Pornography, Violence, and Pornography Education

Dr Michael Flood
Queensland University of Technology
Email: m.flood@qut.edu.au
Twitter: @MichaelGLFlood

Citation: Flood, M. (2019). Pornography, Violence, and Pornography Education.
Aware Conference: Building Digital Resilience, Sydney, 21 September.

Acknowledgement

• Please note that this presentation draws on work led by Maree Crabbe, and a journal article co-authored by Maree Crabbe and Michael Flood and currently under review.

Pornography has effects

• Pornography has effects on attitudes and behaviours. (The jury is in.)
• Evidence from:
  • Correlational studies
  • Experimental studies
  • Longitudinal studies
  • Meta-analyses and reviews of these
• (See my summary and overview, Senate submission: http://xyonline.net/content/effects-pornography-use-among-adults-and-young-people)

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Pornography's effects

• Pornography as *sex education*: (i) Sexual knowledge and attitudes
  • Sexual knowledge, including about bodies and practices
  • Liberalised sexual attitudes

Pornography's effects

• Pornography *as sex education*: (ii) Sexual practices and relations
  • Shifts in heterosexual boys' and young men's sexual expectations, practices, and repertoires.
    • E.g., interest and participation in anal intercourse. And perhaps other sexual practices such as extravaginal ejaculation and deep fellatio. And also e.g. choking.
  • Unsafe sex
• Pornography shapes men's *sexual scripts*

Pornography's effects: Relationships

• Pornography and relationship dissatisfaction
• Porn use is bad for men's relationships with women.
  • Meta analysis "points to an overall negative effect of pornography on men's sexual and relational satisfaction" (but not women's) (Wright, Tokunaga, Kraus, & Klann, 2017).
• Also: Pornography as *betrayal*
  • Much of heterosexual men's porn use is hidden.
  • A substantial proportion of female partners aware of their partners' porn use experience hurt and distress.

Pornography's effects: Sexual dysfunction?

- Significant increase in reports of sexual dysfunction – e.g. of erection difficulties – among young men.
- Blamed by some on porn: 'Porn broke my penis'
- At this stage the evidence *does not* support this.
  - Study of over 3,800 sexually active heterosexual men aged 18-40: Pornography was not a risk factor for men's desire, erectile, or orgasmic difficulties (Landripet & Štulhofer, 2015).

Pornography's effects: Addiction

- Some patterns of pornography use are compulsive and damaging.
- Involve: loss of control, excessive time spent, and negative consequences to self and others
- Debates over how to conceptualise this...
  - A behavioural addiction?
  - An impulse control disorder?

Pornography's effects *cont'd*

- Pornography as sexist education
  - Sexist and stereotypical constructions of gender and sexuality.
  - Sexually objectifying understandings of and behaviours towards girls and women
  - With impacts on behaviour / treatment of others

Pornography's effects *cont'd*

- Pornography as *rape training*
  - Sexually aggressive and violence-supportive attitudes (in both experimental and correlational studies)
  - Sexually aggressive behaviour
- Recent longitudinal studies... E.g.;
  - Over three years, individuals who intentionally consumed violent X-rated materials were twice as likely as others to engage in sexually aggressive behaviour (Ybarra *et al.* 2011).
- A meta-analysis of 22 studies, from seven countries, comprising over 20,000 participants
- There is a circular relationship between pornography and sexual aggression.

Mediators of pornography's effects

Four types of factor mediate the impact of exposure of pornography:

1. The characteristics of the viewer
   - E.g., age, gender, maturation, sexual experience, pre-existing attitudes towards gender and sexuality
2. The viewer's engagement with the material
3. The content of the material
4. The character and context of exposure
   - The duration and intensity of viewing, masturbation, the immediate context (whether voluntary or involuntary, and whether solitary or collective), and the wider cultural context

Will your 12-year-old, porn-using son, or your husband, become a rapist?

