

Research Report

An Overview of Research on the Impact that Viewing Pornography has on Children, Pre-Teens and Teenagers



Bravehearts^{inc.}
Educate Empower Protect
Our Kids

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About Bravehearts

Our **Mission** is to stop child sexual assault in our society.

Our **Vision** is to make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child.

Our **Guiding Principles** are to at all times, do all things to serve our Mission without fear or favour and without compromise and to continually ensure that the best interests and protection of the child are placed before all other considerations.

Bravehearts has been actively contributing to the provision of child sexual assault services throughout the nation since 1997. As the first and largest registered charity specifically and holistically dedicated to addressing this issue in Australia, Bravehearts exists to protect Australian children against sexual harm. All activities fall under 'The 3 Piers' to Prevention; Educate, Empower, Protect – Solid Foundations to Make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child. Our activities include but are not limited to:

EDUCATE

- ◆ Early childhood (aged 3-8) 'Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure' primary and pre-school based personal safety programs including cyber-safety.
- ◆ Personal Safety Programs for older children & young people and specific programs aimed at Indigenous children.

EMPOWER

- ◆ Community awareness raising campaigns (Online and Offline) including general media comment and specific campaigns such as our annual national White Balloon Day.
- ◆ Tiered Child sexual assault awareness, support and response training and risk management policy and procedure training and services for all sectors in the community.

PROTECT

- ◆ Specialist advocacy support services for survivors and victims of child sexual assault and their families including a specialist supported child sexual assault 1800 crisis line.
- ◆ Specialist child sexual assault counseling is available to all children, adults and their non-offending family support.
- ◆ Policy and Legislative Reform (Online and Offline) - collaboration with State Government departments and agencies.

Bravehearts Inc. is a National organisation, it is a registered Public Benevolent Institution, registered as a Deductible Gift Recipient, operates under a Board of Management and is assisted by State based Community Regional Committees, Executive Advisory Committees and a Professional Finance Committee.



Executive Summary

An overview of the body of research existing on the impact that viewing pornography has on children, pre-teens and teenagers is both relevant and of the utmost importance.

The current high rates of sexual abuse, the ‘mainstreaming’ of pornography, how vital media and technology are in the lives of young people today, the role of sexual educator pornography holds for young people today, and the changed sexual lives of young people all press the need for understanding and change.

Children, pre-teens and teenagers are proven statistically to be exposed to and to have access to pornography at incredibly high rates. They are encouraged by ease of access, coercive methods used by the porn industry, lack of restriction, and such individual factors as delinquency or depression. This high rate of viewing pornography can leave a lasting impact on the young person. It can influence their sexual lifestyles, practices and attitudes and decrease their concern around unsafe or unprotected sex. It can also impact on their wellbeing, relationships and their sexual and psychological development. Many of these young individuals do not wish to see such material but accidentally end up viewing it anyway, with very negative consequences. Thankfully, these consequences may be able to be avoided through certain methods of parenting and education. Alarmingly, some evidence exists proving that viewing pornography has the potential to increase the likelihood of a young individual committing a sexual crime. Although these outcomes have previously been reported, there is a growing agreement that most effects from viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager are mediated by a variety of factors. These can include how the pornography is viewed, individual factors such as perceived realism or intoxication, or social and historical influences such as those from the family environment or values.

Whilst studying the effects described above, it is inevitable that other related topics demanding equal attention were also uncovered. Sexual offenders have been found to use pornography in a variety of ways, such as to learn how to enact their crimes, to scout victims through online interaction, to groom victims, and to create their own pornography featuring themselves and their victims.

Another issue reviewed was the issue of the sexualisation of children, occurring predominantly through the media and associated industries (such as fashion and music) resulting in a variety of negative consequences.

Finally, ‘sexting’ was found to be a new form of sexual behaviour, calling for further investigation and understanding. Due to ‘sexting’, young people are experiencing a variety of implications, including legal ramifications and being branded sex offenders.

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Relevance and Importance of the Area of Research



“Of course, sex is great. We don’t have to pretend otherwise. But people shouldn’t feel victimised by a pornified culture and girls shouldn’t be forced to do things they don’t feel comfortable with”...fast-developing technology and an “increasingly pornified British culture” has led to a “secret garden, strip-tease culture in British schools and society” (BBC, 2013, para. 8 & 10)

The above quote from politician Dianne Abbot exemplifies an issue being faced not only by Britain, but also by societies worldwide. There is no denying pornography’s prevalence in today’s world, however, the difference is that children, pre-teens and teenagers now have greater and easier access to it than ever before due to modern technologies. This has increased concern for what effect this exposure may be having on young people and hence, turned attention toward scientific research in the area. This report is compiled of information relating to the impact that viewing pornography has on children, pre-teens and teenagers. This includes details on the relevance and importance of this research, the amount of access and exposure young people have to pornography and the general impacts of viewing and how to avoid them. The report then delves deeper and describes evidence for and against the potential pornography has to encourage the young person to commit a criminal offence. Research has also addressed issues of similar concern, including how sexual offenders use pornography, the sexualisation of children, and new sexual behaviours such as ‘sexting’. Each of these is discussed later in this report.

There are many factors contributing to the growing interest in and imminent need to further an understanding of the impact that viewing pornography has on children, pre-teens and teenagers. In order to improve the safety of society, the relevant issues must be determined and necessary changes implemented. These factors include the high rates of sexual attack and abuse, the mainstreamed nature of pornography within society, the perceived vitality of media and technology in the lives of today’s young people, the position that pornography holds as a sexual educator for young people, and the changed nature of the sexual lives of young people. Already, it is clear that this area of research is both relevant and of the utmost importance.

First and foremost, the notably high rates of sexual attack and abuse within the community at large is distressing and of great concern, as is anything that may contribute to the cause. There are a variety of statistics that emphasise this worrisome reality. It should be noted that it is with incredible difficulty that information on sexual abuse is gathered, as a variety of factors may detriment the accuracy of these statistics (Lievore, 2003; Yarrow Place, 2005). Such inhibitors generally come from personal insecurities and misconceptions regarding the act of reporting incidents (for example, guilt and embarrassment or the belief that there is not enough proof) (Yarrow Place, 2005). Approximately one in five children will

experience some form of sexual exploitation before the age of 18 (James, 2000; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). Experts estimate that less than one in ten of these children will tell. Research tells us that in 70-90% of the time offenders are known and trusted by the child and/or their families (National Child Protection Clearinghouse, 2005) What is particularly alarming is that a mere one percent of sexual offenders are reportedly unknown to the victim (Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, 2012a).

Another relevant issue to the children, pre-teens and teenagers of today is the increasingly 'mainstream' nature of pornography within society (Flood, 2009b; Hall & Bishop, 2007; Jane, 2010; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). This term describes frequent exposure to a uniform representation of sexuality as created by pornographic norms, particularly emphasising a misrepresentation of women as objects and lesser sexual beings (Hall & Bishop, 2007). Strasburger and Wilson (2002) state that sexual content in the media has increased over time, now appearing more often and becoming more candid (Flood, 2009b). This has been paired with a new tendency for images and quotations to have a greater influence on society than ever before as the world has become more connected (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b). Also, possibly adding to the 'mainstreaming', is the development of pornography and its adaptation to modern technologies, creating new forms of material (Flood, 2009b). Additionally, the 'mainstream' trend is evident in the size of the pornography industry, which Jane (2010) claims to be "a larger industry than US basketball, football and baseball combined" (para. 6). Strasburger (2004) found that in the most popular teenage television programs, an average of 6.7 scenes per hour contained sexual content.

