

## HOW TO ADDRESS MEDIA LITERACY AND YOUTH EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY

**\*It is illegal for someone under 18 to view pornography, or to share nude/explicit pictures/videos of themselves/another. Children as young as 5 are being exposed online through pop-ups, ads, or unsupervised internet use**

1. MediaSmarts' research <sup>[2]</sup> shows that older kids are more likely they are to pay purposeful visits to pornography sites (the figures rise from seven percent to 35 percent between Grade 7 and Grade 11). It is natural for adolescents to be curious about sexuality. It is also natural for them to be more inclined to do their own research online rather than asking their parents awkward and embarrassing questions. The problem with pornography is that it is an unhealthy response to a healthy concern.
  - I. After a certain age, parental filters are no longer a viable or desirable solution as filters indiscriminately block both pornographic and good sites on sexuality. The best approach for parents of tweens and teens is an ongoing dialogue that acknowledges their interest in relationships and sex as normal and helps them develop the critical thinking skills they need to make good online decisions.
  - II. Discuss the sexual messages in various media. Media literacy has been found to be effective both in helping youth understand how depictions of sex and relationships in sexualized media are inaccurate and to resist peer pressure. <sup>[3]</sup> Help your kids understand the harmful effects of images that degrade and exploit women or girls or that pressure boys to conform to a male-gendered model centred on sexual attractiveness and prowess. Don't focus only on sex: it's important also to look at the gender stereotypes that may be communicated and perpetuated by mass media and contribute to the sexual roles portrayed in pornography and "pornified" media. <sup>[4]</sup>
  - III. Direct your kids to good-quality websites that provide information for young people on sexuality and health. If the only information your kids are receiving about sexuality is from porn sites, you have a problem. Explore with them the differences between normal, healthy sexual expression and the exploitive activity that is so prevalent online
    - a. [www.sexandu.ca](http://www.sexandu.ca)
    - b. <http://www.scarleteen.com/>
    - c. [www.amaze.org](http://www.amaze.org)
  - IV. Establish clear rules about visiting pornographic sites. Making your values and expectations clear to your kids is one of the most effective ways of influencing their behaviour. Sex therapist Marty Klein suggests that "you start before there's a problem, by shaping a vision of what their values are and how they want to deal with all this sex that's all over the place. This should be a conversation they can understand that doesn't demonize porn. If the conversation is, 'This stuff is garbage,' 'it's for losers,' 'it's dangerous,' 'it has no value,' young people are not going to pay attention." <sup>[5]</sup> MediaSmarts' research found that if there is a rule in the home about not visiting inappropriate sites, students are more likely to say they have never looked for pornography online and, in particular, are less likely to seek it out once a month or more. (Having this rule was also associated with students being exposed to less racist and sexist content.) <sup>[6]</sup> Unfortunately, boys – who are most likely to seek out pornography online – are less likely than girls to have a rule in the home on this topic. <sup>[7]</sup>

## 2. DISCUSS THE MAIN CONSEQUENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WATCHING PORN: Summary of article below:

- receiving distorted – or even violent and deviant – messages about relationships and sexual behaviour.
- becoming sexually active at earlier ages,
- experiencing increased violence or abuse in sexual relations,
- increased acceptance of sexual stereotypes
- increased obsession with body image.
- lower rate of condom use among men who watched porn <sup>[3]</sup>
- some young people are more vulnerable than others for a variety of reasons that may include interpersonal victimization, mental health issues, and patterns of risk-taking behaviour.
- attitudes of violence against women
- pornography seemed to increase the likelihood that these attitudes are formed or developed and also of increased sexual aggression. <sup>[5]</sup>
- more likely to see women as sex objects. <sup>[7]</sup>
- "The script about what sexual relationships should be has been written for young men – that they have to be the aggressors and that it's about their pleasure, not necessarily their female partner's..."
- Unrealistic attitudes about sex and relationships; Inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality
  - Preoccupation with sex
  - Sexually permissive attitudes
  - Positive attitudes about casual and recreational sex
  - Insecurities about body image in females

- Insecurities about sexual performance in males
- Sexually violent material has been linked to sexual violence in young people
- Symptoms of depression

Numerous concerns relating to young people's exposure to explicit sexual depictions have been raised by health professionals and others. These include becoming sexually active at earlier ages, experiencing increased violence or abuse in sexual relations, increased acceptance of sexual stereotypes and increased obsession with body image. These are legitimate concerns, but they do not necessarily apply to all youth. At the same time as pornography has become widely available online, for instance, the rate of teen pregnancies has actually dropped by more than a third in Canada.<sup>[2]</sup> Most of the effects that can be stated with confidence – such as a lower rate of condom use among men who watched porn<sup>[3]</sup> – are also true of exposure to sexualized media in general.<sup>[4]</sup> What is emerging in the research is that some young people are more vulnerable than others for a variety of reasons that may include interpersonal victimization, mental health issues, and patterns of risk-taking behaviour. One study in the Netherlands found that “pornography for the general user might not add to, for example, attitudes of violence against women... But for a small group of people, pornography seemed to increase the likelihood that these attitudes are formed or developed and also of increased sexual aggression.”<sup>[5]</sup>

