactive values (affectivity, belonging, and support) with a humanitarian motivator present the need for love, affiliation, and social association. Normative values (obedience, religiosity, and tradition) with a material motivation gather the need to keep social values, norms, and traditions tending to praise conventionality (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014).

It is important to acknowledge values, as they are the basis of our attitudes (Gouveia, 2019). In fact, the six subfunctions of values from the Functional Theory of Human Values have been used to explore the prediction of attitudes (Vilar, 2020). So, values can impact attitudes toward pornography consumption, working as a cognitive background to understand and perceive the world, as attitudes are composed of three dimensions: emotion, cognition, and action that influence the perception, organization, and evaluation of objects (Krüger, 2013). Moreover, attitudes have been pointed out to play a role on

pornography consumption (Guerra et al., 2004). However, less is documented about the role played by values regarding attitudes toward pornography consumption.

There are studies focusing values and its relation toward attitudes and sexual behavior, but, to our knowledge, not focusing on attitudes toward pornography consumption. Some studies found normative values (e.g. religiosity, tradition) associated with a conservative approach of sexuality, while promotion and excitement linked with a more open approach of sexuality (Beckwith & Morrow, 2005; Guerra et al., 2012; Guerra & Gouveia, 2011).

An older study found that a higher tolerance regarding pornography was related to defense of liberty values, while defense of authority and religiosity values were associated with a prohibitive view of pornography (Meliema & Bassili, 1995). Regarding the relation between values and engagement on pornography consumption, Rechter and Sverdlik (2016), through Schwartz's theory, found that self-transcendence and conservation values negatively predicted pornography consumption, while hedonism and self-enhancement (moderated by religiosity) values positively predicted pornography consumption.

When we look at the impact of values prioritization into health and well-being, we can see that values have an impact. Using the Functional Theory of Human Values, a study found that personal values (experimentation and realization subfunctions) and social values (normative and interactive subfunctions) have a slightly positive impact in subjective well-being (Albuquerque et al., 2006). Another study corroborates the findings adding that realization values predicted well-being in men and interactive values in women (Gomes, 2016). In this last study, Gomes (2016)

also found that relationship's satisfaction was predicted, in both men and women, by suprapersonal values. Here in Portugal, has been found (Lins et al., 2011) that the most prioritized were social and central values.

In this line, the consideration of the relation between prioritized values and the attitudes toward pornography consumption, as prospective predictors of future behavior (Wright & Tokunaga, 2018), may be an important contributing factor to understand how to avoid some of the negative effects of pornography consumption for (socio)sexual health, more than only informative approaches (as seen before in an HIV prevention program, Costa et al., 2017). Namely, the adoption of sexual scripts, like no condom use (frequently seen at pornographic videos), that put at risk sexual health, or a higher attentiveness or sensitivity to eventual effects of pornography consumption on health (Wright & Tokunaga, 2018). Also, this understanding can help clinicians, sexual educators, to better manage difficulties, like psychological discomfort or self-punishment/criticism, related to internalized values and beliefs seen as incompatible with pornography consumption (Štulhofer et al., 2020).

In Portugal, a recent study found good sexual functioning in overall, but also a significant percentage of people having sexual health concerns in reaching orgasm and sexual desire/arousal (Santos-Iglesias et al., 2017). Pornography has been created to promote sexual arousal (Rasmussen, 2016) and it has been found to be a good source (Baumel et al., 2020). So, if we manage to understand which values are related to positive attitudes toward pornography consumption, we can help people integrate pornography consumption as a positive and complementary source of new sexual stimulus and repertory to overpass some of the sexual health challenges. Or help them solving the conflict between prioritized values and pornography consumption (Štulhofer et al., 2020).

Method

Participants

A sample of 665 Portuguese adults (406 females, 253 males, and 6 of other gender) with a mean

age of 25.72 years old ($SD = 8.85$) participated in the study. Most of the participants reported heterosexual orientation ($n = 540$), followed by bisexual ($n = 71$), homosexual ($n = 42$), and other ($n = 12$).

Instruments

Basic Values Survey (BVS)

The questionnaire measures how each value is considered a guide principle in life. The BVS (Marques et al., 2016) is composed of 18 items, each one reflecting one value, that lead to six subfunctions with three items each: excitement (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.62$), promotion (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$), suprapersonal (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.60$), existence (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.60$), interactive (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.53$), and normative (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.60$). The internal consistency reported through Cronbach's alpha is satisfactory and agrees with literature regarding to BVS studies (Vilar, 2020).