Along with new forms of technology, and therefore pornographic material, comes the fact that children, pre-teens and teenagers now place a high, even vital, importance on media and technology in their lives. On average, children have been found to spend five and a half hours using media and technology per day (Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). In a report by Flood and Hamilton (2003b), a mere two percent of children stated they had never used the Internet. Nearly a third of children from the ages of five to fourteen own a mobile phone (Ronken & Johnston, 2012). In a survey of 16 to 17 year olds, 75% claimed that their mobile phones were either 'very' or 'extremely' important (Ronken & Johnston, 2012). There have been a number of reasons identified for the essentiality of technology in the lives of young people. Thornburgh and Lin (2002) claimed that it relates to their development, describing their infatuation with media and technology as part of a learning process necessary to their formation. Another contributing factor to the importance placed on technologies, such as mobiles, by young people is the "status symbol" (Ronken & Johnston, 2012, p. 1) they provide, indicating "popularity, social connectedness, accessibility and independence" (Ronken & Johnston, 2012, p.1).

Pornography is considered to be a significant and popular educator of sex for young people (Ryan, 2012). This is particularly true for males, who have previously reported that they learned about bodies and sexual techniques from pornography (Flood, 2010). Zillman (2000) claimed that this was due to an insufficient number of sexual education programs.

Finally, Flood and Hamilton (2003b) identified a number of changes in the sexual lives of children that have influenced all of the factors discussed in this section. These are:

- Children are beginning puberty at a younger age (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b);
- Children are having sex for the first time at younger ages (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b);
- A change in sexual styles has occurred, such that the younger generation's sexual lives encompass a larger assortment of behaviours (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b);
- Across their lifetime, the younger generations will have a larger count of sexual partners than older generations (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b).

As evidenced by the alarmingly high rates of sexual attack and assault, the 'mainstreaming' of pornography, the heightened importance of media and technology, the role of pornography as a sex educator, and the changes in the sexual lives of young people, it is clear that this area of research is undoubtedly relevant and incredibly important.



Exposure and Access to Pornography

Information regarding the exposure and access that children, pre-teens and teenagers have to pornography can be found in the form of statistical evidence along with details on ease of access to pornographic material, the coercive nature of the industry, the lack of requirement for verification of age, differences in exposure between males and females, other factors of the individual that impact the likelihood of them accessing pornography intentionally, and the regularity and outcome of unwanted exposure to pornography.

Statistical Facts

A range of statistical evidence demonstrates the prominence and commonality of the exposure and access children, pre-teens and teenagers have to pornography. After gathering information from a variety of American surveys, GuardChild (2013) reported that 90% of children (from 8 to 16) claimed to have viewed pornography on the Internet. Internationally, between 75% and 90% of teenagers living in developed countries saw pornography on the Internet before turning eighteen (Christchurch Psychology, 2013). In Australia, it has been found that 93% of males between the ages of 13 and 16 and 62% of females have viewed pornography on the Internet (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias & Morrison, 2006). Many other sources report similar results, indicating that a high percentage of the young population have been exposed to and had access to pornographic material, approximately after reaching the age of ten (Eberstadt & Layden, 2010; Flood, 2009a; Flood & Hamilton, 2003b; GuardChild, 2013; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007).

Simple Access and Coercive Exposure that Doesn't Require Proof of Age

Most pornography websites allow users access that is simple and fast with no verification of age required (DeAngelis, 2007; Flood & Hamilton, 2003a; Shaffer, 2009; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). This lack of restriction is evident in all forms of physical Internet access, including through computers, mobiles and iPods (Eberstadt & Layden, 2010). Eberstadt and Layden (2010) reported that the homepages of 75% of pornography websites studied included explicit and visual snippets of their content before requesting the age of viewers (with a mere 3% requiring some form of proof). This coercive nature is also evident in the industry's use of spam, pop-ups and the control of search engines to increase the chance of exposure to their sites (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b).

Differences between Males and Females

The consensus of research on the differences in pornography exposure between males and females is that males are more likely to access pornography than females (DeAngelis, 2007; Flood, 2009b; Harris & Barlett, 2009). A study reported by DeAngelis (2007) found that in the 16 to 17-year-old age group, 38% of males as

opposed to 8% of females had intentionally viewed pornography throughout one year. It is more common for males to endorse a more favourable attitude toward pornography and for them to become aroused by the material they view (Bryant, 2009; Flood, 2009b). In a study of males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, it was found that the biggest motivators for males to view pornography were arousal, curiosity and the perception that it is 'cool' (Bryant, 2009). Regarding the most likely contexts for viewing pornography to occur, Bryant (2009) reported that males generally view pornography with friends whilst females are more likely to view pornography with an intimate partner.

Other Individual Factors that Influence Amount of Exposure

There are certain individual characteristics, qualities and circumstances that have been found to be associated with a greater amount of exposure than those who do not have these attributes. Bryant (2009) uncovered three types of individuals prone to more exposure than others: "delinquent youth" (Bryant, 2009, p. 2), "depressed youth" (Bryant, 2009, p. 2) and those with antisocial or violent behavioural tendencies. It has also been found that those who are more disposed to breaking rules, who utilise file-sharing programs, and who engage in sexual conversations with strangers online are more likely to willingly view pornographic material (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007).

Unwanted Exposure

My daughter was seven when she first encountered pornography online. Her school (she was in Year 2) participated in the online maths practice program Mathletics. One day when she clicked on the link to Mathletics, it took her to a pornography website and she called me saying Mummy the computer has done something funny and there are strange people on the Mathletics site. Some hacker or virus had attached itself to the Mathletics address and was taking children to a porn site. Fortunately, it was one that needed you to accept that it was an adult site and you had to click a link to access the more graphic content The images would have been classified as images of full frontal male and female nudity in sexualised depictions and have been at least in the MA15+ classification range. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 146)

The above quote is a first-hand example of unwanted exposure of children to pornographic material. It has been found that a large number of young people have had similar experiences in being fortuitously exposed to pornography (DeAngelis, 2007; Jane 2012; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). For example, out of 200 Australians between the ages of 16 and 17, a large number of both males (84%) and females (60%) had experienced unwanted exposure to pornography whilst online (Bryant, 2009). GuardChild (2013) also provides a range of statistics relating to unwanted exposure:

- "17% of tweens surveyed said they received an email or online message with photos or words that made them feel uncomfortable. (Only 7 percent of parents were aware of this.)" (GuardChild, 2013, point 7)

- “70% of children 7 to 18 years old have accidentally encountered online pornography, often through a web search while doing homework.” (GuardChild, 2013, point 11)
- “41% of unwanted sexual solicitations, 29% of unwanted exposure to sexual materials, and 31% of harassment occurred when children were online with their friends.” (GuardChild, 2013, point 16).

Adding more cause for concern, Flood (2009b) reported evidence that these statistics were on the rise, meaning more and more young people are being inadvertently exposed to pornographic material whilst online for other reasons.

The General Impacts of Exposure to Pornography on Children, Pre-teens and Teenagers



After discovering the amount of exposure that children, pre-teens and teenagers have to pornography, it is natural to inquire as to the impact that this exposure may have on the young person. Due to past inconsideration and ethical limitations, experimental research is considerably lacking in this area (Bryant, 2009; Flood & Hamilton, 2003b; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002).¹ Still, the information that has been collected by previous research is compelling enough to warrant attention, change, and further investigation (Flood, 2010).

Greenfeild (2004) evidenced that pornography can impact on a young person's propensity toward sexual violence, their attitudes toward sex, their morals and values, and their sexual behaviours. Furthermore, Misstear (2012) reported that pornographic material showcasing violence can influence a young person's development. This section showcases these and other effects in detail, covering sexual lifestyles and practices, sexual attitudes, unsafe and unprotected sex, impact on wellbeing, impact on relationships, desensitisation and habituation effects, development impairment, and the impact and effects of unwanted exposure to pornography.

