

Boys, Sex, and Porn: New technologies and old dangers



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The context...

- Controversies & anxieties about children's sexuality
- "Sex among [Australia's] youths, like sex among its adults, is too often neither gender-egalitarian, nor pleasurable, nor safe."

Shifts in young people's sexual lives

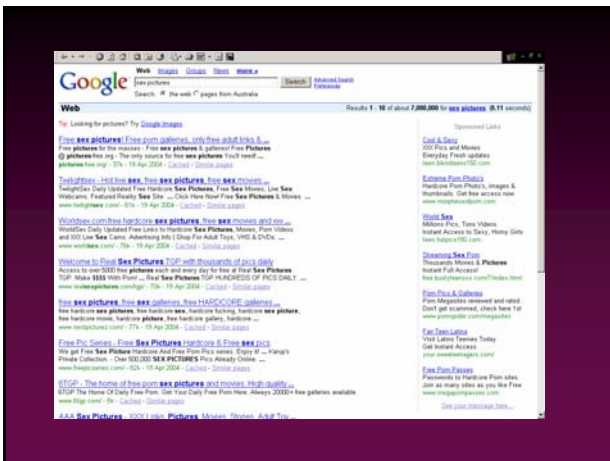
- Earlier puberty and longer adolescence
- A decline in the average age of first intercourse
- A wider variety of sexual behaviours
- A greater number of sexual partners
- A supportive gay and lesbian community
- The sexualisation of contemporary culture

Pornography

- Definition: Sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience
- Images of bodies and sex may be harmless or harmful.

Youth's exposure to pornography

- Exposure: Deliberate or accidental
- Exposure on the Internet is 'child's play', because;
 - a) The Internet hosts an enormous variety of free pornography.
 - 70 to 80 per cent of adult material is carried on free sites



b) There are virtually no age-related barriers to access

- Three-quarters of commercial websites show sexually explicit content on the first page.
- Only one-third have an 'adult' notice.
- Only 3 per cent of commercial sites require age verification to see content

c) Internet pornography uses indiscriminate, coercive and manipulative strategies

- 'Pop-ups'
- 'Mousetrapping' & traffic forwarding
- Spam e-mails
- Manipulation of search-engine processes

Youth and the Internet

- The Internet is a space of both pleasure and danger.
 - *Danger*: The internet is a new medium for the perpetration of old forms of child abuse.
 - *Pleasure*: The internet is also used by children and youth for information, support, and social and sexual interaction.

Exposure to X-rated movies (video & DVD)

- Australian research: Phone survey of 16- and 17-year-olds
- 73% of boys have watched an X-rated video.
 - 21% at least monthly
- 11% of girls have watched an X-rated video.
 - 0% at least monthly
- Boys and girls follow different paths to exposure to pornography.

Exposure to Internet porn

- Accidental exposure:
84% of boys and 60% of girls have been exposed accidentally to sex sites on the Internet.
- Deliberate exposure:
38% of boys have looked at Internet sex sites.
Over one fifth of boys access Internet sex sites at least every two or three months.
2% of girls have looked at Internet sex sites, all very occasionally.

Exposure to porn videos and websites (%)

	Boys	Girls
Watch X-rated videos	73	11
At least monthly	21	0
Accidental exposure to sex sites on the Internet	84	60
Deliberate exposure to sex sites on the Internet	38	2
At least monthly	11	0

What children & young people see

- Images of women and of male-female sex, aimed at heterosexual male viewers
- A wide variety of genres, focused on particular sexual practices, sexual participants, body parts, or other aspects of sexuality
- Narrow and sexist depictions of sex

Violent content in pornography

- US X-rated video analysis: One-quarter of scenes involve themes of sexual violence.
- Websites may show violence, subordination and degradation.
- Internet porn includes three genres which are non-consenting: rape, upskirts / voyeur, bestiality.
 - Does porn 'make violence sexy'?
- Mass-market heterosexual pornography is linked to gender inequalities.

What are the effects?

- Sexuality education is good for children and youth.
 - Sexuality education does not lead to earlier or increased sexual activity.
- However, children and youth exposed to pornography may:
 1. Be disturbed by premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content
 2. Experience the liberalisation of their sexual knowledge and attitudes
 3. Be disturbed by seeing 'extreme' behaviours
 4. Accept and adopt inappropriate non-mainstream sexual practices
 - But how do we judge what is acceptable or not? (Sexual ethics.)
 5. Adopt sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviours.

Effects *cont'd*: Sexual aggression

- There is an association between pornography and male sexual aggression against women:
 - Experimental studies of attitudes: Adults show strengthening of attitudes supportive of sexual aggression following exposure to pornography.
 - Experimental studies of behaviour: Adults show increases in behavioural aggression following exposure to pornography.
 - Correlational studies in the 'real world': Find associations between the use of at least certain forms of pornography and sexually aggressive behaviour or the willingness to use it.

Caveats regarding effects

- Pornography's effects are complicated, and various factors mediate the impact of exposure.
- Pornography is not the sole determinant of men's violence against women.
- Pornography is not the only important source of sexist and violence-supportive imagery and attitudes.
- Pornography also can have positive effects and meanings.

Porn and sexual violence *cont'd*: New technologies

- When abuse becomes pornography
 - Child pornography
 - Documenting and circulating images of abuse
- When pornography is abuse
 - Taking and circulating images of bodies and sex without consent



Stills from Australian abuse DVD

Boys, sex, and pornography

- Pornography plays a significant role in boys' and young men's peer cultures.
- Regular consumption, particularly of violent pornography, is a risk factor for young men's perpetration of sexual assault.
- Porn helps teach sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships.

Boys and pornography *cont'd*

- Porn intensifies dangerous constructions of masculinity and sexuality.
- Boys are perpetrating violence to produce porn.
 - For personal pleasure and status from male peers.
- Boys' use of porn extends cultural 'pornographication', or 'raunch culture'.
 - Positive trends among youth (growing acceptance of gender equality and female sexual agency) may be undermined by porn's sexist messages.

In the near future...

- Youth's exposure to pornography is likely to increase, because of:
 - Younger and more frequent internet use and increased access;
 - New channels of exposure to porn (new media);
 - The pornographication of culture.
- On the other hand:
 - Increased parental monitoring and filtering (at least in Australia).

Children, sex, and harm

- Protecting children from sexual harm does not mean 'protecting' them from sexuality in general.
 - Maintaining children's sexual ignorance fosters sexual abuse and poor sexual and emotional health.
- At the same time, pornography is a poor, and dangerous, sex educator.

What we can do

- a) Social & educational strategies
 - Pornography education and media literacy; Parental understanding and monitoring; Providing alternative content on sexuality.
- b) Technological strategies: Filtering
 - Proposal for filtering of content by all Internet Service Providers (ISPs), with an adult 'opt-out' option.
- c) Additional measures by porn providers



Preventing sexual violence

- To prevent sexual violence, we must address the ideologies, social conditions, and power relations which underpin it.
 - Including pornography
- New technologies:
 - facilitate old forms of abuse;
 - are generating new ways in which to perpetrate violence, document it, and enjoy it;
 - offer new opportunities for prevention and intervention.

Conclusion

- Our tasks:
 - Foster empowerment and minimise harm.
 - More widely, build a gender-just and sexually ethical culture.

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