

Effects of Pornography on Adolescents

Pornography has significant effects during all stages of family life. A cross-sectional survey revealed that 87 percent of Australians aged 15 to 29 years had ever viewed pornography.¹⁾ According to a large survey of American college students, 51 percent of males and 32 percent of females admitted to viewing pornography for the first time before they were 13 years old.²⁾ For a child exposed to pornography within a family setting, pornography causes stress and increases the risk for developing negative attitudes about the nature and purpose of human sexuality.

For adolescents who view pornography, their attitudes toward their own and others' sexuality change, and their sexual expectations and behavior are shaped accordingly.

1. Effects on Adolescents

1.1 Sexual Development

[Pornography viewing](#) among teenagers disorients them during that developmental phase when they have to learn how to handle their sexuality and when they are most vulnerable to uncertainty about their sexual beliefs and moral values.³⁾ A study of 2,343 adolescents found that sexually explicit Internet material significantly increased their uncertainties about sexuality.⁴⁾ The study also showed that increased exposure to sexually explicit Internet material increased favorable attitudes toward [sexual exploration with others outside of marriage](#) and decreased marital commitment to the other spouse.⁵⁾ Another study by Todd G. Morrison, professor of psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, and colleagues found that adolescents exposed to high levels of pornography had lower levels of sexual self-esteem.⁶⁾ Based on a national longitudinal survey of 12 to 17 year olds, Dr. Rebecca Collins et al reported that adolescents who viewed more sexual content on television were more likely to initiate sexual intercourse and progress to more advanced noncoital sexual activities over the following year. Television that included only talk about sexual intercourse bore similar results to television that actually depicted sexual conduct.⁷⁾

High adolescent consumption of pornography also affects behavior. Male pornography use is linked to significantly increased sexual intercourse with non-romantic friends,⁸⁾ and is likely a correlate of the so-called "hook-up" culture. In a meta-analysis of longitudinal and cross-sectional studies covering twenty two studies, Paul Wright and colleagues reported that pornography consumption—both violent and non-violent—is associated with verbal and physical sexual aggression. The association held for both males and females, and for both adolescents and adults.⁹⁾

Exposure to pornographic sexual content can be a significant factor in teenage pregnancy. A three year longitudinal study of teenagers found that frequent exposure to televised sexual content was related to a substantially greater likelihood of teenage pregnancy within the succeeding three years. This same study also found that the likelihood of teenage pregnancy was two times greater when the quantity of that sexual content exposure, within the viewing episodes, was high rather than low.¹⁰⁾

1.2 Mental Health

A significant relationship also exists between frequent pornography use and feelings of loneliness, including major depression.¹¹⁾ Frequent pornography consumption alters the brain in ways similar to the neurological alterations of those addicted to cocaine, alcohol, and methamphetamines.¹²⁾ Viewing pornography can engender feelings of shame: In a study of high school students, the majority of those who had viewed pornography felt some degree of shame for viewing it. However, 36 percent of males and 26 percent of females said they were never ashamed of viewing pornography,¹³⁾ giving some idea of the [level of desensitization](#) already reached in society.

