

THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patricia Bromley". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background that appears to be a piece of paper or a scan of a document.

Approved: _____ Date: 01-20-2012

THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Masters of Science

in

Education

Adult Education

by

Sara Juarez Koch

2011

Abstract

THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Sara Juarez Koch

Under the Supervision of Patricia Bromley, Ph.D

The issue in this research paper was to determine if and how exposure to pornography has any effect on younger and older adolescents. Because adolescence is one of the pivotal developmental times for young people it is pertinent to learn the facts behind this issue. Additionally, the issue was to learn if pornography affects all adolescents in the same way or if there are differences between male and female adolescents in their usage and reactions to this exposure. A brief review of literature on the process and importance of adolescent development was conducted. A second review of literature relative to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of adolescent exposure to pornography was conducted as well. Through the review of literature, it is apparent that adolescents are affected by exposure to pornography but that the effects vary by age, sex, frequency of exposure and inherent personality of the adolescent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
APPROVAL PAGE.....	i
TITLE PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction	
Statement of the Problem	
Definitions of Terms	
Delimitations	
Method of Approach	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Defining Pornography	
Stages of Adolescent Development	
Adolescents, Pornography and Technology	
Males vs. Females: Differences in Usage and Effect	
Positive or Harmful Effects	
III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	13
IV. REFERENCES.....	14

Chapter One: Introduction

Pornography has become very prevalent in our culture and it is readily available to everyone, especially on the Internet. It is potentially worrisome that younger and older adolescents can be exposed so easily to very explicit pornography. This exposure may be accidental in the form of adolescents just “surfing” the internet or it may be quite intentional. In either case, the question is “does it do harm to the psychological development of the adolescent?”

Statement of the Problem

What does exposure to pornography at a young age do to the psychological development of children? Adolescence is a vital time for emotional and social development in children. It is at this time that the sexual identity of an individual is developed. One would assume that exposure to explicit pornography before children are able to process it cannot be helpful at such a critical developmental stage. Additionally, do adolescents exposed to pornography become hyper-sexualized and desensitized? How do adolescents who have been exposed to pornography view relationships with the opposite sex after viewing such material? Does the viewing of pornography lead to a higher incidence of rape or other sexual offenses? These are issues that will be addressed by the following literature review.

Definition of Terms

Pornography: For the purpose of this paper will be broadly defined as any sexually explicit material created principally for the purpose of inciting sexual arousal or providing erotic pleasure (Diamond, 1999).

Obscenity: According to the United States Supreme Court, for something to be "obscene" it must be shown that the average person, applying contemporary community standards and

viewing the material as a whole, would find (1) that the work appeals predominantly to "prurient" (sick, morbid, shameful, or lascivious) interest; (2) that it depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way; and (3) that it lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value (Federal Communications Commission, n.d.).

Adolescence: This definition varies slightly depending upon the source but for purposes of this paper the definition of adolescence will be as follows: A period in time when children ages 12 through 18 years old are expected to undergo dramatic physical, mental and emotional changes which will be noted by predictable physical and mental milestones ("Adolescent Development Overview," 2009).

Delimitations of Research

The research was conducted through the University of Wisconsin-Rock County (Janesville, WI) and Karrmann libraries (University of Wisconsin-Platteville) over a period of ninety (90) days. Primary searches were conducted via Internet through EBSCO Host, Wilson Web and Academic Search Elite. Key search topics included "pornography and adolescents," "adolescent development," "effects of pornography on adolescents," and "psychosexual behavior."

Method of Approach

A review of literature related to the stages of adolescent development was conducted. A second review of literature was conducted relating to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of the effects of pornography on adolescent psychological development. The findings were summarized and recommendations made.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Defining Pornography

The word pornography gets its literal meaning from the Greek words *porne*, meaning “whore,” and *graphein*, meaning “to write” (Malamuth, 1999). Thus, in the past, the term pornography literally meant “writing of the whores,” while today the term takes on many different forms. Pornography, in modern terms, can be defined as any form of material that is created to sexually arouse or provide sexual pleasure (Diamond, 1999).

Even though there is a technical, working definition for the word pornography, it can still be difficult to define in the modern age due to the wide variety of technology that is employed by the producers of pornography as well as the wide spectrum of moral views held by society. For example, there is now a debate as to whether or not the viewing of “virtual sex,” sex with a virtual person, or sex between two virtual people, would be considered pornography since it does not include real humans only computer generated people who often look very real.