Well, it depends on:

1. What he brings to his pornography use
   - What are his attitudes towards gender and sexuality like? Is he already oriented towards sexual aggression?
2. What he makes of the pornography he sees
   - Does he find it realistic? Desirable? Arousing?
3. The content of the pornography he uses
   - How does it depict sex, bodies, women, men, their interactions, and so on?
4. How he uses it, in what circumstances, and his wider social and cultural context

Beyond simplistic accounts of effects: the example of sexual violence

- Let's go beyond simplistic, deterministic, behaviourist, accounts.
  - E.g., regarding sexual violence and abuse
- Pornography is one risk factor, among many, for sexual violence perpetration.
- Integrative models: Pornography consumption is one factor, which combines with others, to predict men's sexually aggressive behaviour.
- Pornography increases the risk of sexual violence perpetration for *some men* much more than others.

Media headlines: Wrong and right

- Wrong:
  - "Porn responsible for massive increase in child sex crimes"
  - "Porn turns boys into rapists"
  - "Early sexualisation of kids blamed for rise in sex attacks"
- Right:
  - "Porn use increases the likelihood that boys will perpetrate sexual abuse"
  - "Porn feeds violence-supportive and objectifyng attitudes"
  - "Internet porn contributing to sexual violence"

  m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Minimising the harms of pornography use

- Strategies:
  - Regulatory: legal & technological
  - Educational
- Education:
  - 'Pornography education', 'Porn literacy', 'Critical porn analysis'
- Pornography education:
  - education that seeks to support young people to critically evaluate and respond to pornography's influence in order to minimise its harms and equip them for relationships and sexuality that are safe, respectful, mutually pleasurable and consenting.

  m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

At the intersections of violence prevention education, sexuality education, and media literacy

- Media literacy: the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms.
  - Typically aim to help young people become informed, active participants in the communication process. E.g.;
    - To be more sceptical of media messages, and to find them less desirable
    - To know more of how media is produced, including its misrepresentations of reality, its 'myths' (e.g. about sex)
    - To look more critically and reflectively at media
- Pornography education:
  - education that seeks to support young people to critically evaluate and respond to pornography's influence

Why locate pornography education in schools?

- Pornography education aligns with existing school priorities
- School-based pornography education can reach broad audiences
  - Parents are important. But they also have constraints as sources of sexuality education.
- Schools can provide high quality pornography education
- Schools are a setting for pornography's impacts
- There is growing support for school-based pornography education

  m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Best practice in school-based pornography education

- A framework developed by Maree Crabbe, *In the Picture*
- 14 elements:
  1. A whole school approach
  2. A sound conceptual framework
  3. A tailored approach
  4. Based in sexuality education
  5. Builds student competencies
  6. Age-appropriate and sequential delivery
  7. Participatory teaching and learning approaches

  m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Best practice *cont'd*

8. A safe, inclusive, supportive learning environment
9. Sensitivity to inequalities of gender, sexuality and race/ethnicity
10. Skilled, well-equipped staff
11. Active engagement of parents as partners
12. Development of community partnerships
13. Support across the school organisation, culture and environment
14. Regular review and evaluation

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Best practice in school-based pornography education

1. A whole school approach
   • An overarching principle for this work
2. A sound conceptual framework
   • A positive approach to sexuality
   • An understanding of and responsiveness to diversity
   • A human rights framework
   • A harm minimisation approach
   • A strengths-based approach
3. A tailored approach

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Best practice in pornography education

4. Based in sexuality education
5. Builds student competencies
   • Analysing social, cultural and societal influences on identity & wellbeing. (Including critical evaluation of pornography and its influence)
   • Communicating and interacting for wellbeing
6. Age-appropriate and sequential delivery
   • Foundational learning: Teach general competencies, without content on pornography
   • Integrated learning: Materials on pornography are part of broader learning activities
   • Specific learning: Focused discussion of pornography

Best practice in school-based pornography education

7. Participatory teaching and learning approaches
8. A safe, inclusive, supportive learning environment
9. Sensitivity to inequalities of gender, sexuality and race/ethnicity
   • Pornography use, attitudes, and impacts are highly gendered.
     • Challenge sexism and gender inequalities
     • Use single-sex and mixed-sex groups in sequence?
   • Address sexualised racism and stereotypes of of same-sex sexualities

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Best practice in pornography education

10. Skilled, well-equipped staff
    • Pornography education should be taught by teachers, as part of a whole school approach
    • Other staff need training and support too
11. Active engagement of parents as partners
12. Development of community partnerships
13. Support across the school organisation, culture and environment
14. Regular evaluation and review