Sexual Lifestyles and Practices

Viewing pornography at a young age has been found to influence and cultivate an individual's sexual lifestyle and sexual behaviours (or practices) (Bryant, 2009). Tyden and Rogala (2004) found that over half of the men included in their study (16 to 24 year olds) reported that what they viewed on pornography influenced their sexual behaviours. Behaviours and lifestyle influences that have been reported as being adopted as a result of viewing pornography include a greater likelihood of having had sex, a likelihood of having sex more often than non-viewers (high-school aged participants), anal intercourse, a tendency toward one-night stands, masturbation, and having multiple sexual partners (Flood, 2009b, 2010; Flood & Hamilton, 2003b). It has also been reported that if more explicit sexual acts are viewed, younger individuals are likely to see them as acceptable and re-enact them (Flood & Hamilton, 2003). However, there is not enough research to prove that such non-mainstream acts as bestiality and sadomasochism are adopted by those young individuals that view pornographic material displaying such acts (Flood & Hamilton, 2003). The form of pornography that has the greatest or strongest effect on children,

¹ It would be unethical to deliberately expose individuals in these age groups to X-rated material for the sake of experimentation (Flood & Hamilton, 2003b).

pre-teens and teenagers is the Internet (Flood, 2010; Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009).

Sexual Attitudes

The frequent viewing of pornography by young people can foster unfavourable and unhealthy sexual attitudes (DeAngelis, 2007; Flood, 2010; Harris & Barlett, 2009). One misconception that tends to be formed is that sex happens a lot more frequently throughout the community than what it does in reality (Flood, 2010). More liberal and more radical viewpoints are also common outcomes from frequent pornographic exposure, such as being accepting of non-marital, pre-marital, extra-marital and recreational sex (Flood, 2010).

Another detrimental attitudinal outcome is that young viewers (between the ages of 13 and 18) have been found to see sex as a purely physical experience (DeAngelis, 2007). Similarly, young people can begin to approve of prostitution, endorse loveless and affectionless sexual relations, and can begin to be more contemptuous toward love (Flood, 2010; Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Zillmann, 2000). DeAngelis (2007) adds that males are the likely endorsers of the previously mentioned attitudes, especially when they perceive the pornography as more realistic.

Endorsing the view of women as sexual beings is a problematic outcome of frequently viewing pornography (Bryant, 2009; DeAngelis, 2007; Eberstadt & Layden, 2010). Flood and Hamilton (2003) reported this in males as young as 14, among whom a correlation was confirmed between frequent pornography viewing and an accepting stance toward forcing a girl to have sex. The more explicit the pornographic material is, the more likely this attitude is going to be endorsed by the viewer (DeAngelis, 2007). The objectification of women can affect both males and females, with both having previously supported the belief that an incident of rape was brought on by the female victim in a study (Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). Ryan (2012) reported a quote from a woman, describing the expectation that men have of women regarding sex. She said, "I think that men think that they'll test, that they'll see if they can do whatever they see in a porno...a past person that I've been with assumed that I'd enjoy something that he'd seen and it almost feels hard to say no" (Ryan, 2012, para. 21).

Unsafe and Unprotected Sex

Another extremely concerning potential impact resulting from viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager is the higher likelihood for the individual to engage in unsafe or unprotected sex. Hughes (1998) claimed that, "...children are...learning an extremely dangerous message from pornographers: Sex without responsibility is acceptable and desirable" (para. 6). Studies have shown that viewing pornographic material decreases the necessity in the minds of viewers of using condoms, and have also shown that viewers will not use contraceptive options as often as those who aren't exposed to pornographic material (Brown, Keller & Stern, 2009; Flood & Hamilton, 2003) Brown, Keller and Stern (2009) also reported that frequent exposure

to sexual material can also result in pregnancy, due to irresponsible attitudes created toward sex. The engagement in unsafe and unprotected sex as a result of a high rate of exposure to pornography is extremely dangerous when it comes to the health of the young person (Hughes, 1998). The risk of sexually transmitted disease is connected to those viewing sexually explicit material and the resultant sexual practices adopted by those individuals (Focusas, 2008).

Impact on Wellbeing

Viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager can have a considerable impact on the individual's wellbeing. Bryant (2009) reported that this could "...generate shame, guilt, anxiety, confusion, poor social bonds, and addictions..." (p. 3). Esteem issues have also been reported, including feelings of dissatisfaction with one's body and sexual anxiety (Brown, Keller & Stern, 2009; Flood, 2010). In saying that, a study reported by Flood (2010) found that college-aged Canadian males experienced an increase in esteem relating to sexuality with more frequent pornography exposure.

It has been previously reported that pornography viewers may become so attached that they become addicted, resulting in obsessive and compulsive behaviours that are likely to be detrimental to the individual and those around them (Flood, 2010). This phenomenon is just as likely for young people as it is for adults, and is happening to those as young as 11 years of age (Edberstadt & Layden, 2010; Misstear, 2012). A number of clinicians professed their concerns for those affected, with one claiming, "it's awful to see the effect it has on them; at such a young age, to have that kind of sexual problem" (Eberstadt & Layden, 2010, p. 29) and another that, "before the internet, I never encountered this" (Eberstadt & Layden, 2010, p. 30).

Impact on Relationships

Viewing pornography while at a young age has been associated with a negative impact on the individual's intimate relationships. Whilst there is not extensive evidence in the research supporting this idea, it has been widely noted and reported in a variety of articles that pornography has the potential to undermine intimate relationships (Bryant, 2009). A high rate of exposure to pornographic material can limit how the young individual views members of the opposite gender, decreasing wholesome perceptions (DeAngelis, 2007). Paul (2005) quoted sex therapist and psychologist, Aline Zoldbrod, in saying that "pornography doesn't show how a real couple negotiates conflict or creates intimacy" (para. 51). Basically, pornography can result in the young viewer having a skewed opinion of a 'normal' intimate relationship (DeAngelis, 2007).

Desensitisation and Habituation Effects

Desensitisation and habituation are both effects that have been connected to a high viewing rate of pornography. Excitatory habituation will result from a lengthy period

of exposure to pornography, causing the individual to expand their viewing to material portraying more novel sexual activities in order to achieve the same goal as was initially sought when viewing (Zillmann, 2000). Desensitisation can also occur, which can result in individuals acting out their fantasies (Crosson-Tower, 2005). Thornburgh & Lin (2002) reported that in a study of 19 to 20 year olds who viewed an hour of an R-rated equivalence film that contained sexual violence, desensitisation occurred immediately with arousal decreasing during viewing after this hour, and a lessened empathy toward the victims of sexual violence shown in the films.

Development Impairment

This is an area that requires imminent research to clarify exactly what is occurring and whether preventative action is needed. It is argued that not enough evidence exists to confirm impairments on the development of young people who view pornography (Livingstone, Haddon & Gorzig, 2012). In saying that, those who support that development is impaired in young people as a result of early exposure to pornography provide compelling information, such as the following section from Hughes (1998):

...if there is exposure to pornography during this period, sexual deviance may become imprinted on the child's "hard drive" ... pornography short-circuits and/or distorts the normal personality development process and supplies misinformation about a child's sexuality, sense of self, and body that leaves the child confused, changed and damaged. (para. 13 & 15)

Impacts and Effects of Unwanted Exposure to Pornography

Unwanted exposure to pornography can have a number of effects on a young person. Strong and lasting negative emotions have been associated with unwanted exposure to pornography as a young person and far outweigh the recall of positive emotions (Greenfield, 2004; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). These have included disgust, disturbance, shock, sickness, surprise, repulsion, embarrassment, anger, troubled, fear, sadness (Flood, 2009b; Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Greenfield, 2004). These emotions are likely to be so strong and lasting due to the concern that children are being unwillingly exposed to explicit material before they are developmentally ready to (Bryant, 2009; Flood, 2009b; Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007). This means that the child has probably not been aware of such sexual acts before the exposure, is not yet interested in sexuality and is unable to successfully handle the information exposed to them with relation to their sexual identity (Bryant, 2009 & Flood, 2009b).

