

# Effects of Pornography on Sexual Practices

Contemporary society is alarmingly sexualized, and the traditional sexual taboos of a well-functioning society have broken down. Nearly two-thirds of United States high-school students have had sexual intercourse by grade twelve.<sup>1)</sup> Of these sexually active high-schoolers, 70 percent of females and 55 percent of males report that they wish they had waited instead.<sup>2)</sup> These numbers have massive implications for the future of the American family, for of women who have had three sexual partners other than their eventual husband, only 39 percent will be in a stable marriage by their mid-thirties.<sup>3)</sup> In 2007, 20 percent of U.S. girls in grade 12 already have had sexual intercourse with four or more partners.<sup>4)</sup> The vast majority of their [children will grow up without their fathers present](#).

## 1. Sexual Formation

As the empirical data make clear, pornography further misshapes this already dysfunctional sexuality, and the consumption of pornography can become a destructive [addiction](#) as well. This sexual malformation not only affects the consumer of pornography, but also [weakens those close to him](#) or her. Habitual consumption of pornography can [break down the relational substrates](#) of human life and interaction—family, friends, and society.

As such, reinforcing these relationships is the surest guard against such destructive sexual tendencies.

The closer adult men were to their fathers growing up, the fewer non-marital sexual behaviors they engage in and the greater their levels of marital happiness and family satisfaction.<sup>5)</sup> The proportion of adolescents who rate their fathers as very close to them is highest among those from intact married families (40 percent) and lowest among those from single-parent families (three percent).<sup>6)</sup>

## 2. Sexual Satisfaction

Society benefits when it fosters a healthy sexuality. Human beings are healthiest and happiest when they are [monogamous](#) (only one sexual partner in a lifetime), and that happiness is directly related to monogamy's long-term stability and exclusivity.<sup>7)</sup>

Healthy relationships yield additional positive sexual outcomes. Some research indicates that married couples have the most frequent, and Conservative Protestant women have the most enjoyable, [sexual relations](#).<sup>8)</sup> The supreme and tragic irony is that, while the desire for the highest levels of sexual fulfillment are likely the motive for many [adolescents' first peek into pornography](#), the attainment of that universal longing is most likely to be had through [monogamy](#) and regular participation in [religious worship](#).

## 3. Cultural Views of Sex

These insights, until recently, were common social assumptions and institutionalized patterns. Until the dawn of the sexual revolution and, later, the digital age, they were reflected in a public

opprobrium of pornography. One 1994 study found that 71 percent favored a total ban on [sexually violent movies](#) and 77 percent a total ban on sexually violent magazines. Only eight percent thought that there should be no restrictions on the former, and only three percent thought there should be no restrictions on the latter. Concerning merely sexually explicit magazines, less than 10 percent thought there should be no restrictions on the material.<sup>9)</sup>

The cultural censure of disordered sexuality that enables stable family life has faded with the proliferation of Internet pornography. As a result, the [effects of hyper-sexualization](#) permeate society.<sup>10)</sup> Today's youth are reaching puberty earlier, engaging in sexual intercourse sooner, while "Emerging Adults" are cohabiting more, having children out of wedlock, and getting married significantly later or not at all.

## 4. Countering Pornography

The key to militating against these damaging patterns and to protecting against the effects of pornography is to foster relationships of affection and attachment in family. The first and most important relationship is between the father and the mother. The second is engaged parents who love their children. In today's technological society, this means limiting, monitoring, and directing their children's Internet use. This, in turn, provides an invaluable shield against Internet pornography and allows room for a healthy sexuality to unfold in a natural and socially supported way. In our over-sexualized culture, with a longer pre-marriage period, children need the capacity for abstinence if their sexuality is to be channeled into stable marriage, procreation, and healthy family life for their children. Strong families remain the best defense against the negative effects of pornography, especially when aided by regular religious worship with all the benefits it brings.<sup>11)</sup>

The fundamental role of government (including the courts) is to protect innocent citizens, most especially [children and adolescents](#), and to protect the sound functioning of the basic institutions of family, church, school, marketplace, and government. They are all interdependent. Pornography undermines both marriage and the family, and has a host of ill effects. The government needs to reassess its laissez-faire attitude towards the proliferation of pornography, especially on the Internet.

<sup>1)</sup> "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2007" 57, SS04 (June 6, 2008): 1-131, Table 61. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm#tab63> Accessed Nov. 2, 2009.

<sup>2)</sup> Joe S. McIlhane Jr., M.D. and Freda McKissic Bush, M.D., *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008), 106.

<sup>3)</sup> National Survey of Family Growth, Analysis by Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation (1995).

<sup>4)</sup> "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2007" / 57, SS04 (June 6, 2008): 1-131 Table 63 <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm#tab63> Accessed Nov. 2, 2009.

<sup>5)</sup> R. Hosley, K. Canfield, S.L. O'Donnell, and G. Roid, "Father Closeness: Its Effect on Married Men's Sexual Behaviors, Marital, and Family Satisfaction," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 15, (2008): 59-76 (69-70).

<sup>6)</sup> Patrick Fagan (author): original unpublished research. Available on request.

<sup>7)</sup> McIlhane Jr. and Bush, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children*, 136-37; L.J. Waite and M. Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 47-123. Chapters 4-8 detail the various emotional, physical, financial, and health benefits of marriage.

<sup>8)</sup> Robert T. Michael, John H. Gagnon, Edward O. Laumann, and Gina Kolata, *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1994), 118, 127, 129.

- <sup>9)</sup> Randy D. Fisher, Ida J. Cook, and Edwin C. Shirkey, "Correlates of Support for Censorship of Sexual, Sexually Violent, and Violent Media," *The Journal of Sex Research* 31, (1994): 229-40 (234).
- <sup>10)</sup> R.E. Longo, S.M. Brown, and D. Price Orcutt, "Effects of Internet Sexuality on Children and Adolescents," in *Sex and the Internet: A Guidebook for Clinicians*, ed. A. Cooper (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 87-105 (91).
- <sup>11)</sup> Nicholas Zill, "Quality of Parent-Child Relationship, Religious Attendance, and Family Structure," *Mapping America* 48 (2009). See also Mapping America charts of U.S. patterns of viewing x-rated movies (Maps # 37 to 39) and adultery (Maps # 73 to 75), <http://www.mappingamericaproject.org/publications>.

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

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