Before the arrival of the internet, it was more difficult for anyone, adolescents in particular, to access pornographic material as it had to be bought in a store (magazines and books) or rented in a video store, both of which would require an adolescent to interact with an adult and would likely result in them being denied access to the material. In any case, it seems that the computer age has brought with it much greater access to pornographic material as indicated by the following statistics: on a daily basis, up to 25% (or 68 million) of all internet search engine requests are for pornography (Markey & Markey, 2010) and according to the internet traffic measuring service comScore, 70% of 18 to 24 year old men visit adult sites each month (Kendall, 2007).

While internet access to pornography seems to be the most prevalent there are still other ways to access pornography. According to research done in 2005 by Kagan research, satellite and cable operators earn just under \$800 million a year from adult movie subscriptions and pay-per-view orders, which is roughly 40% of pay-TV on-demand revenue ("Pornography statistics," 2009).

Pornography can be categorized into two main groups, soft-core and hard-core or XXX (Diamond, 1999). Soft-core pornography is described as the illusion of sexual activity or the simulation of sexual acts without the explicit display of the participants' genitalia. Many magazines of a sexual nature, such as Playboy, Playgirl and Hustler would be considered soft-core pornography. Hard-core pornography on the other hand is described as showing sexual acts that are extremely graphic or explicit; the images usually show aroused genitalia and penetration. There are many cable channels, magazines, movies and websites that are dedicated to a variety of hard-core pornography. While pornography can take many forms, most adults would agree that pornography encompasses striptease, live sex acts, hardcore videos, sexual aids and devices, explicit telephone and computer messages, adult magazines, raunchy fiction and more (Slade, 2000).

Although much of the pornography that is produced is considered legal for adults over the age of 18, there are some forms of pornography that are illegal. Pornography that displays children under the age of 18, or child pornography as it is more commonly known, is the most prevalent form of illegal pornography. One of the main problems with the legality of pornography is that what may be judged obscene in one state or region may be considered more acceptable in another. According to Finkelhor and Ormrod (2004), there are a multitude of factors that may affect the prosecution rates on illegal pornography between states. Some of the

factors recognized by Finkelhor and Ormrod (2004) were the difference in state statutes, community standards, availability of pornography, and initiatives undertaken by police and prosecutors.

However, pornography to an adolescent might be a very different matter. For an adolescent, catching a glimpse of someone's underwear, looking at a lingerie catalog, seeing bare breasts in National Geographic or catching someone in a passionate embrace might all be categorized as pornography.

In any case, pornography is a reality and it is readily available to those who seek it. Many staunch defenders of pornography believe that it is a matter of free speech and First Amendment rights that make it an important medium, saying that limiting the availability of pornography would be outright censorship. Opponents of pornography, including feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, believe that pornography is material that is without merit and just plain obscene, adding to the so-called moral decline of our society. Feminist groups such as "Women Against Rape" (WAR) and "Women Against Pornography" (WAP) are strong lobbyists against the production and availability of pornography (Diamond, 1999).

While pornography is believed by many to be a perfectly acceptable means of enjoyment or sexual expression for adults, most could probably also agree that pornography is neither healthy nor necessary for adolescents, or is it?

Stages of Adolescent Development

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2011), normal adolescence can be divided up into three stages: early, which includes children between the ages of 10 and 14,

middle, which includes children between the ages of 15 and 16 and late, which includes children between the ages of 17 and 21. The adolescent stages of development are a time of great growth and change for children. This is the period of time when children determine their personality, their personal morals and values, and their general outlook on life. A child's sexual identity is also being established at this time and it is normal for the adolescent to want to experiment sexually. Normal sexual experimentation may include sexual activity with others of the opposite sex, the same sex and even through masturbation. It is natural for adolescents to be curious about sex and therefore quite natural for children to seek out pornographic material at some point during their adolescence.

It is at this point in a child's development that the vast majority of schools in the United States now offer some form of sex education in schools. While the content may vary to include a mix of learning about abstinence, birth control, and HIV prevention, it seems clear to parents that the need for sex education exists. In fact, a poll of 1000 United States parents conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, as referenced in Dailard (2001), indicates that 81% of parents polled wanted sex education taught in the schools. Adolescence is an opportune time for parents as well as educators to begin teaching their children about healthy sexual practices.