Avoiding the General Impacts of Early Exposure



Methods of parenting and education have been suggested in order to avoid the negative impacts of viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager.

A variety of resources suggest tips for parenting in order to combat the negative effects of viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager. DeAngelis (2007) reported a study finding that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles were the most effective at limiting social media use, which made their children do such things as avoiding viewing sexual content. Another important buffer to the negative consequences of exposure to sexually explicit material is a warm, open and communicative relationship between the parent and child (Christchurch Psychology, 2013; Greenfield, 2004). Finally, parents should take part in the sexual education of their children and promote critical evaluation (Christchurch Psychology, 2013; Greenfield, 2004).

It is recognised that it is natural for young people to explore their sexual self and therefore should be provided with information appropriate for their development and age levels (Flood, 2009b). DeAngelis (2007) reported the opinion of Jochen Peter, a communications researcher, who suggested that young people should be educated about their sexuality, rather than protected by it. An example he provides is that it should be explained to teenagers that pornography “is one very specific notion of sex and sexuality, and may not correspond with what they, and most adults, experience in their sex lives” (DeAngelis, 2007, paragraph 20)

Viewing Pornography as a Child, Pre-Teen or Teenager and Connections to Sexual Offending



Recognising and understanding any direct connections between viewing pornography as a child, pre-teen or teenager and actually committing a sexual offence are integral to creating a safer community for young people. To delve into this, both the confirming and disconfirming evidence available will be discussed, along with reasons as to why there is such an inconsistency in this area of research.

The research in this area is inconsistent and has not arrived at a definitive conclusion as to whether or not viewing pornography causes an individual to become a sexual offender, in other words, whether there is a casual link between the two variables (Bensimon, 2007; DeAngelis, 2007; Harris & Barlett, 2009; Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009; Nathan, 2011). Still, there is enough evidence to cause concern as to the links between sexually offending and viewing pornography (Bensimon, 2007; DeAngelis, 2007; Harris & Barlett, 2009; Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009). Possible reasons for this lack of conclusion include a diverse range of methods used by researchers, the difficulty in conducting research, cultural diversity in attitudes toward sexual abuse and ethical dilemmas (Bensimon, 2007; Harris & Barlett, 2009; Nathan, 2011; Zillmann, 2000). The following paragraphs look at the confirming and disconfirming research relating to a direct link between viewing pornography (particularly as a child, pre-teen or teenager) and committing a sexual offence.

Confirmation of the Direct Connection

There have been some experiments and studies conducted in an attempt to discover whether or not a direct link between the two variables exist. An electric shock study provided evidence that violent pornographic material made males more aggressive toward females (Nathan, 2011). This was done by showing different video footage to three different male college student groups: the first of a female seemingly enjoying being raped, the second of a female being raped and being upset about it, the third of a younger-aged couple enjoying having consensual sex, and the fourth viewed footage with no sexual or violent material (Nathan, 2011). Following the viewing, participants had a meeting with a research team member, who would either be male or female and would either be insulting or pleasant (Nathan, 2011). Afterwards, the participants were given the opportunity to give the research team member an electric shock (a fake machine, unbeknownst to the participants) if they wished (Nathan, 2011). The participants who had viewed violent rape footage and had met with an insulting female team member administered the largest shock (Nathan, 2011).

Demare, Briere and Lips (1988) conducted a study using a survey and did not discover a direct cause and effect phenomenon. Instead, they found that both the viewing of violent sexual pornography and the attitude that violence against women was acceptable and were connected to a greater tendency of committing a sexual offence (Demare, Brier & Lips, 1988).

A high rate of pornography exposure is also related to acceptance of the idea that it is okay to “hold a girl down and force her to have sex” (Flood, 2010, p. 176) and a greater approval of sexually harassing someone (Flood, 2010). Similarly, Eberstadt and Layden (2010) reported the following: “...a study of 804 representative Italian teenagers found that boys who viewed pornography were significantly more likely to report having “sexually harassed a peer or having forced somebody to have sex” (p. 30). Self-report experiments have found that men who view a greater amount of sexual violence are more likely to report a likelihood of committing rape (Flood, 2010; Harris & Barlett, 2009). It is also interesting to note that areas with the most circulation of pornography have also been reported to have the highest rates of sexual abuse in many studies (Advent Creative, n.d.).

Perhaps even more intriguing than the above experiments and surveys is the research into the past pornography use of sexual offenders. Viewing pornography as a young person (or at any age) has been identified as a common trend among sexual offenders (including teenage male offenders), especially extremely explicit material (Bensimon, 2007; Crosson- Tower, 2005; Dines, Jensen & Russo, 1998; Forensic Psychology Practice, 2006; Hughes, 1998; Simons, 2007). Furthermore, sexual offenders have been found to find pornographic material more arousing and are likely to engage in a sexual act after viewing (Harris & Barlett, 2009). There have also been a number of articles reporting that sexual offenders claimed having viewed pornography prior to committing a sexual offence or had used it to help plan their attack (Bensimon, 2007; Hughes, 1998) For example, Advent Creative (n.d.) reported that 41% of sexual crimes investigated by the Michigan State Police Department had involved the use or imitation of pornographic material. The following section from Hughes (1998) reports trends mirroring those just described in children:

Exposure to Pornography May Incite Children to Act Out Sexually against Other Children:

Children often imitate what they’ve seen, read, or heard. Studies suggest that exposure to pornography can prompt kids to act out sexually against younger, smaller and more vulnerable children. Experts in the field of childhood sexual abuse report that any premature sexually activity in children always suggests two possible stimulants: experience and exposure. This means that the sexually deviant child may have been molested or simply exposed to sexuality through pornography.

In a study of six hundred American males and females of junior high school age and above, researcher Dr. Jennings Bryant found that 91

percent of the males and 82 percent of the females admitted having been exposed to X-rated, hard-core pornography. Over 66 percent of the males and 40 percent of the females reported wanting to try out some of the sexual behaviors they had witnessed. And among high schoolers, 31 percent of the males and 18 percent of the females admitted actually doing some of the things they had seen in the pornography within a few days after exposure. (Hughes, 1998, para. 9 – 10)

No Confirmation of Direct Connection

Although, as seen above, there has been a strong connection between viewing pornography and sexual offending discovered, no definitive causal relationship has ever been proven (Brandt, Prescott & Wilson, 2013; McCarthy, n. d.; Nathan, 2011). All of the research that does exist is counteracted by research that proves the opposite (McCarthy, n.d.). Brandt, Prescott and Wilson (2013) report that while there has been a rapid rise in pornographic circulation due to the Internet and other new technologies, there have been no significant rises in the numbers of sexual offence cases. This has been supported by a number of other studies (Bauserman, 1996; Kimmel & Linders, 1996). There is also evidence proving that those who commit a sexual offence don't differ to non-offenders when it comes to pornography viewing habits both as an adult and in their younger years (Bauserman, 1996; Bensimon, 2007; Christchurch Psychology, 2013). Offenders don't all use pornography to motivate or plan their crimes (Nathan, 2011). The United States Commission on Obscenity and Pornography presented an intriguing claim that perhaps pornography entertains potential sexual offenders enough to prevent them from performing the acts in actuality, thereby keeping the rate of sexual crime lower than what it would be (Nathan, 2011). As will be discussed in the following section of this report, instead of a direct casual link between pornography viewing (particularly at a young age) and sexually offending, it is more likely and proven that a variety of factors mediate the two variables (Christchurch Psychology, 2013).