Some considerations regarding the internal consistency need to be clarified. First, the somewhat low Cronbach's alpha is expected as each subfunction has values that are correlated to each other but that are quite different, which leads to higher heterogeneity that lowers internal consistency. However, this heterogeneity can be beneficial as we can have different items that are moderately correlated to each other and each item accesses a distinct aspect of a broad concept (Graham et al., 2011). Second, the Cronbach's alpha is related to the number of items of the measure which means that with the same mean inter-item correlations as the number of items grow the Cronbach's alpha tends to grow as well (Gouveia et al., 2009).

So, we also reported the mean inter-item correlations found: excitement ($r = 0.36$), promotion ($r = 0.37$), suprapersonal ($r = 0.33$), existence ($r = 0.34$), interactive ($r = 0.28$), and normative ($r = 0.34$) that reflect a good homogeneity. Third, the variability of values within a culture tends to be low what tends to lower Cronbach's α (Gouveia et al., 2009). Based on these considerations, the internal consistency found can be considered as appropriate.

Table 1. Multiple Linear Regression (Stepwise) of Basic Human Values and Attitudes Toward the Use of Pornographic Materials.

Basic values subfunctions	Attitudes			Positive effects			Negative effects		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Excitement	0.25	6.18	<0.001	0.25	5.65	<0.001	-0.26	5.96	<0.001
Promotion	0.10	2.53	0.012	0.15	3.69	<0.001	-0.09	2.19	0.029
Suprapersonal	-0.04	0.89	0.375	-0.09	2.14	0.033	0.04	0.85	0.399
Existence	-0.01	0.16	0.872	0.01	0.26	0.794	0.04	0.77	0.441
Interactive	-0.08	1.82	0.069	0.02	0.54	0.607	0.17	4.18	<0.001
Normative	-0.16	4.16	<0.001	-0.15	3.75	<0.001	0.03	0.85	0.397
Multiple correlation coefficient	0.31			0.31			0.28		
% Explained variability	9.50			9.30			7.50		
Significance of the sample	$F_{3,661}=24.12^*$			$F_{4,660}=18.06^*$			$F_{3,661}=18.94^*$		

Note: $*p < 0.001$.

Scale of Attitudes Toward Consumption of Pornographic Materials

The scale (Guerra et al., 2004) consists of 27 items. It assesses the attitudes toward pornography consumption across three subscales: the attitudes toward pornography (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), the agreement with positive (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and negative (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) effects of pornography consumption.

Procedures

The sample was collected through convenience, sharing the survey through social media and mailing for universities as well as for sexual health organizations. The participants answered the survey online. Through an informed consent form, the participants agreed to participate voluntarily in the study being confidentiality and anonymity granted. The data collection happened between September 2018 and February 2019.

The data analysis was performed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Through a Multiple Linear Regression, we examined the relation between the six subfunctions (excitement, suprapersonal, interactive, promotion, existence, and normative) and the attitudes toward pornography consumption (attitudes, positive, and negative effects).

Results

The analysis revealed that the attitudes toward pornography consumption were predicted by excitement, promotion, and normative values. The positive effects of pornography consumption were predicted by excitement, promotion, suprapersonal, and normative values. The negative

effects of pornography consumption were predicted by excitement, promotion, and interactive values (Table 1).

Discussion

These results shed light on how the human values impact the attitudes toward pornography consumption. The more emphasis on excitement (emotion, pleasure, and sexuality) and promotion (power, prestige, and success) values (oriented to personal needs) and the less emphasis on normative (obedience, religiosity, and tradition) values (oriented to social needs), the more positive attitudes toward pornography consumption. The more emphasis on excitement and promotion values and the less emphasis on normative and suprapersonal (beauty, knowledge, and maturity) values, the more agreement with positive effects of pornography consumption. Lastly, the more emphasis on interactive (affectivity, belonging, and support) values and the less emphasis on excitement and promotion values, the more agreement with negative effects of pornography consumption.

These results are in line with previous research that pointed normative values (e.g. religiosity and conservation) related with a conservative view toward sexuality and pornography; and pointed excitement values (e.g. hedonism and self-enhancement) related with a wider view of sexuality and pornography (Beckwith & Morrow, 2005; Guerra et al., 2012; Guerra & Gouveia, 2011; Meliema & Bassili, 1995; Rechter & Sverdlik, 2016). Nevertheless, this study focused directly on the attitudes toward pornography consumption, revealing the impact of normative, excitement, and promotion values, but also the

impact of new value's subfunctions—interactive and suprapersonal.