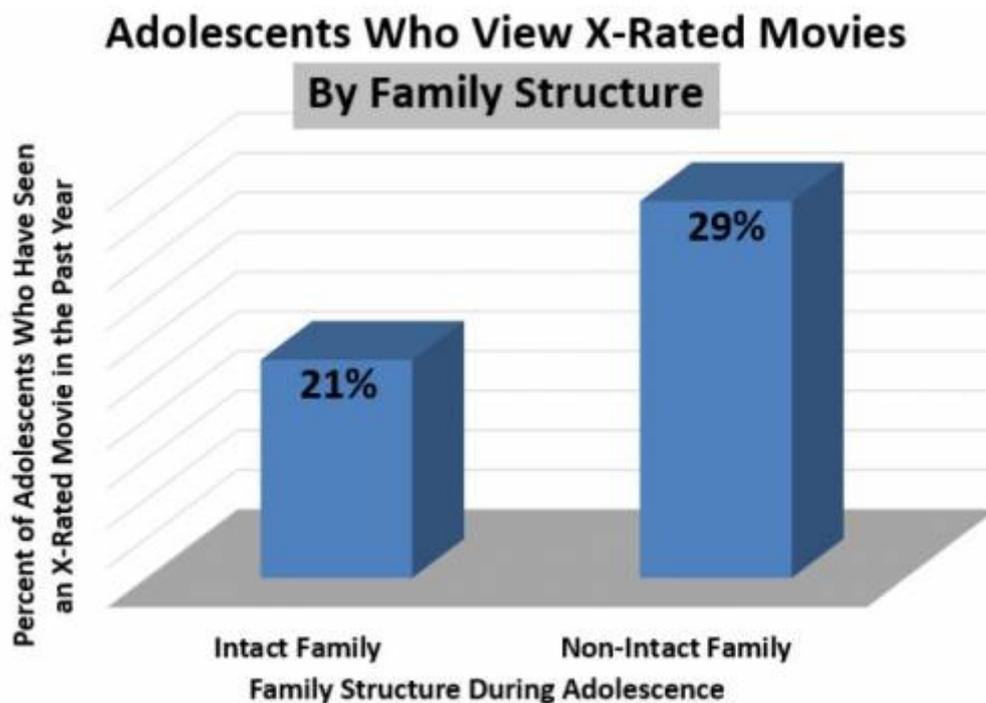
2. Parental Involvement

Although U.S. adolescents indicate their preferred source of sexual information is their parents, more than half of them report they have learned about intercourse, pregnancy, and birth control from [television](#), and half of teenage women report they first learned about intercourse from magazines.¹⁴⁾

A study of 1,300 eight- to thirteen-year-old girls found that, among those who engaged in “cybersex,” 95 percent of the parents were completely unaware of their children’s involvement.¹⁵⁾ Compared to adolescents who do not search for pornography online, adolescents who search for pornography online are about three times as likely to have parents who do not monitor their behavior at all (or very little). Compared to those who do not seek out pornography, those who seek Internet pornography are three times as likely to give a poor rating of their attachment to their parent.¹⁶⁾

2.1 Related American Demographics

According to the General Social Survey, adults who grew up living with both biological parents are less likely to have viewed an X-rated movie in the last year.¹⁷⁾ (See [Chart](#))



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-2006

3. Effects on Children

The impact of a parent's use of pornography on young children is varied and disturbing. Pornography eliminates the warmth of affectionate family life, which is the natural social nutrient for a growing child. Other losses and traumas related to the use of pornography when a child is young include:

- encountering pornographic material a parent has acquired;
- encountering a parent masturbating;
- overhearing a parent engaged in "phone sex";
- witnessing and experiencing stress in the home caused by online sexual activities;
- increased risk of the children becoming consumers of pornography themselves;
- witnessing and being involved in parental conflict;
- exposure to the commodification of human beings, especially women, as "sex objects";
- increased risk of parental job loss and financial strain;
- increased risk of [parental separation and divorce](#);
- decreased parental time and attention—both from the pornography-addicted parent and from the parent preoccupied with the addicted spouse.¹⁸⁾

Also, parents may disclose their struggle with the addiction to pornography to their children, intentionally or unintentionally, thereby distorting their children's sexual development.¹⁹⁾

¹⁾ Lim, Megan SC, Paul A. Agius, Elise R. Carrotte, Alyce M. Vella, and Margaret E. Hellard, "Young Australians' Use of Pornography and Associations with Sexual Risk Behaviours," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 4 (2017): 438-443.