Factors that Mediate Viewing Pornography and Committing a Sexual Offence



More research and information has been uncovered relating to factors that mediate and contribute to the likelihood of an individual committing a sexual offence after viewing pornography than that which confirms direct links. These mediating factors fall under three categories: how the pornography is viewed, individual factors, and social and historical factors.

The way in which pornography is viewed, or the context in which it is viewed, by the young individual can influence them as a mediator between viewing and committing a sexual offence (Flood, 2009b; Flood & Hamilton, 2003). This is because certain conditioning processes could take place while the individual is viewing the pornographic material, making them more likely to offend (Marshall, 1993). Contributing to this is the consideration of whether the pornography is viewed voluntarily or involuntarily, along with whether it is viewed while the individual is alone or with others (Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). Flood (2009b) claims that "...masturbating alone while watching pornography may lend greater intensity to the sexual images viewed (Jensen, 1998), while watching pornography in groups may enhance collective acceptance of its value systems" (p. 388). Another three factors residing under the context of viewing category are the intensity, frequency and duration of pornography viewing, which can have a major impact as will be discussed at the end of this section (Flood, 2009b; Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002).

There are numerous individual factors that can act as a mediator between viewing pornography and sexually offending. The individual's perceived sense of realism of the pornographic material they are viewing acts as a very strong mediator (Bryant, 2009). In their study, Jochen and Valkenburg (2006) found that a greater perceived realism meant that the participant had a more recreational sexual attitude. Individuals (mostly men, including teenagers) who are at high risk of engaging in aggressive behaviour are more likely to commit a sexual offence after viewing pornography, a phenomenon further exaggerated by the added variables of high rates of viewing and viewing more explicit material (Greenfield, 2004; Kingston, Malamuth, Fedoroff & Marshall, 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). Substance abuse, alcohol consumption and intoxication have been proven to make an individual more inclined to commit a sexual offence after viewing pornography (Kjellgren, n.d.; Marshall, 1993; Nathan, 2011). Not only does alcohol influence men, but it also affects the judgment of women, who are less likely to identify incidents of rape than when sober (Harris & Barlett, 2009). Other individual factors that have been found to mediate viewing pornography and committing a sexual offence are age, gender, antisocial tendencies, hostility (both general and toward women), a lack of social

skills, emotional state whilst viewing, psychological disorders, delinquency, depression, personality features related to dominance, hypermasculinity, Machiavellianism, anger, impulsiveness, “emotional loneliness” (Marshall, 1993, ‘Abstract’), a tendency toward having sex with strangers, a lack of empathy, stress and suicidal tendencies (Bryant, 2009; Flood, 2009b; Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Grant, Indermaur, Thornton, Stevens, Chamarette & Halse, 2008; Harris & Barlett, 2009; Kjellgren, n.d.; Marshall, 1993). Also, the mood the individual is in or the emotion that they are feeling whilst viewing pornography has been identified as a mediator (Flood & Hamilton, 2003). The cognitive structures of some individuals may increase their likelihood of committing a sexual offence (Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009).

There are a number of social and historical influences that mediate the two variables. Influences from the family environment, including neglectful or absent parenting, childhood abuse or neglect, conservative or repressive family views regarding sexuality, or domestic abuse and domestic violence serve as potential mediators (Grant, Indermaur, Thornton, Stevens, Chamarette & Halse, 2008; Kjellgren, n.d.; Nathan, 2011). Another social mediator are the values held by society or culture and adopted by the individual, for example, what may be considered sexism by one society or culture may be an accepted normality for another (Bryant, 2009; Flood & Hamilton, 2003).

Although all of these factors have been proven to take place as mediators, it has also been demonstrated that committing a sexual offence is more likely brought on by a set of such behaviours repeated over time rather than one mediator during one viewing sitting (Bensimon, 2007; Marshall 1993). Similarly, certain combinations of these factors can produce certain conditioning experiences that increase an individual’s propensity toward sexual offence (Marshall, 1993).



The Use of Pornography by Offenders

Not only is it important to delve into the impact of pornography on young people, but it is also beneficial to know how sexual offenders utilise pornographic material. Pornography is used by offenders (particularly sexual abusers of children) not only to educate them on how to conduct their crimes (Dines & Jensen, 2004), but also to discover and acquire new victims, to groom and desensitize the young person into doing what they wish, and to create pornographic material of the young person.

Pornography can be used by sexual offenders to scout and recruit their victims. The simplest method for them to do this is through the use of the Internet (Crosson-Tower, 2005). Commonwealth of Australia (2011) reported that the majority of sexual offenders who utilise the Internet for these purposes do so via chat rooms. Similarly, in America one in five children have experienced initiation from a sexual offender while using the Internet (Ronken & Johnston, 2012). Research shows that in looking for potential victims, offenders commonly aim to abuse teenagers due to their "...greater access to computers and mobile technology...[a greater amount of] privacy in their activities...[and their] interest in sex and romance" (Ronken & Johnston, 2012, p 5). This means that on many occasions, the offender is in fact truthful about who they are and what they want from the victim, as they can rely on the aforementioned qualities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Furthermore, offenders may even mail the victim a mobile phone for the purpose of secretly contacting the offender, allowing a greater amount of opportunity for interaction (Ronken & Johnston, 2012). The play on the natural tendencies of young people, including their blooming sexual selves, allows for a more successful grooming process and eventual abuse (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

Another convenient and effective use of pornography for offenders is in grooming their victims, allowing them to manipulate the young person's knowledge, perceptions and resistance. Victims may first be introduced to sex and sexual practices through grooming (Crosson-Tower, 2005; Dines & Jensen, 2004). When being shown sexual material, victims may become sexually aroused by what they are being exposed to (McCarthy, n.d.). Soon, the victim will see the behaviours and practices being shown to them as normal, although they usually involve sexual interactions between children and adults that are violent and abusive or nude images of the offender (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Crosson-Tower, 2005; McCarthy, n.d.). This process eventually decreases the victim's resistance or displeasure to the sexual practices that they are exposed to (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Crosson-Tower, 2005; Dines & Jensen, 2004; Flood, 2009b). If the offender is attempting to create a sex ring with multiple children, he will also groom the victim into seeing sex as a group activity (Crosson-Tower, 2005). The grooming process can produce such strong connections and reliance on the relationship in the victim's mind that, even if they realise that what is occurring is wrong, they will continue the relationship as they feel it meets certain needs of theirs

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

Another use of pornography by sexual offenders is the exploitation of their young victims through the creation of pornographic material involving them, including pictures and video footage (Crosson-Tower, 2005). These materials can be used by the perpetrator as fear-inducing blackmail (sexploitation) of the victim, forcing the victim to keep their relationship and activities as a secret and to continue engaging in these with the offender (Crosson-Tower, 2005; McCarthy, n.d). These materials featuring the offender's victims are also used for the offender themselves for arousal, posting on the Internet and trading (McCarthy, n.d.).

As can be seen, there is an alarmingly wide range of uses that pornography has for the sexual offender. They can learn how to carry out their crime, scout for victims online, groom young victims and create pornographic material featuring the victim. All of these have been proven to be used by offenders and still continue to occur.

The Sexualisation of Children

The sexualisation of children is a related issue to the effects of direct exposure to pornography and its occurrence is far-reaching. As “children imitate behaviours without understanding the potential implications” (Government of Western Australia, 2012, para. 4), it is important to recognise the messages society is delivering to young people, much of which have become extremely sexualised due to the previously addressed trend of ‘mainstreaming’ pornography. The young people of today are developing in a more sexualised culture than ever before, primarily motivated by the general media. This has been shown to cause a variety of effects on their lives. Along with this evidence, there have been numerous suggestions for counteracting the effects of sexualisation.