The values of excitement represent the need of emotion, sex, pleasure, and satisfaction (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014), that can be achieved through pornography. It may be a way to satisfy sexual needs and desires. The values of promotion are related to immediacy and practicability on achievement (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014), that are two core aspects on pornography: the ease of use on Internet.

The values of normative represent the need to respect traditions and maintain social norms and traditions (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014) that pornography is modifying as it is modifying the way we live our sexuality. The values of interactive present the need for being part of and having meaningful relationships (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014) and pornography is opening the way we relate on sex. The values of suprapersonal represent the need for esthetics, knowledge, and maturity (Gouveia, 2013; Gouveia et al., 2014) and pornography is not seen as an appropriate source to get accurate sexual information (actually, it is not the purpose of pornography).

The subfunctions that predicted positive attitudes toward pornography consumption belong to the personal orientation (excitement and promotion) that focuses on the individual itself and its achievements and benefits (Gouveia, 2013). Pornography can be a good and practical way to fulfill personal needs like sex and pleasure. In contrast, the subfunctions that predicted negative attitudes toward pornography consumption belong to social orientation (interactive and normative) that focus on the community and its maintenance; and to central orientation (suprapersonal) that balances both personal and social goals (Gouveia, 2013). Pornography can be challenging traditional norms and religious beliefs being a difficult way to fulfill the need of belonging and affection and seen as not a credible source of sexual information.

Conclusion

We find evidence that values impact attitudes toward pornography consumption. Furthermore, we identify whose values relate to positive/

negative attitudes toward pornography consumption and agreement/disagreement with positive and negative effects of pornography consumption. We have shown that the psychosocial aspects, related to the social context, values, influence the attitudes toward pornography consumption, that can impact our sexual lives and experiences. Namely, if considering the impact of internalized values conflicting with attitudes or behaviors (Štulhofer et al., 2020) that can impact sexual, psychological, and global health.

Although innovation is offered in this research area, we also point out some limitations. The convenience sample was highly educated and younger, what leads to caution about representativity of the results found. In this regard, the participants decided themselves, voluntarily, to participate on the survey, so we need to account for some predisposition to participate. Moreover, the survey was based on self-report, so we need to be aware of social desirability bias on a sensitive topic. Also, the theoretical perspective of the Functional Theory of Human Values is focused mostly on individual values and cultural values can also influence individual's attitudes toward pornography consumption. This, along with the fact that the explained variance that we found is quite low, claims continuous research.

For future research, we should explore other variables that can help further explain attitudes toward pornography consumption, possibly through a focus group. For example, (erroneous) sexual beliefs, myths or misconceptions about pornography consumption, previous sexual education, or sexual socialization. In this regard, forward research can consider cultural values, namely through Hofstede's 6-dimensions model of national culture. Also, would be great to expand the research to other countries with different cultural norms and backgrounds. Last, due to the lack of studies in Portugal and the specificities of this sample, the consumption of pornography should be deeply studied. For example, motivators to consumption, types of pornography consumed and context of consumption.

Even considering the limitations, the study's novelty and the results are quite interesting and can help improve the discussion over pornography consumption and its possible effects. It can

be useful under clinical sets and, largely, to the sexual education field, from parents to educators.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the article.