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Pornography education in practice

• Two broad groups of pornography education resources:
   • Programs focused on pornography
   • Materials addressing pornography within other curricula, typically relationships and sexuality education
• Very few existing resources meet the 14 standards of best practice
• But: The program *In the Picture* comes closest

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

In The Picture – Resourcing schools to address pornography's influence

- Comprises a framework, guidelines, and a toolkit of curricula and resources
  - Includes resources for educating students, developing policy, equipping staff, developing parent and community partnerships, creating a supportive school context, and evaluation
- Has various strengths:
  - Grounded in a strong conceptual framework
  - Has a very well designed curriculum
  - Practical and thorough
- See http://www.itstimewetalked.com.au/about-us/reality-risk/
  m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Educational appeals or 'hooks' for young men (and young women)?

- Porn as unrealistic
- Porn as sexist
- Porn as degrading. Versus respect for girls & women
- Porn as teaching bad sex
- Porn as turning males into bad lovers
- Porn as controlling or influencing them for commercial reasons. Vs being independent and in control (Crabbe 2014: 122-23)

    m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Does pornography education work?

- There is encouraging evidence from impact evaluations of:
  - Violence prevention education (including respectful relationships education)
  - Sexuality education
  - Media literacy programs
  - Pornography education

    m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Pornography education: Recent evaluations

- Five-session media literacy curriculum focused on pornography: Positive changes in students' pornography-related knowledge, pornography-related attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Rothman *et al.,* 2018)
- Students' learning about pornography in sexuality education >> later pornography exposure was less likely to lead to views of women as sex objects, compared to students who had not learnt about… ((Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2017)
- Etc.

Better and worse pornography?

- Criteria for an ethical pornography: in its production, use and distribution, and content
1) Production:
   - Occupational health and safety
   - Consent to participate
     - 12% of males, and 6.2% of females, have taken a nude or sexual image of another person without their consent (Survey, Australia, people aged 16-49, 2018)

Better and worse pornography?

2) Use and distribution
   - Consent to viewing
     - 6% of young women at university have been exposed to pornographic pictures or materials by someone when they did not wish to see them (US survey, 2001)
   - Consent to distribution
     - 9.1% of males, and 4.4% of females, have distributed a nude or sexual image of another person without their consent (Survey, Australia, people aged 16-49, 2018)
   - Disclosure to intimate partners?
     - Should people be expected to tell their partners…? No

Better and worse pornography: 3) Content

Criterion	Tick
Consent	√
No violence or violent acts	√
Respectful and mutual interactions	√
Diverse body shapes and sizes ?	√
Safe working conditions	√
The Healthy Sex Foundation Tick of Approval	**√**

Ethical pornography?

• However:
  • Depictions of consensual heterosexual sex will nevertheless perpetuate the sexual objectification of women.
  • 'Ethical' images will still be read in the context of a wider, sexist culture.
• Still, it seems pragmatic to give attention to 'better', or at least 'less worse', pornography

Some dilemmas & challenges

• Engaging young people as agents, while recognising social relations and structural inequalities
• Addressing sexual harm without reinforcing sex negativity
  • We need progressive ethical frameworks that are sex-positive, respectful of sexual diversity, and responsive to sexual abuse and exploitation
  • Let's be anti-sexist, not anti-sex
• Supporting sexual diversity
• Negotiating sexual explicitness e.g. in a school context

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Conclusion

• Pornography education is a key strategy with which to minimise the harms of pornography exposure among children and young people.
• To be effective, it must meet standards for best practice.
• More widely, we must strive to build a gender-just and sexually ethical culture.

m.flood@qut.edu.au   @MichaelGLFlood

Further reading

• The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people (Flood, Senate submission, 2016): http://xyonline.net/content/effects-pornography-use-among-adults-and-young-people
• Young Men Using Pornography (Flood, book chapter, 2010): http://www.xyonline.net/content/young-men-using-pornography
• Pornography, Men, and Boys: http://xyonline.net/content/pornography-men-and-boys
• Bibliographies of key academic works on pornography: http://www.xyonline.net/content/26-pornography