A More Sexualised Society

Worldwide, the young people of today are growing up and developing in societies that are more sexualised than ever before, an issue of great concern (Flood, 2009b; Gale, 2011; Jane, 2010; Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009). The pornographic or sexual material being viewed at a conventional level is now more explicit and hardcore than what it has been in the past (Jane, 2010). This means that acts of a sexual nature that are unenjoyable, painful, degrading or violating for women are becoming more normalised and acceptable (Jane, 2010). Exposure to these messages and materials influences young people and their perceptions about gender and sex (Jane, 2010; Johnston & Ronken, 2008). This is when sexualisation occurs, and it can be considered as having occurred if:

- an individual’s sole value stems only from their sexual appeal,
- if their standards for defining attractiveness are through levels of sexiness,
- if individuals are seen as sexual objects, or
- if the concepts of sex and sexuality are introduced to a person at an inappropriate age or stage of development (APA, 2007).

This sexualisation manipulates what an individual is aroused by, an individual’s attitudes toward sex, and an individual’s sexual behaviours (Harris & Barlett, 2009).

Research shows that the primary instigator of this early sexualisation is the media, including advertising, movies, television, music, music videos, toys, children’s clothes and magazines (APA, 2007; Jane, 2010; Johnston & Ronken, 2008; Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009). Even though the media responds to the demand of a society and reflects its culture to an extent, it also contributes considerably to both (APA, 2007). Each of the media outlets mentioned above are infused with the belief that ‘sex sells’, which is repeatedly reinforced by sales and success rates² (Harris & Barlett, 2009). Even though this belief has been long withstanding in marketing and advertising, it is the fact that it is beginning to be used

² For an example of this reinforcement, please refer to Simjen, 2011.

to appeal to and attract young customers that is particularly disturbing (Johnston & Ronken, 2008). It is of concern that when children and young people are encouraged to behave grown-up and sexier, they "...aren't practising and learning how to be whole human beings that will actually make them into great adults" (Government of Western Australia, 2012, para. 5). Furthermore, although the amount of sexual content has increased in the general media, there has been no effort made to accompany increases with more warnings or information on the benefits of such things as birth control (Kingston, Malamuth, Federoff & Marshall, 2009). Even though this sexual increase has occurred, evidence suggests that the public does not want this to occur (APA, 2007). For example, 73% of people involved in a 1999 'Adweek' poll responded that they felt advertising used too much sexual imagery (Dolliver, 1999). Research shows that while the sexualisation of young people affects both genders, females are more likely to experience the effects and become objectified (APA, 2007).

The following points provide examples of how the media and popular culture are contributing to the sexualisation of children and young people:

- *Movies and Television:* Recently, much concern has been raised regarding the large amount of content of a sexual nature in children's movies and television shows (APA, 2007). In the same vein, female characters are scarce in popular G-rated films (Kelly & Smith, 2006), with a study showing that "Of the over 4,000 characters in these films [G-rated films released between 1990 and 2004], 75% overall were male, 83% of characters in crowds were male, 83% of narrators were male, and 72% of speaking characters were male" (APA, 2007, p. 7).
- *Music and Music Videos:* A study by Pardun, L'Engle and Brown (2005) showed that more so than the television shows, movies or magazines teenagers choose to engage in, their music choices contain the most frequent sexual content. APA (2007) reported that 15% of 164 popular songs by 16 musical artists most popular with adolescents contained lyrics that were sexually degrading. Music videos are also widely available to young people yearning to be like those older than them, depicting highly sexualised content (Johnston & Ronken, 2008). The following paragraph from the APA (2007) 'Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls' describes this highly sexualised music video content:

In music videos, women more frequently than men are presented in provocative and revealing clothing (e.g. Andsager & Roe, 1999; Seidman, 1992), are objectified (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis, 1993) and typically serve as decorative objects that dance and pose and do not play any instruments (e.g. Arnett, 2002; Gow, 1996). They are often displayed in ways that emphasize their bodies, body parts, facial features, and sexual readiness. (p. 5)
- *Magazines:* APA (2007) reported that magazines push the notion that the reader's main goal should be to present themselves as "sexually desirable" (APA, 2007, p. 7) to attract men's attention. This incites the suggestions of certain clothes, products and behaviours throughout the magazine to achieve

this goal (APA, 2007). These magazines are now being marketed toward much younger girls than ever before, reaching out to those as young as five (Johnston & Ronken, 2008). This means that they are introduced to topics (such as rating male celebrities by how ‘hot’ they are) and pressured to follow suggestions (including how to dress and intimate relationship advice) that they are not developmentally ready to learn about and successfully comprehend healthily (Johnston & Ronken, 2008).

- *Fashion:* Johnston and Ronken (2008) identified three concerning factors of the fashion industry: the use of children to model adult clothing; bras, undies and g- strings with provocative slogans or logos on them in children’s sizes; and makeup that is no longer marketed in a ‘fun’ manner, but instead with the purpose of making a young girl appear sexier and more glamorous. Another concerning element is the use of pornographic logos, slogans and messages on clothing made for young people (Jane, 2010).
- *Children’s Toys:* Johnston and Ronken (2008) made an interesting note, that Barbie dolls were originally aimed to appeal to six to ten year olds. Now, they are aimed to appeal to three to six year olds (Johnston & Ronken, 2008). Other dolls have been created that are also aimed to a young age group and are highly sexualised, including Bratz dolls (Johnston & Ronken, 2008). Demonstrating this transition to more sexualised content is the change between Trolls in the 1960s to the rebranded Trollz cartoon and dolls of today, as seen in the pictures below (APA, 2007).

Figure 1A
Trolls of the 1960s



(Trolls! 2010)

Figure 2
Trollz of Today



(DIC Entertainment Corp., 2005)

- *Games*: Similar to movies, females are seldom included in video games (APA, 2007). When they are, their clothing exposes skin more often than clothing worn by male characters and are highly sexualised (APA, 2007).

The Implications of a More Sexualised Society

The sexualisation of society creates many implications for all in the community, many of which are not favourable. Generally, young people gain an increased knowledge of sex due to the repeated and constant exposure they have to sexual content (Flood, 2010). Furthermore, although young people (particularly girls) are encouraged and pressured to look and behave in sexier ways, these young people do not really understand what they are doing or what their actions and looks imply (APA, 2007). They have not experienced the aspects of life being presented to them, even though they adopt them and try to be a part of them (APA, 2007). Other effects include a lack of understanding of what they're doing from young people, altered attitudes, values and thoughts about sex, impacts on sexual behaviours, the increased likelihood of committing a sexual offence, a greater sexual knowledge at a younger age, desensitisation, detrimental impacts on the development and wellbeing of young people, detrimental impacts on intimate relationships, and other societal consequences.

The sexualisation process influences the attitudes, values and thoughts or perceptions regarding sex that individuals within the affected society hold (Harris & Barlett, 2009). Individuals can come to hold the same worldviews about sex as those that are projected repeatedly by the media (Harris & Barlett, 2009). Young people who are exposed to media discussing or depicting sex regularly tend to think that sexual behaviours occur more frequently in society than they actually do (Bryant, 2009; Harris & Barlett, 2009). Views, attitudes and perceptions that have been proven to be adopted by those exposed to sexualised media include recreational and permissive sexual attitudes, premarital sex acceptance and liberal attitudes toward sex (Bryant, 2009; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012).

