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## Your Brain on Porn and Other Sexual Images

Is porn bad for the brain? The Savvy Psychologist explains 3 studies that looked at how we process porn and other sexualized images, and reveals the potential effects on the brain—and on how we see our fellow men and women

By Ellen Hendriksen | August 19, 2015 | 0

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A recent neurology study found that the more porn a man watched, the less gray matter he had in his brain. The study made headlines the world over, prompting an anonymous listener to ask whether such sexual stimulation is indeed bad for the brain. So just what is the effect of sexual imagery on our brains--and does it affect how we see our fellow men and women? Here are the details on 3 studies that examined the brain on porn and other sexualized images.>

### Study #1: Your Brain On Porn

In May 2014, a study in the prestigious journal *JAMA Psychiatry* was all over the news. It found that the more porn men reported watching, the less volume and activity they had in the regions of the brain—specifically the striatum—linked to reward processing and [motivation](#). They also found that connectivity between the striatum and the prefrontal cortex (which is the part of the brain used for decision making, planning, and behavior regulation) weakened the more porn the men reported watching.

The researchers hypothesized that these differences might reflect change resulting from intense stimulation of the reward system. However, before you [close your laptop](#) and think of England, there are three important things to note:

First, these were all healthy men. The participants were screened for psychiatric disorders, neurological problems, medical illness, and substance abuse before their brains were scanned. So despite the brain differences, it didn't seem to affect their health or daily functioning.

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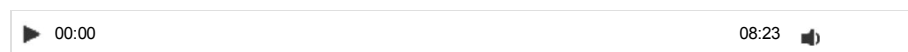
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Second, brain changes aren't limited to porn. [Anything you do frequently](#), from smoking pot to playing a musical instrument to driving a delivery truck, can change your brain. The bigger concern is whether it affects your functioning or causes distress.

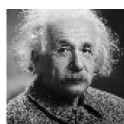
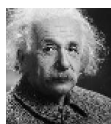
Third, this was only a snapshot—the participants weren't followed over time—so we don't know the answer to the chicken-or-egg question of whether porn shrinks your brain or whether your brain structures and connectivity predispose you to get more out of porn.



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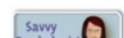
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