Unfortunately for adolescents, this time period is also one where actions and consequences are not easily recognized. Children's brains are still developing during the adolescence phase, with the prefrontal cortex not reaching maturity until the approximate age of 25. The prefrontal cortex is primarily responsible for the "executive" processes in the brain, meaning that this part of the brain "controls cognitive analysis and abstract thought, and the moderation of "correct" behavior in social situations" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science, 2008).

An underdeveloped frontal cortex can mean that children have issues with controlling their intense emotions, seeing cause and effect relationships, knowing how to act appropriately in social situations, and other cognitive functions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science, 2008). Hence, there may be negative effects of exposure to pornography that adolescents cannot see at the moment.

Adolescence is a critical time in development. Several biological and psychosocial developmental tasks are completed during adolescence, namely sexual maturation of the body, the development of one's sexual identity, and learning how to deal with physical and emotional intimacy in relationships with others (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). Additionally, the adolescent will typically determine their gender role in society as well as their identity as either heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual in the adolescence phase.

It is also at this time that adolescents usually begin experimenting with sexual encounters between members of the same sex and the opposite sex. Self-exploration in the form of masturbation is also quite normal at this time, with males typically beginning at 13-15 years of age and females beginning at a later age (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002).

Adolescents, Pornography and Technology

One consideration when studying the effects of exposure to pornography on adolescents is the ease with which children can now gain access to this material. Just as far back as twenty years, children may have been able to sneak peeks at pornographic material if a friend was able to obtain a copy of a “girly magazine” or a parent or older sibling possessed some type of pornographic reading material, but it was not available at the click of a button.

In 2010 however, pornography can be easily accessed by anyone with a computer, a television or a cell phone. The website Bio-Medicine recently reported on a survey that included

429 students aged 13-14 from across Alberta, Canada. This survey, conducted by Sonya Thompson, a former sex education teacher, indicated that “a majority of the students, 74% reported viewing pornography on the Internet. Forty-one percent saw it on video or DVD and 57% reported seeing it on a specialty TV channel” (Thompson, 2007, p.1). And according to a recent report in the journal *Pediatrics*, 42 percent of adolescents, ages 10 to 17 have viewed internet porn (Castleman, 2009).

Males vs. Females: Differences in Pornography Consumption and Effect

Children from 12-19 years of age have been the focus of most studies of adolescent exposure to sexually explicit material. It appears from the literature review that it is widely known that more male adolescents than female adolescents view pornography, at both a greater rate and at an earlier age. Older male adolescents, who were computer savvy and who spent five or more hours a day on the Internet, were most likely to actively seek out pornographic websites (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). And in a recent survey by Thompson (2007) of 429 Canadian adolescents aged 13-14, a vast majority of both male and female students reported having viewed explicit pornography at least once, with 33% of the males reporting very high usage compared to eight percent of females surveyed. In a study by Wallmyr and Welin (as cited in Bryant, 2009) both solitary and group use of pornography was more commonly reported by young men (for purposes of masturbation) than by young females (for purposes of sexual socialization).

Positive or Harmful Effects

According to one study (Haggstrom-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tyden, 2006) with a sample of 18-year-old high school students in Sweden, it was determined that males consumed pornography at a higher rate than girls and were more likely to experiment with different sexual practices such as anal intercourse or group sex. Such practices could potentially be deadly for

young men at this age when the relationship between action and consequence is not easily seen. Unfortunately it is all too easy for adolescents to contract sexually transmitted diseases before they realize how it happened.

Such research in the United States has also yielded troubling conclusions. One researcher (Zillman, as cited in Haagstrom-Nordin, et al., 2006) states that adolescents who view an exorbitant amount of pornography tend to have more contemptuous attitudes about love and sexual pleasure, with little or no warmth towards partners.