References

- Albuquerque, F., Noriega, J., Coelho, J., Neves, M., & Martins, C. (2006). Valores humanos básicos como preditores do bem-estar subjetivo. *Pscio*, 37(2), 131–137.
- Baumel, C., Silva, P., Guerra, V., Garcia, A., & Rosário, A. (2020). Consumo de pornografia e relacionamento amoroso: Uma revisão sistemática do período 2006–2015. *Gerais: Revista Interinstitucional de Psicologia*, 13(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.36298/gerais2020130103>.
- Baumel, C., Silva, P., Guerra, V., Garcia, A., & Trindade, Z. (2019). Atitudes de jovens frente à pornografia e suas consequências. *Psico-USF*, 24(1), 131–144. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-82712019240111>.
- Beckwith, H., & Morrow, J. A. (2005). Sexual attitudes of college students: The impact of religiosity and spirituality. *College Student Journal*, 39(2), 357–366.
- Costa, E., McIntyre, T., Trovisqueira, A., & Hobfoll, S. E. (2017). Comparison of two psycho-educational interventions aimed at preventing HIV and promoting sexual health among Portuguese Women. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 29(3), 258–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2017.1307300>.
- Gomes, A. (2016). *Satisfação conjugal e bem-estar subjetivo: Contribuições dos valores, traços de personalidade e atributos pessoais* [tese de doutoramento]. Universidade Federal de Paraíba, João Pessoa, Brasil. <https://repositorio.ufpb.br/jspui/handle/123456789/11611>.
- Gouveia, V. V. (2013). *Teoria funcionalista dos valores humanos: Fundamentos, aplicações e perspectivas*. Casa do Psicólogo.
- Gouveia, V. V. (2019). Human values: Contributions from a functional perspective. In S. Koller (Eds.), *Psychology in Brazil* (pp. 67–81). Springer.
- Gouveia, V. V., Milfont, T. L., & Guerra, V. M. (2014). Functional theory of human values: Testing its content and structure hypotheses. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 60(Suppl. C), 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.12.012>.
- Gouveia, V. V., Santos, W. S., & Milfont, T. L. (2009). O uso da estatística na avaliação psicológica: Comentários e considerações práticas. In C. S. Hutz (Ed.), *Avanços e polémicas em avaliação psicológica: Em homenagem a Jurema Alcides Cunha* (pp. 127–155). Casa do Psicólogo.
- Graham, J., Nosek, B. A., Haidt, J., Iyer, R., Koleva, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2), 366–385. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021847>.
- Guerra, V. M., Andrade, F. C. B., & Dias, M. R. (2004). Atitudes de estudantes universitários frente ao consumo de materiais pornográficos. *Estudos de Psicologia*, 9(2), 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-294X2004000200008>.
- Guerra, V. M., & Gouveia, V. V. (2011). Sexo antes ou depois? A influência dos valores humanos e da experiência sexual no liberalismo/conservadorismo sexual. In S. C. S. Fernandes, C. E. Pimentel, V. V. Gouveia, & J. L. Álvaro (Eds.), *Psicologia Social: Perspetivas atuais e evidências empíricas* (pp. 225–251). Casa do Psicólogo.
- Guerra, V. M., Gouveia, V. V., Sousa, D. M., Lima, T. J., & Freires, L. A. (2012). Sexual liberalism-conservatism: The effect of human values, gender, and previous sexual experience. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41(4), 1027–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-012-9936-4>.
- Krüger, H. (2013). Ideologias, sistemas de crenças e atitudes. In L. Camino, A. R. R. Torres, M. E. O. Lima, & M. E. Pereira (Eds.), *Psicologia Social: Temas e Teorias* (2nd ed., pp. 261–308). Technopolitik.
- Lins, S., Cavalcanti, C., & Faria, R. (2011). Valores humanos e comportamento ecológico de universitário brasileiros e portugueses. *Revista EDUCAmazônia – Educação Sociedade e Meio Ambiente*, 1(6), 42–74.
- Marques, C., Silva, A. D., Taveira, M. C., & Gouveia, V. (2016). Functional theory of values: Results of a confirmatory factor analysis with Portuguese youths. *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 50(3), 392–401. <https://doi.org/10.30849/rip/ijp.v50i3.111>.
- Meliema, A., & Bassili, J. N. (1995). On the relationship between attitudes and values: Exploring the moderating effects of self-monitoring and self-monitoring schematicity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21(9), 885–892. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167295219002>.
- Público. (2019, 11 de dezembro). *The 2019 year in review*. Disponível em <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>
- Rasmussen, K. (2016). A historical and empirical review of pornography and romantic relationships: Implications for family researchers. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 8(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12141>.
- Rechter, E., & Sverdlik, N. (2016). Adolescents' and teachers' outlook on leisure activities: Personal values as a unifying framework. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 99, 358–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.04.095>.
- Santos-Iglesias, P., Castro, A., Barbosa, M., & Nobre, P. J. (2017). Sexual functioning in Spanish and Portuguese young adults: Initial validation of the Arizona Sexual Experience Scale. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 29(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2016.1259706>.
- Štulhofer, A., Rousseau, A., & Shekarchi, R. (2020). A two-wave assessment of the structure and stability of self-reported problematic pornography use among male

- Croatian adolescents. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 32(2), 151–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2020.1765940>.
- Vilar, R. (2020). Basic values survey (BVS) – a20-Nation Validation Study. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/79PHY>
- Vilar, R., Liu, J. H., & Gouveia, V. V. (2020). Age and gender differences in human values: A 20-nation study. *Psychology and Aging*, 35(3), 345–356. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000448>.
- Wright, P. J., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2018). Linking pornography consumption to support for adolescents' access to birth control: Cumulative results from multiple cross-sectional and longitudinal national surveys. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 30(1), 111–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2018.1451422>.