With such a great impact on values, attitudes and thoughts about sex, it is no wonder that the sexualisation of society has a major impact on the sexual behaviours of its inhabitants, including young people. Harris and Barlett (2009) reported a study that found that adolescents who had watched a high number of television programs containing content of a sexual nature had double the chance of having sex during the following year than adolescents who didn't watch much of the same material. Whilst engaging in sexual intercourse, females may begin to ignore or remove themselves from their own sexual feelings, making them feel as though they are unable to take control of what is happening or contribute to the situation they are in, consequently allowing their sexual partner full control over them (APA, 2007). Children as young as seven who are exposed to sexual material can also begin to experiment and try sexual behaviours with others, causing a myriad of further problems for the child and causing harm to others (Gale, 2011). Along with these negative consequences to sexual behaviours, some positive effects of the rise of sexual content in the media

have been demonstrated, such as those described in the paragraph below:
...after an *ER* episode with three minutes on emergency contraception, 51% of viewers reported talking with others about the issue, 23% sought information from another source, and 14% talked to their doctor about it (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002). After an episode of *Friends* that portrayed a pregnancy resulting from condom failure, about two-thirds of viewers aged 12 – 17 reported learning that condoms could fail and most remembered that six months later (Collins, et al., 2003). (Harris, 2009, p. 307 – 308)

Research shows that with the greater sexualised nature of society comes the greater likelihood for some to commit a sexual offence. APA (2007) reported that boys are more likely than girls to commit a sexual offence as a result of sexualisation. Those exposed to a high number of sexual materials that objectify women have been shown to agree more than those with less exposure to stereotypes regarding sex roles and sexual offending (APA, 2007). An example of the outcome of such effects is the recent prosecution of a boy aged 14 for raping a girl aged four, with the judge claiming that the young boy had been a victim of sexualisation (Pemberton, 2012).

Of extreme concern for the young people of society is the impact that sexualisation can have on one's development and wellbeing (Gale, 2011). Young people are at a developmental stage where sexualised messages may be more readily accepted than those at other ages (APA, 2007). Children may fail to develop a healthy body image and self-image, causing a range of possible problems throughout their lives (Government of Western Australia, 2012). Parents or others could worsen this effect, for example, some parents have allowed their daughters to have plastic surgery in an effort to make them more attractive or more sexy (APA, 2007). The sexualisation trend could also be detrimental to a young person's cognitive development, as with most of the individual's attention focused on their physical appearance, there are not many cognitive resources left for them to perform other activities (APA, 2007). Resulting from these and other factors, many outcomes associated with the young person's wellbeing could occur, including depression, low self-esteem, feelings of not being good enough, anxiety, disgust in oneself, lack of confidence, eating disorders, shame, high stress levels, lower academic effort and performance and a decreased satisfaction with life (APA, 2007; Gale, 2011; Government of Western Australia, 2012; Johnston & Ronken, 2008). Along with this, a young female may begin to self-objectify herself, placing high yet unnecessary importance on their appearance and sexuality and only feeling rewarded when these qualities are appreciated or recognised (APA, 2007; Johnston & Ronken, 2008). An example of these effects can be most readily and clearly seen in the following paragraph from APA (2007):

Particularly strong evidence of the media's role in shaping girls' body image can be seen in before and after analyses of cultures that are new to Western media. For example, in a study on adolescent ethnic Fijian girls in Western Fiji, Becker (2004) found that the beginnings of weight and body shape preoccupation, purging behaviour to control weight, and body disparagement were linked to the introduction of television. Before television, traditional Fijian culture emphasized a

robust body shape and based notions of identity not on the body but on family, community, and relationships. Three years after television was introduced, girls' eating behaviors and attitudes about their bodies had shifted, and rates of disordered eating had increased. (p. 24)

The sexualisation of society can influence people's intimate relationships with one another. Ringrose, et al. (2012) reported that sexualisation is transforming relationships, increasing fluidity and altering how people relate to each other. Due to the sexual objectification of women, males can fail to recognise them and relate to them on any other level than a sexual one, contributing to their inequality (APA, 2007). Young women are being educated about intimate relationships through the media, with their greatest source of education in the area reportedly coming from MTV (APA, 2007). Similarly, it has been shown that young girls who have been exposed to objectifying statements within magazines report less of an interest in having sexual relationships (Roberts & Gettman, 2004).

At a broader level, there are major consequences for the sexualised society, most prominently, sexism (APA, 2007). One study found that if a female applicant for a manager position looked sexy, then they were thought not as competent or intelligent as more conservative applicants and more negative emotions were experienced toward them from the participants (Glick, Larsen, Johnson & Branstiter, 2005). However, these effects did not exist if the applicant was applying for a receptionist position (Glick et al., 2005). With relation to children, if they are made to wear uniforms to school, then females are thought to have greater academic skills and be better behaved than those without (APA, 2007).

How to Counteract Sexualisation and Avoid the Negative Implications

Researchers have provided numerous suggestions to combat the occurrences and consequences of sexualisation, including recommendations for society and the media, schools, families and young females. The sexual influence of society could be decreased by reducing the sexual content that children can see in their environment (Bailey, 2011). For example, magazine covers containing sexual content could be removed from where children can see them or age ratings could be placed on music videos (Bailey, 2011). The products for children should not be marketed in an inappropriate manner, nor should the items available to them be (Bailey, 2011). Johnston and Ronken (2008) suggest that industry- wide regulations be instigated. Schools can increase young people's awareness of sexualisation and educate them on methods of avoiding such an occurrence through such programs such as media literacy and more sex education with a focus on responsibility and respect (APA, 2007). Parents and families can also contribute to the counteraction. For example, parents could endeavour to watch television and movies alongside their children to provide commentary on appropriateness (APA, 2007).

The Government of Western Australia (2012) provided the following checklist on their site for parents wishing to counteract and avoid the sexualisation of their children:

- “Tell your children from a very early age, and often, that they are loved for who they are.
- As they get older, help them to understand that beliefs that link ‘beauty’ with happiness and success are mistaken.
- With adolescents, explain that ads are designed to make you think that being sexy is the same as being successful, but this isn’t true.
- Minimise children’s exposure to commercial media and kids’ magazines.
- Don’t dress your child as a little adult.
- Help your child to understand the difference between public and private behaviour – some things are OK at home but not in public.
- Don’t buy make-up, high heeled shoes and skimpy clothing or bras for young girls.
- Congratulate department stores that offer good choices in clothing.
- Boycott products that are advertised in a way that exploits children.
- Use the Advertising Standards Bureau’s free public complaints service to complain about inappropriate advertising in the mainstream media” (The Government of Western Australia, 2012, “What can parents do?”).

Finally, young girls could be approached directly to encourage activism and resistance against sexualisation and objectification, along with being encouraged to be a part of girl empowerment groups (APA, 2007).

Sexting and Other new Sexual Behaviour: Inspired by Technology



The creation of a variety of new technologies which have become available along with the previously discussed sexualisation of society have led to the increase of sexual opportunities for children, pre-teens and teenagers, both wanted and unwanted. This is also encouraged by the natural and long withstanding quality of curiosity and the sexual development stages experienced by those in these age groups (Seitz, 2011; Ronken & Johnston, 2012). These factors also allow for more private experiences and relationships, often hidden from parents even though they may be happening whilst the young person is in their bedroom (Seitz, 2011). Unwanted sexual messages received online, new concerns related to mobile phones, and 'sexting' are all discussed in the following sections.

