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ENGL 110

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The Underlying Effects of Pornography

The adult pornography industry is one of the biggest moneymaking machines in the modern day, with the industry raking in upwards of 97 billion dollars globally. Of that 97 billion, approximately 13 billion dollars comes from the United States, which is more than the NFL, NHL, and NBA combined. (Internet Filter Review, 2006). Sex, like all things in a capitalist society, is seen as a commodity, to be bought and sold. As the discussion around sex has turned from taboo to a hyper-acceptance in recent years, one needs to consider the long-term effects on consumers' mind and behavior. These topics, which have been continued to be reported on for decades, are now overshadowed by an accepting, liberating philosophy surrounding adult content, with sites such as Onlyfans being a catalyst for this new form of an accepted career path, enabling many who otherwise lack any other form of income to become financially self-sustaining. Pornography, while seen by many as a natural form of sexuality, should not be consumed, as the impact pornography has on one's brain and one's relationships with others, and the effects had on those who consume such material, outweigh the potential monetary benefits pornography production provides.

First, one can turn to the direct impact porn consumption has on the brain. In a study titled *Neuroscience of Internet Pornography Addiction: A Review and Update*, author Todd Love, among many other researchers, concluded that internet pornography addiction functions in similar ways as substance addiction, such as alcohol or cocaine (Love, 2015). In another study titled *Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated With Pornography Consumption:*

The Brain on Porn. authors Simone Kühn and Jürgen Gallinat discover that “a significant negative association between reported pornography hours per week and gray matter volume in the right caudate, as well as with functional activity during a sexual cue–reactivity paradigm in the left putamen” (Kühn, 2014) Gray matter is extremely important when pertaining to brain activity, as levels of such material affects one’s memory and critical-thinking. By having decreased gray matter, the negative effects speak for themselves. Not only does porn use have negative impacts on your brain, but it also has a negative impact on your relationships with others. One of the most prevalent and concerning ways porn warps the mind is how a consumer’s view on women changes. An article titled *Media and Sexualization: State of Empirical Research, 1995–2015*, goes into this very topic, with porn use increasing the rates of body dissatisfaction, self objectification, sexist beliefs, sexual violence, and diminished views on women’s competence, morality, and humanity. (Ward, 2016) Porn can not only affect the way consumers view females who are strangers, but also those closest to them, even their own spouses. In an article titled *Pornography Use and Marital Separation: Evidence from two wave panel data*, author Samuel Perry, through statistically analysing and comparing spouses porn consumption habits in 2006, compared to the same couples divorce rates in 2012, Perry concluded that “married Americans who viewed pornography at all in 2006 were more than twice as likely as those who did not view pornography to experience a separation by 2012, even after controlling for 2006 marital happiness and sexual satisfaction as well as relevant sociodemographic correlates.” (Perry, 2018) Adult usage is prevalent, but also is bleeding over into the younger population as well.

One as well should be conscious of the user-base who is consuming this type of material, especially when creating such material. While many consumers are in the adult age range, there

is an ever-so-growing amount of watchers who are well under the age of 18. In an article published by the Independent, author Jonathan Owen reveals that “Children as young as 11 are regularly exposed to online porn, and by the age of 14, 45% are watching explicit content on the web, according to the report by the Institute of Public Policy Research think tank. (Owens, 2014) Not only are children viewing porn more commonly than ever before, parents, who often aim to shield their children from such sexual material aren’t even aware of their children’s true consumption habits. In a research article titled *Young people, Pornography & Age-verification*, there was a significant disconnect between parents’ perceptions of their children’s pornographic consumption, with 75% of parents expected their child to have not seen pornography online, but of those children, 53% said they had in fact seen porn. (BBFC, January 2020) Parents are not fully aware of their children's access and consumption of porn, and children are easily accessing such material, with lack of age verification being at the forefront. Nearly 74 percent of pornography websites surveyed display adult content on their homepage (accessible to anyone) before asking if the viewers are of legal age. (Enough is Enough, 2025) Not only is this material just a few clicks away, the material as stated before, contains aggressive, violent behavior, which can have detrimental effects on one’s perception of others. In a 2023 study titled *Teens and Pornography*, it was found that 52% of teens exposed to pornography reported seeing violent forms of pornography such as choking (36%), someone in pain (37%), or depictions of what appears to be rape (19%) (Common Sense Media, 2022) This consumption of borderline sexual-abuse material, impacts a child’s brain in a similar fashion as adults, increasing sexual aggression and violence. In an article titled *X-rated material and perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior among children and adolescents: is there a link?* “Among the 10–15 year old respondents surveyed nationally in the Growing up with Media study, self-reports of

intentional exposure to x-rated violent material are associated with significantly higher odds of reporting perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior.” (Ybarra, 2011) Not only is violent pornography being exposed to children, which warps their view of sex itself, it also triggers a possible repeat of this cycle of abuse, with many children then growing up with sexually aggressive behaviors, possibly becoming a sexual predator or perpetrator themselves. Children are as well are put at an increased risk fo being sexually abused themselves. A meta-analysis of 37 studies, conducted by psychiatrists such as Jessica Laird, Bianca Klettke and Kate Hall, found that exposure to violent or rape pornography increased a child’s odds of experiencing sexual exploitation 3-5 times (Laird, 2020). Putting children in danger of sexual exploitation can also lead to the production of the final topic this essay will touch on, pornographic material that contains children.

