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Dear Colleague:

This month, we chose an article we knew would be controversial – research about the impact of viewing pornography. They asked a crucial question: Can early exposure and use of pornography predict future behaviors? Their findings are significant. They found that the age of first exposure to pornography (11 years old and under) and sexual sensation-seeking together and independently were predictors of sexual risk-taking among young adults (both female and male). Our newsletter may help you consider the implications of these findings for your practice and for our field.

As always, if you have any other questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely, Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

Role of Pornography Use and Exposure in Predicting Sexually Risky Behaviors

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

The Question

Can early exposure and use of pornography predict future behaviors?

The Research

Matija Sinkovic, Aleksandar Stulhofer and Jasmina Bozie explore the role of early exposure to pornography and sexual sensation-seeking behaviors in the development of risk sexual behaviors. They found that the age of first exposure to pornography (11 years old and under) and sexual sensation-seeking together and independently were predictors of sexual risk-taking among young adults (both female and male). The significant association of first exposure to pornography and sexual sensation-seeking among both males and females suggest a possible interaction between these two factors. The authors compared this to other research showing that violent pornography use increases sexual aggression, but only when other risk factors are also present (e.g., proneness to aggression). The authors did not find any correlation between substantial pornography use and sexual risk taking among young adults.

In the last ten to fifteen years, pornography has become easily accessible to all age groups, primarily through the use of the Internet. It is usually assumed that young people are most at risk for negative consequences of pornography use, but there has not been any deeper explanation of this correlation and not enough research to establish causality. Because of their developing sexual identity, young people may be more likely either to use pornography uncritically or to

consider the depictions of sex in pornography as realistic views of sexual activity.

Research has identified that the use of sexually explicit material is linked to higher numbers of sexual partners, substance abuse at sexual encounters, sexual intercourse before age 15, failure to use a condom and reported pregnancy. In addition, associated biological links between sensation-seeking synaptic sensitivity and levels of sex hormones suggest a neurobiological component of these behaviors. Of course, these statistical correlations do not mean that it is the pornography that is driving these behaviors; rather, they likely all stem from other underlying factors. However, the links identified in the research are critical to developing health-related interventions and prevention efforts.

Finally, the authors highlight the need for future research and in particular, a longitudinal study that would consider other factors such as frequency of pornography use at the time of first exposure; type of pornography used; and, most importantly, changes in the level of sexual sensation-seeking behaviors over time.

BOTTOM LINE: The age of first exposure to pornography (11 years old or under) and sexual sensation-seeking behaviors signaled sexual risk taking among young adults (both female and male).

Implications for Professionals

Pornography use is associated with (but does not necessarily cause) a number of other sexual sensation-seeking behaviors. In the presence of other factors that contribute to sexual violence, it is a risk factor for repeat sexual offending. Given this risk, in the presence of other factors that contribute to sexual violence, how should a practitioner consider the use of pornography by a client? Given the complexities involved in individual client behavior, practitioners should consider pornography very carefully, and only explore its use with clients whose risk assessments indicate that its use is NOT a component of their overall risk profile. Otherwise, youth with sexual behavior problems should not view pornography.

To add complexity to the decisions, there are many forms of pornography with varying degrees of violence associated with sex. Therefore, the use of any sexually explicit materials should be carefully screened so that it does not include either violence or any other echo of the sexually abusive behaviors. Finally, in some very select cases where both treatment interventions have been completed and the use of sexually explicit materials cannot be linked to sexually abusive behavior, perhaps some pornography use might be considered if the focus is on consensual sexual experiences.

Implications for the Field

It can be difficult to engage in an objective discussion about pornography use (especially if the discussion focuses on youth who have sexually abused). Even the word “pornography” can be triggering for many, given that many of the online images are misogynistic and include violence, objectification, and a genital focus. Still heavily weighted towards traditional male fantasies, the images can distort the perceptions by some youth about how to engage in healthy relationships and consensual sexual activity. As we have discussed in past NEARI Press newsletters, there is an absence of truly erotic, relationship-based explicit sexual material that might serve as an acceptable alternative to much of what is now available as accessible “pornography”. While certainly not definitive, this research (and its non-correlative conclusions) hopefully opens the door for further research and conversations that consider questions such as the impact upon a youth depending upon when (developmentally) he or she is exposed to pornography, what kind of pornography is being viewed, what behaviors are being enacted, and the level of understanding about healthy relationships and consensual sexual experiences.

Citation

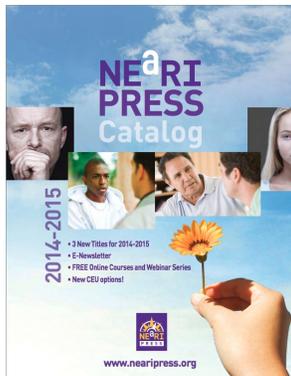
Sinkovic, M, Stulhofer, A & Bozie, J. (2013). Revisiting the association between pornography use and risky sexual behaviors: The role of early exposure to pornography and sexual sensation seeking. *Journal of Sex Research*. 50 , 633-641.

Abstract

Among the suggested problems and harms associated with widespread pornography use among young people, risky sexual behaviors have been frequently mentioned. To further explore this public health concern, this article analyzed sexual sensation seeking (SSS) as a potential confounder of the association between pornography use and sexual risks using data collected in 2010 from a population-based sample of young Croatian adults aged 18 to 25. Significant, but small, correlations were found between the indicators of pornography use (age at first exposure, frequency of use in the past 12 months, and personal importance of pornography) and sexual risk taking. However, in a multivariate analysis, only age at first exposure to pornography remained a significant, albeit weak, predictor of sexual risk taking among both women and men. SSS, defined as the dispositional tendency toward the impulsive pursuit of sexual arousal and stimulation, neither confounded nor moderated this association. Overall, the findings do not support the notion that pornography use is substantially associated with sexual risk taking among young adults, but suggest that early exposure to sexually explicit material and high SSS are additive risk factors for sexual risk taking.

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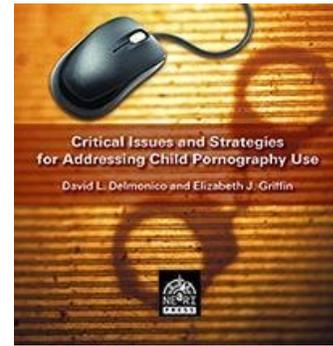
Illegal Images: Critical Issues and Strategies for Addressing Child Pornography Use

by David L. Delmonico and Elizabeth J. Griffin



With the widespread use of the Internet and subsequent technologies, child pornography is more available and accessible than ever. As a result, more individuals are entering the mental health and legal system who have viewed child pornography.

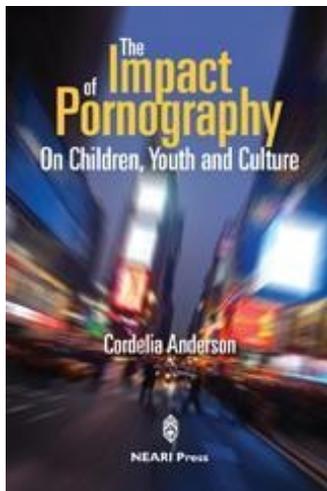
The purpose of *Illegal Images* is to provide helping professionals with information regarding the key issues to be addressed when working with anyone viewing online child pornography. Reading *Illegal Images* will answer critical questions about this difficult issue and give practical solutions for working with these individuals.



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The Impact of Pornography on Children, Youth and Culture

by Cordelia Anderson

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