Unwanted Sexual Messages Received Online

The modern use of technology has opened up a whole new arena for sexual predators to find their next victims and even for peers to sexually harass others online. GuardChild (2013) reported that in their survey of adolescents who used the Internet, 20% had been targeted online for sexual solicitation. Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig (2012) reported that almost half of the children in their study who had received sexual messages while online were negatively impacted, a phenomenon which was much more likely for girls and for younger children. Similarly, Ronken and Johnston (2012) reported that out of those children that use the Internet, one in five had been approached for sexual solicitation online. Supporting these facts, the following responses were given to the survey question asked by Livingstone, Haddon and Gorzig (2012), "What things on the internet would bother people about your age?" (p. 17):

- 'If people take a picture of you and they edit it and make you look bad and they put it on the internet.' (girl, 9, Ireland)
- 'A person asked me to show my breasts on the webcam.' (girl, 11, Belgium)
- 'In online games where you can get some bonus points. When a child meets someone unknown in such a game and that person offers him or her buying those points if the child sends him some naked photos.' (boy, 12, Czech Republic)
- 'In social networking sites it bothers me if there are foreigners who start bothering you and writing to you. They often ask for your MSN in order to see your webcam.' (girl, 16, Estonia)' (Livingstone, Haddon & Gorzig, 2012, p. 153)

Another concerning quote comes from Commonwealth of Australia (2011) from a

15-year-old female:

About a month ago I went on MSN and had heaps of friends that I knew that wanted to add me. While I was accepting the ones I knew and declining the ones I didn't, I accidentally accepted one I didn't know. When I saw that I'd added them, I messaged them and said "Hey, do I know you?" They replied by saying "No, well, sort of." But I honestly didn't know this person. I had never met them or even heard of them. Anyway, I left the room with my friend and I left for about 2 hours and completely forgot about my msn. When I got back in my room I remembered and went and checked it. When I looked at my chat screen with this person, there was a massive amount of abuse towards me on there. Such as threatening to rape me, then kill me, and then eat my flesh. I was so scared. I still am today, I'm afraid that this person knows a lot about me, knows what school I go to or knows where I live and that they are going to come and do what they said. It's scary going through that thought everyday. (p. 125 – 126)

New Concerns Relating to Mobiles

With the advent and increased use of mobile phones come further concerns for the safety of young people. Communication that occurs via the mobile more is more frequent and is able to happen in a private and personal setting (Ronken & Johnston, 2012). The necessity of mobile phones, as previously discussed, also makes the younger ages groups an easier target for sexual predators (Ronken & Johnston, 2012).

Not only do sexual predators take advantage of this and associated technologies (such as mobile apps for chatting), a child or teenager's peers are also able to easily contact each other as demonstrated by the following section from Ringrose, et al.'s (2012) interviews with young people. This comes from a 15-year-old female respondent who uses 'BBM', or Blackberry Messenger Broadcast, on her mobile phone, like the majority of her peers at her U.K. school (Ringrose et al., 2012).

But like our phones play a massive part in relationships. Like phone calls until late hours. Texting, not as much because now we have got BBM. BBM is like Match.com basically, you have got everyone there and it is like – and people send broadcasts over BBM. Like there will be a smiley face and then next to the smiley face there will be something like 'Would you have sex with me?' 'Would you do this, would you do that' and then by sending that broadcast, like the boy will answer it and then you will start talking to them and it is just like ... Like the question will be like, 'Would you have sex with me lights on/lights off. Socks on/socks off. What position? To what music? Condom or no condom? Stuff like that... (Ringrose et al., 2012, p. 27 – 28)

‘Sexting’

Information and Statistics on ‘Sexting’

One of the most popular new forms of sexual expression and sexual behaviour is ‘sexting’. Basically, ‘sexting’ “refers to sending and receiving sexually suggestive images, videos, or texts on cell phones [mobiles] (Weisskirch & Delvi, 2011, ‘Abstract’). This can occur either in an ‘aggravated’ manner, whereby criminal action is involved (for example, a sexual predator requesting images) or an ‘experimental’ manner, whereby the individual acts out of romantic interests or a need for attention (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011).

Recent statistics show that of 1,839 teenagers, 15% who had access to mobiles had ‘sexted’ before, and over half knew someone else who had (Rice, et al., 2012). Furthermore, those who had ‘sexted’ in the past were more likely than those who hadn’t to be sexually active (Rice, et al., 2012). Whilst there are many sources reporting a high rate of ‘sexting’ among young people (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Ferguson, 2013; GuardChild, 2013; Ringrose et al., 2012), there are some reporting lower rates (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2012). This difference in findings is most likely due to the fact that individuals may not be truthful in their reporting of ‘sexting’ behaviours (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Both females and individuals with higher levels of testosterone than most others have been found to be more likely to engage in ‘sexting’ (GuardChild, 2013; Roher, 2012).

Other factors that make an individual more likely to ‘sex’ include being motivated by celebrities who post ‘selfies’ (TheHuffingtonPost, 2013) or if they manage their own phone account, rather than their parents (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Although young people may be willing to engage in ‘sexting’ behaviours, as with many other effects of sexualisation, they may not completely understand ‘sexting’ or be able to recognise when it is occurring (Seitz, 2011). Instead, Seitz (2011) states that young people are more concerned with the outcomes of such behaviour, such as connectivity through sharing or being able to exact revenge.

Implications of ‘Sexting’

As a consequence of the sexualisation of society, ‘sexting’ brings with it a variety of implications for young people, including the objectification of girls, negative impacts on an individual’s wellbeing and the increase of sexual aggression and violence (Livingstone, Haddon & Gorzig, 2012; Seitz, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2012; Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2012). Ringrose et al. (2012) identified the following major issues when it comes to ‘sexting’: Young people feel a big threat from their fellow students online; ‘sexting’ can be a form of bullying; females feel and experience the greatest impact from ‘sexting’; technology makes the problems identified with pornography viewing worse; a variety of pressures resulting from sexualisation are revealed by studying ‘sexting’; that children are being influenced at younger ages than ever before; cultures (including race) influences the sexual pressures placed on young people, and the fact that school-aged children required more support and knowledge to help them successfully cope.

The legal consequences of this type of sexual behaviour have been one of the biggest concerns with children being charged with child pornography offences and being placed on the register of sex offenders held by governments (Flood, 2009b; Kendall, 2012). Laws have not been developed to address 'sexting', and so, the act is not excluded from those addressing child pornography, resulting in these arrests and charges (Wastler, 2010). Wolak, Finkelhor and Mitchell (2012) emphasise this issue, reporting that in America from 2008 to 2009, around 3,500 cases had involved young people and 'sexting'. Unfortunately, these acts of impulse and exploration are being enacted without the young individual's knowledge of any legal ramifications (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2012). This accentuates the fact that more knowledge and information is required to be shared with young people in order to aid them in making informed and sensible decisions (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones & Wolak, 2012). Not only can an individual's criminal profile be tarnished, but their "digital reputation" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p.142) can be tainted, meaning that future employers or any other instigators of future opportunities for the young individual will forever be able to trace and see the sexual posts previously made by the person (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

Avoiding the Impacts of 'Sexting'

Past research has demonstrated ways in which the impacts discussed above may be avoided. Professor Karen Vered emphasised in an article by the Commonwealth of Australia (2011) that instead of ignoring or denying the natural sexual exploration of young people, society should recognise this journey and share advice, information and materials with them. It has been suggested that 'sexting' should not be a criminal act under some circumstances, separating private experimentation from private sharing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2012).

At the same time, it will not do the young people well if they only hear the extreme negative consequences of 'sexting' without compassion and support from parents or caregivers, which could result in depression or self-harm if the child feels they have destroyed the rest of their life (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Other suggestions have included explaining to children what is appropriate and safe and what is not, parents learning about modern technologies and their uses, new legislation, parents being open to discussions about such matters, additions to school curriculum to address 'sexting' concerns (preferably in single sex groups) and for parents to use blocking options on their children's mobiles (Ringrose et al., 2012; Ronken & Johnston, 2012).

Conclusion

Previous research on the impacts of pornography has provided enough evidence to provoke concern and a need for action; however, it also has highlighted the severe lack of ongoing research in this area. This is a worrisome reality considering the consequences that have been associated with children and young people's exposure to pornography and the increased accessibility of material.

While the evidence boasts unarguably high rates of the behaviours discussed (including viewing pornography and 'sexting'), more of a consensus needs to be reached regarding the impacts and outcomes of such behaviours. Furthermore, information relating to how to counteract and avoid such behaviours or consequences is even more inadequate. Once more awareness is raised through conclusive and decisive research, perhaps more action will be undertaken to make the changes that are necessary for the utmost benefit of children, pre-teens and teenagers and of society.



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