Conversely, there are a number of studies that have reached other findings regarding adolescent exposure to pornography. In a recent article titled, *Teens and Porn*, Lussenhop (2009) relays the findings of Malamuth, a professor of Communication and Psychology at the University of California-Los Angeles. According to Malamuth, there are a number of aspects that can result in a sexually maladjusted person. Negative factors such as a personality disorder, misogynistic feelings, or violence in the home, can all predispose an adolescent to sexual maladjustment. So, the argument can be made that not all adolescents are affected in the same way by exposure to pornography. A great deal of how an adolescent reacts to exposure can be traced back to family life and personality traits. It seems that if an adolescent is predisposed to committing violent acts, including violent sexual acts, then exposure to pornography can increase the likelihood of those acts actually coming to fruition, but it is not likely to be the root cause of the violence (Lussenhop, 2009). The tendency towards sexual violence committed by adolescents may also be related to the frequency of exposure to sexually oriented or violent media.

Researchers from as far back as the early 1980's have been studying the possible correlation between sexually violent media and acts of sexual violence against women. In a

1982 study conducted by Neil Malamuth and his research partner Edward Donnerstein, it is further suggested that there is a link between the exposure to sexually violent pornography and a predisposition to sexual aggression. Malamuth and Donnerstein voice the concern about a possible conditioning effect that links violence and sex on those that frequently view violent pornography. Malamuth and Donnerstein theorize that there could be a greater tendency for learned sexual aggression and lowered inhibition of rape for men that are predisposed to sexual violence towards women, but are clear to point out that this is not likely to happen in general (Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982).

Dr. Douglas Kirby, a senior research scientist at ETR Associates (a leading publisher of patient education, health promotion and health education pamphlets) who has studied adolescent sexual risk behavior for more than thirty years, believes that there is no correlation between pornography consumption and a greater rate of sexual activity and risk taking. Kirby, as cited in Lussenhop (2009) states that, “ It is not the case that all the changes that have taken place in society, including much greater access to pornography, have led to an increase in sexual behavior," he says. "Between the '90s and the early 2000s, the percent of young people who've ever had sex did not increase" (Lussenhop, 2009).

There seems to be a correlation between the increased use of pornography on the internet and a decrease in the incidence of rape. According to Anthony D'Amato, Professor of Law at Northwestern School of Law, there has been a significant decrease in the incidence of rape from 1980 to 2004. In 1980 there were 2.7 rapes for every 1000 people. In 2004 that number had dropped to 0.4 rapes for every 1000 people (D'Amato, 2006). In fact in 1970, D'Amato served as a consultant to President Nixon's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, which

ultimately concluded that there was no contributory relationship between exposure to sexually explicit materials and delinquent or criminal behavior.

Summary

There is still much debate as to whether or not pornography negatively affects adolescents. Research is difficult to conduct in this area due to the fact that there are ethical boundaries to consider when working with adolescents. However, researchers have conducted numerous studies and surveys of adolescents and have to come to divergent conclusions. One group of researchers is inclined to believe that adolescents must be predisposed to sexual maladjustment in order for pornography to negatively affect them. Another group of researchers came to quite the opposite conclusion, believing that indeed, pornography may serve an important purpose in that it can teach adolescents about sexual relations.

Clearly there is no agreement as to whether or not adolescent exposure to pornography is really detrimental to adolescent development or not. It may simply be such an individual reaction by each youth that no generalization can be made.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

It seems that every day our society continues to advance technologically and it does not appear that there will be any slowing of that growth in the near future. This also means that there will continue to be an abundance of ways for adolescents to access pornographic material, whether via the Internet, cell phones or the television.

Children in the 21st century are frequently bombarded with sexual images and can easily access graphic sexual material. It is imperative that parents begin discussing healthy sexuality with children at an early age. To combat the views of sexuality and “relationships” that adolescents may be exposed to in pornography, parents and educators will have to take the time to explain what is real and not real in terms of relationships and healthy sexual expressions. This may mean that adolescents are going to “grow up” faster than they did twenty years ago, but then they are going to need to be armed with the truth about sexuality versus what they learn through pornography. Perhaps the ready access to pornography in our society will actually encourage more parents to open up the lines of communication with their children, regarding issues of sexuality, and it will create a healthier generation than the one before.

Parents will continue to play a pivotal role in the development of their adolescent’s self-esteem and sense of self. Parents can also begin teaching their children about responsibility at an early age by discussing with them the process of decision making and possible consequences. Teaching adolescents that they can make responsible and informed choices and that they can critically analyze a situation will go a long way in the protection of our children. Even though there is no clear evidence that exposure to pornography will damage the psychological growth of adolescents, it seems implicit that parents should try to limit exposure at an early age, as they would any other controversial, and possibly harmful material.