²⁾ Leahy, Michael, *Porn University: What College Students are Really Saying About Sex on Campus*, Northfield Publishing, 2009, as cited by Perry, David L., MD, FCP, "The Impact of Pornography on Children," American College of Pediatricians (June 2016), available at <http://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>

³⁾ Jochen Peter and Patti M. Valkenburg, "Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material, Sexual Uncertainty, and Attitudes Toward Uncommitted Sexual Exploration: Is There a Link?" *Communication Research* 35, (2008): 579-601 (581).

⁴⁾ Peter and Valkenburg, "Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material," 596.

⁵⁾ Peter and Valkenburg, "Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material," 595.

⁶⁾ Todd G. Morrison, Shannon R. Ellis, Melanie A. Morrison, Anomi Bearden, and Rebecca L. Harriman, "Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material and Variations in Body Esteem, Genital Attitudes, and Sexual Esteem Among a Sample of Canadian Men," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14, (2006): 209-22 (216-7).

⁷⁾ Collins, Rebecca L., Marc N. Elliott, Sandra H. Berry, David E. Kanouse, Dale Kunkel, Sarah B. Hunter, and Angela Miu, "Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior," *Pediatrics* 114, no. 3 (2004): e280-e289.

⁸⁾ E. Häggström-Nordin, U. Hanson, and T. Tydén, "Associations between Pornography Consumption and Sexual Practices among Adolescents in Sweden," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 16, (2005): 102-7 (104-5).

⁹⁾ Wright, Paul J., Robert S. Tokunaga, and Ashley Kraus, "A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies," *Journal of Communication* 66, no. 1 (2016): 183-205.

¹⁰⁾ Anita Chandra, Steven C. Martino, Rebecca L. Collins, Marc N. Elliott, Sandra H. Berry, David E. Kanouse, and Angela Miu, "Does Watching Sex on Television Predict Teen Pregnancy? Findings from a Longitudinal Survey of Youth," *Pediatrics* 122, (2008): 1047-1054 (1052).

¹¹⁾ Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, "Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and

Adolescents: A National Survey," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 8, (2005): 473-86 (479).

Vincent Cyrus Yoder, Thomas B. Virden III, and Kiran Amin "Internet Pornography and Loneliness: An Association?" *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 12 (2005): 19-44 (30). This was a study of 400 individual Internet pornography users.

¹²⁾ Kühn, Simone, and Jürgen Gallinat, "Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn," *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 7 (2014): 827-834. As cited by Perry, David L., MD, FCP, "The Impact of Pornography on Children," American College of Pediatricians (June 2016), available at

<http://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>

¹³⁾ Thomas Johansson and Nils Hammarén, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Pornography: Young People's Attitudes Toward and Relations to Pornography," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 15, (2007): 57-70 (64).

¹⁴⁾ Nicole Daluga, *A Content Analysis of Sexual Risk and Protective Behaviors and Messages in Sexually Explicit Web Pages Viewed by a National Probability Sample of U.S. Adolescents* (Atlanta, Georgia: Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University, 2002), 255-279; Tina Hoff, Liberty Green, and Julia Davis, *National Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults: Sexual Health Knowledge, Attitudes and Experiences*, (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003), 37. Available at

<http://www.kff.org/youthhivstds/3218-index.cfm>. Accessed October 22, 2009.

¹⁵⁾ Joan D. Atwood, "Mommy's Little Angel, Daddy's Little Girl: Do You Know What Your Pre-Teens Are Doing?" *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 34, (2006): 447-67 (461).

¹⁶⁾ Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, "Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 8, (2005): 473-86 (478).

¹⁷⁾ This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted only in even-numbered years and uses two samples per GSS that total approximately 3,000. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.

Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "Intergenerational Links to Viewing X-Rated Movies: Family Structure," Mapping America Project. Available at

<http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-37-39-161.pdf>

¹⁸⁾ Jennifer P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 7, (2000): 31-58.

¹⁹⁾ M. Deborah Corley and Jennifer P. Schneider, "Sex Addiction Disclosure to Children: The Parents' Perspective," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 10, (2003): 291-324.

This entry draws heavily from [The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family and Community](#).

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