CSAM, an abbreviation for child sexual assault material, is one of the darkest forms of pornographic content that possibly exists, involving the rape and sexual abuse of children. Coming from a cyber tipline aimed at combating the creation and spread of such material, they stated that “In 2024 alone, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) received reports of more than 62 million images of suspected CSAM, and received more than 546,000 reports concerning online enticement - a 192% increase compared to reports in 2023.” (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cyber Tipline, 2024) This isn’t just a dark corner of the online pornographic sphere, it is a major market being catered to at this very moment. With the dangers of different adult hardcore, sexually aggressive material that already circulates amongst countless porn sites, categories such as ‘barely legal’ ‘petite’ ‘young’ and ‘teen’ rank at the top consistently. The fixation on more and more intense material, especially pertaining to younger age groups, while technically legal, can lead one down a dark path. In an

article titled “Does Deviant Pornography Use follow a Guttman-like Progression?” authors Kathryn C. Seigfried-Spellar and Marcus Rogers delve into the topic on whether child-pornography users consume different forms of deviant content, such as bestiality or sadism, and whether they are more likely to consume such material the longer they consume media of sexual nature. They state that “interviews with child pornography consumers have suggested some offenders move “through a variety of pornographies, each time accessing more extreme material” (Quayle & Taylor, 2002, p. 343), (Spellar and Rogers, 2013). As mentioned earlier, pornography dependency works in a similar fashion as alcohol or cocaine dependency, so one would assume the same type of tolerance build up, one that can only be satisfied with more intense usage. Going off of the facts of how prevalent themes of, and explicit forms of CSAM exists in the porn industry, Spellar and Rogers go on to reveal that “desensitization may put an individual at risk for progression from nondeviant to deviant pornography behaviors.” This in turn implies that you are more likely to witness online minor intercourse the longer you consume such pornographic material, due to its extreme and violent nature, rather than its immediate association with children. (Spellar and Rogers, 2013) In A 2022 survey of dark web users conducted by Finnish nonprofit Suojellaan Lapsia Ry, they found that at least 37% of global respondents reported seeking direct contact with a child after viewing CSAM. (Suojellaan Lapsia Ry, July 11, 2021) This consumption of illegal material of child sexual exploitation can trigger a consumer to actually seek out and perform the abuse themselves, which is a horrifying reality considering the previously stated increased rate of children being subjected to abuse after viewing similar material.

Porn consumption is pushing both adults and children into abusive circumstances, but porn production, on the other hand, presents many benefits towards adults who are willing to

participate in the creation of such material. Many of those who produce their own pornography make their living through such means, especially those who have disabilities/struggle working with certain conditions in the workplace. Porn production can be an accessible and rewarding way for them to receive income, as well as be independent and work from home. Onlyfans, one of the most prominent up-in-coming porn platforms, creates a safer, more regulated form of production, locking content behind age-restrictions and pay-walls, shielding the eyes of impressionable children. OnlyFans specifically can opens doors to be create one's own image and brand, as many onlyfans stars who started on OnlyFans, now do big projects and make money outside of only fans through social media marketing, podcasts, vlogs, YouTube etc. In an interview personally conducted with famous onlyfans star Kayla Raine, who produces content on the platform as a double-amputee, advocates for the profession, stating:

“For me personally Onlyfans has opened up so many doors for me and I am very grateful for it. Before my family was very low income and I struggled finding work and I was living off of disability checks and now I can fully support myself. I bought a car, buying a house in the next year (all in cash) I've met big names not even just in the only fans industry, I've had brands reach out to me, I've been on podcasts, I've been invited to creator events etc. so I feel like onlyfans is a way bigger job than people make it out to be.”

In conclusion, while pornography production might be a viable career option for those who might not have any other option, the risks of porn consumption cannot be ignored. Pornography negatively impacts one's critical thinking, memory, and view of others, especially women, and has even encouraged consumption of more explicit, even sometimes illegal material such as CSAM. Children are also put at risk due to it's easy accessibility and lack of age-verification on

many websites across the internet, and having similar, but more detrimental effects on their psyche. Both age groups are in danger of slipping down a slope of increasingly more hardcore material as usage continues. Viewing this violent, sometimes illegal material can lead both children and adults to become victims, and perpetrators, of the same abuse they witness. While the answer may be thought to be through legislation and regulation, such actions are unlikely to happen due to its massive monetary incentive. Not only does The US domestically produce a total of 13 billion dollars annually through pornography, the US coincidentally hosts more CSAM online than any other country in the world, with 30% of the global total of CSAM URLs at the end of March 2022, according to the Internet Watch Foundation. (Rhiannon, 2022)

Pornography isn't going to disappear any time soon, especially in the US, as there is a clear market for such material. Pornography, whether beneficial for those who create it, should not be consumed.

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