There is still much debate as to whether exposure to pornography actually affects each child, but it is likely that more extensive, invasive research in that area will not be done due to the ethical issues that surround intentional exposure to young adolescents. In the event that more research is done, it would be beneficial to see how parental support and openness of communication regarding sexuality might counterbalance any potential negative effects of exposure to pornography on early to middle adolescents.

References

- Adolescent development-overview. In (2003). J. Mannheim (Ed.), *University of Maryland medical reference encyclopedia* Retrieved from <http://www.umm.edu/ency/article/002003.htm>
- American Academy of Pediatrics (2011). *Stages of adolescence*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx>
- Bryant, C. (2009). Adolescence, pornography and harm. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 368,1836-2206.
- Castleman, M. (2009, April 27). Does pornography cause social harm? [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/all-about-sex/200904/does-pornography-cause-social-harm>
- Castleman, M. (2011, May 17). How does internet porn affect teens--really? [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/all-about-sex/201105/how-does-internet-porn-affect-teens-really>
- Dailard, C. (2001). Sex education: Politicians, parents, teachers and teens. *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 4(1), Retrieved from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/04/1/gr040109.html>
- D'Amato, A. (2006). *Porn up, rape down*. Informally published manuscript, School of Law, Northwestern, Chicago, Illinois. Retrieved from <http://anthonydamato.law.northwestern.edu/Adobefiles/porn>.
- DeLamater, J., & Friedrich, W. N. (2002). Promoting sexual health and responsible sexual behavior. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 39(1), 10-14. Retrieved from <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~delamate/pdfs/HumSexDevelJSR.pdf>
- Diamond, M. (1998). *The effects of pornography: An international perspective*. Retrieved from http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/online_artcls/pornography/prngrphy_ovrvw.html
- Federal Communications Commission (n.d.). *Obscenity, indecency and profanity*. Retrieved from <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/obscenity-indecency-and=profanity>
- Finkelhor, D, & Ormrod, R. (2004) Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *Child pornography: patterns from national incident based reporting system* (NCJ 204911). Washington, DC: Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/204911.pdf>

- Haggstrom-Nordin, E., Sandberg, J., Hanson, U., & Tyden, T. (2006). "It's everywhere!" Young Swedish people's thoughts and reflections about pornography. *Nordic College of Caring Science*, 20(4), 386-393.
- Kendall, T.D. (2007). *Pornography, rape and the internet*. Informally published manuscript, The John E. Walker Department of Economics, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina. Retrieved from <http://www.toddkendall.net/internetcrime.pdf>
- Lussenhop, J. (2009). *Teens and porn*. Retrieved July 31, 2009, from <http://www.metroactive.com/metro/05.27.09/cover-0921.html#>
- Malamuth, N. M., & Donnerstein, E. (1982). The effects of aggressive-pornographic mass media stimuli. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 15, 103-135. Retrieved from <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/comm/malamuth/pdf/82AESP15.pdf>
- Markey, P.M., & Markey, C.N. (2010). Changes in pornography-seeking behaviors following political elections. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 31, 442-446. Retrieved from <http://www65.homepage.villanova.edu/patrick.markey/pornseeking-EHB.pdf>
- Pornography statistics*. (2009, December 11). Retrieved from http://www.covenanteyes.com/search/?cx=008845928900825118275%3Ahd_dkbsptum&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=statistics&siteurl=www.covenanteyes.com%2Fpureminds-archive%2F&sa.x=19&sa.y=22#1200
- Slade, J. (2000). *The definition of pornography*. Retrieved August 8, 2009, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/porn/etc/definition.htm>
- Thompson, S. (2007). *Access to pornography among teenagers on the rise*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Alberta). Retrieved from http://www.medindia.net/news/view_news_main.asp?str=1&x=18689
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science. (2008). *Maturation of the prefrontal cortex* Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov/opa/familylife/tech_assistance/etraining/adolescent_brain/Development/prefrontal_cortex/index.html
- Ybarra, M. & Mitchell, K. (2005). Exposure to internet pornography among children and adolescents: A national survey. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 8(5), 473-486.