There are also questions surrounding teens who frequently seek out violent x-rated material: one study noted an almost 6-fold increase in self-reported sexually aggressive behaviour by youth who did this (as opposed to exposure to non-violent x-rated material, which was not found to be statistically significant). However, literature review on studies on youth and violent x-rated material found that evidence for this is inconsistent.<sup>[6]</sup> What may be more significant than any effects pornography or sexualized material may have on young people's *behaviour* are their effects on *attitudes*: for example, teens who are more often exposed to sexually explicit material online are more likely to see women as sex objects.<sup>[7]</sup> Blake Spence, co-creator of the Calgary-based [WiseGuyz](#) program, says that “The script about what sexual relationships should be has been written for young men – that they have to be the aggressors and that it's about their pleasure, not necessarily their female partner's... They need a lens to understand that those messages can be harmful, and that they're actually not realistic.”<sup>[8]</sup> Many young people themselves believe that pornography can affect their attitudes: according to a study by the UK National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 28 percent of youth believe that it affects how young people behave in a relationship and 32 percent believe that it “sometimes” affects how young people interact with their romantic partners.<sup>[9]</sup>

[1] Steeves, Valerie. (2012) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents About Life Online*. MediaSmarts: Ottawa.

[2] Bielski, Zosia. “Canada's teen birth and abortion rate drops by 39.6 percent.” *The Globe and Mail*, May 14, 2012.

[3] Luder, Marie-Therese et al. “Associations between online pornography and sexual behavior among adolescents: Myth or Reality?” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 40 (5) pg 1027-1035

[4] Leung, Wendy. “Porn's negative effect on teen sexuality exaggerated, study says.” *The Globe and Mail*, April 25, 2013.

[5] Duquet F., Quéniart A. *Perceptions et pratiques de jeunes du secondaire face à l'hypersexualisation et à la sexualisation précoce*, November 2, 2009. <http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/jeunes/rapport.recherche.texte.pdf>

[6] Hough, Andrew. “Teenagers can be corrupted by Hollywood sex scenes.” *The Telegraph*, July 18, 2012.

[7] Jochen Peter & Patti M. Valkenburg. Adolescents' Exposure to Sexually Explicit Internet Material and Notions of Women as Sex Objects: Assessing Causality and Underlying Processes. *Journal of Communication* 59 (2009) 407–433.

[8] Bielski, Zosia. “In the age of Internet porn, teaching boys to be good men.” *The Globe and Mail*, April 21, 2012.

[9] Peacock, Louisa and Emma Barnett. “NSPCC: Girls think they have to act like porn stars to be liked by boys.” *The Telegraph*, September 3, 2013.

### 3. COMPARE AND CONTRAST REAL LIFE INTIMACY TO PORNOGRAPHY USING WORD SORT

#### **Pornography vs Real Life**

Using heterosexual, male/female bodies as example. These can happen in same sex scenes too.

VOID OF REAL EMOTION	EMOTION INVOLVED
UNREALISTIC, ALWAYS EXCITING SEX	BORING, MESSY, FUN, NEW, SILLY, REGULAR SEX
MULTIPLE DAYS OF FILMING EDITED TO A FEW MINUTES	REAL TIME LASTING ON AVERAGE A FEW MINUTES
ANONYMITY	FACE TO FACE
RE WIRING OF BRAIN AND DOPAMINE	HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT
WOMEN WANT SEX ALL THE TIME	DEPENDS ON THE RELATIONSHIP, MOOD, FEELINGS AT THE TIME
WOMEN LIKE TO BE CALLED "SLUT" "WHORE"	WOMEN LIKE TO BE RESPECTED
FOR PROFIT \$	FOR LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS
RAPE IS NORMAL	RAPE IS ILLEGAL
NO RESPONSIBILITY	STIS, PREGNANCY
SCRIPTS, FAKE LIQUIDS, ABNORMAL BODY PART SIZES	REAL CONVERSATIONS, BODILY FLUIDS, AVERAGE SIZES
PUBLIC	PRIVATE
ONLY ABOUT GENITALS AND MOUTH	WHOLE BODY
NEVER ENDING STAMINA	3 MINUTES FOR MEN 20 MINUTES FOR WOMEN
CONTROL	CONSENT
PAINFUL	PLEASURABLE
NO PUBIC HAIR	DIFFERENT HAIR ON DIFFERENT PEOPLE
VULVA'S LOOK ONE WAY ONLY	LIKE NOSES, ALL VULVAS ARE DIFFERENT
UNUSUALLY LARGE PENIS	AVERAGE AFTER AGE 21 IS 5-6 INCHES ERECT
DEGRADING TO WOMEN (FORCING, SEMEN ON FACE, PAIN)	TAKING HER LEAD, DIGNITY, RESPECT, CONSENT, PLEASURE FOR BOTH, NOT JUST ONE PERSON

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Is exposure to explicit pornography healthy?

How could it damage a relationship?

How might the use of pornography by one partner make the other partner feel?

What do you think about the accessibility of pornography?

Is pornography okay or is it harmful? Are there levels of what's ok/not ok

Does it realistically depict sex? If not, why?

How might pornography affect the person watching it?

Is viewing pornography a good way to find out about sex?