



Internet porn, gender, poor sexual health outcomes:

How do we best equip our young people?

Introduction

Internet pornography (IP) is readily available to young people who are at a stage of developing their sexual identity, navigating new sexual feelings, desires and establishing new forms of intimacy. High levels of IP use are generally associated with less realistic attitudes towards sex, poorer sexual health outcomes such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and less enjoyment of real life sexual experiences.

Methods

A literature review was conducted using the Edith Cowan University library data base searching the following key words between the dates January 2006-December 2018: Internet pornography, young people, adolescents, gender violence, sexual violence, consent, negotiation, sexual behaviours, intimacy, sexual identity, sexual health. 26 articles were included in the review.

So what is porn teaching adolescents?

In IP only about 2–3 % of heterosexual encounters involve condom use⁴

88% of scenes of the most popular IP contain physical aggression¹

The median age of first viewing pornography was age 13 for males and 16 for females²

Males

2010

- ▶ 90% had watched internet porn¹

2017

- ▶ 100% aged 15-29 had ever viewed IP²
- ▶ 46% had viewed IP weekly over the past 12 months²

Males seek out IP more than women and often view IP as amusing, arousing or exciting³

Females

2010

- ▶ 60% had watched internet porn¹

2017

- ▶ 82% aged 15-29 had ever viewed IP²
- ▶ 19% had viewed IP weekly over the past 12 months²

Females seek out IP less than males and often have more negative views and responses such as shock or distress³

Education

- ▶ Educating adolescents equips them with the capacity to critique the messages portrayed in porn⁵
- ▶ General relationships and sexual health education encourage adolescents to become critical thinkers about pornography.
- ▶ Education targeting the topic of porn specifically should be concerned with addressing how porn may affect adolescent's ideas about 'real-life' sex, gender and consent.

Communication skill development

Developing effective and assertive communication skills empowers individuals to have discussion around a sensitive topic such as sex⁶. Through one on one counselling and education activities designed specifically to build capacity, adolescents can begin to work through, as well as move beyond, the emotional blocks to communicating their wishes to their partner, especially if the individual feels embarrassed or shy discussing sex⁷. Communication skills development assists adolescents in negotiating consent and speaking up against unwanted sexual behaviours or activities.

Parents

- ▶ Parents provide a critical and consistent intervention source. Parents should be encouraged to **model respectful, loving relationships** with partners, friends and their children. Modelling such behaviours helps children develop ideas of what is acceptable and normal behaviour in respectful relationships⁸.
- ▶ Parents should be supported and encouraged to have open, non-judgemental and honest **conversations** with children about sex and relationships⁹. If parents can create a safe environment, children will feel comfortable to talk to parents about the relationships they are involved in and whether they are respectful and healthy.

Recommendations

Efforts to prevent intentional searching for pornography in this climate of high internet accessibility may be ineffective. Rather, adolescents must be equipped with the ability to critique IP. They must be made aware consent, negotiation, equal power and condom use is consistently missing in IP, instead the sexual scripts are heavily gender-role specific and behaviors are often aggressive or violent toward women. Through observing respectful relationships in their own home and education, individuals will be able to watch IP with an understanding that the behaviors and interactions are not a 'normal' reflection of real life sexual experiences. Open and non-shaming discussion of sex and relationships with parents as well as the opportunity to develop communication skills, will help adolescents assertively and comfortably talk with partners to ensure consensual, safe and pleasurable sexual experiences, unlike IP.

References

- 1 (Bridges, et al., 2010)
- 2 (Lim, Agius, Carrotte, Vella, & Hellard, 2017)
- 3 (Quadara, El-Murr, & Latham, 2017)
- 4 (Gorman, Monk-Turner, & Fish, 2010)
- 5 (Crabbe, & Corlett, 2010). (Mitchell et al., 2014)
- 6 (Mark & Jozkowski, 2013)
- 7 (Leask, 2009)
- 8 (Pratt, 2015)
- 9 (Morawska, 2015)

