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The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research¹

“The Internet is transforming the experience of growing up in America. It is also transforming the job of being a parent in America. The Internet brings the world—the good, the bad, and the ugly—to the American family’s doorstep. It brings the ruins of ancient Athens to that doorstep, but it also brings the red light district of Bangkok.”²

The Internet has been synergistically linked to human sexuality since its inception.³ In fact, pornography was one of the early financial engines⁴ that helped transform the Internet from a relatively unknown U.S. military research project⁵ into a burgeoning information, communications, and commercial highway of global proportion.

The coupling of technology with sexuality has brought forth a unique continuum of benefits and risks for society. For example, there is now greater access to information regarding sexual education and sexual health,⁶ as well as new options for connecting with romantic partners.⁷ On the other hand, the Internet has become a highly effective and profitable means of distributing sexually explicit material, as well as a sophisticated conduit for compulsive sexual behavior, sex trafficking, and sex crime.⁸ In speaking to these risks, several experts in the field of mental health contend online sexual pursuits are “a hidden public health hazard exploding, in part, because very few are recognizing it as such or taking it seriously.”⁹

¹ At the time this research review was conducted, the author was a Visiting Social Science Fellow at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. The views expressed in this testimony and submission for the record, however, are the author’s and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

²Third Way Culture Project. (2005). The porn standard: Children and pornography on the Internet. Retrieved August 3, 2005, from http://www.third-way.com/products/THE_PORN_STANDARD.pdf.

³Cooper, A., Griffin-Shelley, E., Delmonico, D. L., & Mathy, R. M. (2001). Online sexual problems: Assessment and predictive variables. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 8, 267–285; Stefanac, S. (1993, April). Sex and the new media. *NewMedia*, 3(4), 38–45.

⁴Cooper, A., Griffin-Shelley, E., Delmonico, D. L., & Mathy, R. M. (2001). Online sexual problems: Assessment and predictive variables. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 8, 267–285.

⁵Internet Society (2005). A brief history of the Internet and related networks. Retrieved June 9, 2005, from <http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/cerf.shtml>; Delmonico, D. L., & Carnes, P. J. (1999). Virtual sex addiction: When cybersex becomes the drug of choice. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, (2) 5, 457–463.

⁶Barak, A., & Fisher, W. A. (2001). Toward an Internet-driven, theoretically-based innovative approach to sex education. *Journal of Sex Research*, 38, 324–332; Newman, G. (1997). The use of online services to encourage exploration of egodystonic sexual interests. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 22(1), 45–48.

⁷Cooper, A., Boies, S., Maheu, M., & Greenfield, D. (1999). Sexuality and the Internet: The next sexual revolution. In F. Muscarella & L. Szuchman (Eds.), *The psychological science of sexuality: A research based approach* (pp. 519–545). New York: Wiley.

⁸Galbreath, N. & Berlin, F. (2002). Paraphilias and the Internet. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 187–205). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

⁹Cooper, A., Delmonico, D. L., & Burg, R. (2000). Cybersex users, abusers, and compulsives: New findings and implications. *Sexual Addictions & Compulsivities*, 7, 5–29.

Moreover, because the sex industry has an unprecedented proximity to the home and work environments, couples, families, and individuals of all ages are being impacted by pornography in new ways. While much remains unknown about the impact of Internet pornography on marriages and families, the social science data that is available provides a foundation from which social policy and research agendas may be explored in an informed manner.

Objective

The objective of this review is to compile the current, empirical findings that examine the relationship between Internet pornography and its impact on marital relationships and families, including children and adolescents. Individual effects are summarized to provide background on this issue. An emphasis is placed on empirical research, contained in peer-reviewed journals and conducted since the early 1990s, when the Internet became a widespread medium for sexually explicit materials and online sexual pursuits.¹⁰ Information regarding: (a) definitions, (b) key assumptions, (c) the virtual square, (d) the pornography debate, (e) Internet usage, (f) online sexual activity,¹¹ and (g) contrary findings may be found in the appendixes.

Terminology

A common challenge when attempting to compare and contrast research findings related to pornography is that diverse definitions and types of pornography exist. Subsequently, different definitions and genres of pornography have been employed in research studies, thereby complicating a coherent synthesis of key findings. In past reviews, the operationalization of terms, or the lack thereof, has been a common critique and limitation of many studies.¹² Furthermore, many agree that “pornography is an elusive term with a range of meanings, dependent not only on cultural, social, and historical contexts, but also on individuals’ own experiences and beliefs”¹³ and that trying to find a common definition is not only futile, but need not be distinguished from the more positively viewed erotica.¹⁴

While the definitional challenges cannot be avoided entirely, it is hoped that providing a glossary of terms (See Appendix A) will reasonably diminish this issue for this compilation. The following terms are defined in the glossary: pornography, Internet pornography, obscenity, erotica, online sexual behavior, cybersex, sexual addiction, and sexual compulsivity. The glossary also includes information regarding the prevalence of sexual addictions. Definitions generated within the medical and social sciences as well as legal discourses were given priority.

¹⁰Cooper, A., Galbreath, N., & Becker, M. A. (2004). Sex on the Internet: Furthering our understanding of men with online sexual problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 18(3), 223–230; Schneider, J. P. (2003). The impact of compulsive cybersex behaviors on the family. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 329–354.

¹¹See Appendix A (A. 5) for a definition of online sexual activity.

¹²Ciclitira, K. (2002). Researching pornography and sexual bodies. *The Psychologist*, 15(4), 191–194.

¹³Kendrick, W. (1997). *The secret museum*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. In K. Ciclitira (2000), Researching pornography and sexual bodies. *The Psychologist*, 15(4), 191–194.

¹⁴Russell, D. E. H. (1998). *Dangerous relationships: Pornography, misogyny, and rape*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Internet Pornography as a Distinct Genre

Internet pornography is distinct from other forms of pornography because of the “Triple-A Engine” effect of *accessibility*, *affordability* and *anonymity* — a combination of traits unique to the virtual square.¹⁵ Additionally, Delmonico, Griffin and Moriarty refer to the “Cyberhex of the Internet” which includes *intoxicating*, *isolating*, *integral*, *inexpensive*, *imposing* and *interactive* as characteristics that make the Internet a unique and powerful medium.¹⁶

The “Triple-A Engine” effect, in particular, is widely accepted as the primary reason why many pre-existing problems with other forms of pornography have been exacerbated in the last decade, and why many individuals have been drawn into problematic pornography consumption that otherwise would not been involved with this material prior to the advent of the Internet.¹⁷ As Leiblum and Döring state,

Personal inhibition levels, social controls, and the lack of willing partners and sexual scenes that may limit sexual activity in everyday contexts are obsolete in cyberspace. It is easy for latent desires to be realized in cyberspace. Internet sexuality may thus serve as a catalyst.¹⁸

Although research identifies young males as the predominant consumers of pornography regardless of the technological forum,¹⁹ many in the field of sexual addictions argue that online sexual activity has expanded the range of male and female consumers.²⁰ The changing demographics of consumption, however, are not yet reflected in the research literature.

The other unprecedented characteristic of Internet pornography is the ease with which children and adolescents have access to it – both solicited and unsolicited access. In the past, the adult bookstore or restricted movie theatre was a tangible gatekeeper or buffer to minors being exposed to this material, albeit not impenetrable. Currently, anyone can be a consumer and/or target of sexually explicit material. A startling indicator of this indiscriminating accessibility, not to mention strategic consumer targeting, is to consider that Nielsen//NetRatings (2005), a reputable and well-recognized source for online audience measurement, now includes children beginning at two years of age in their demographic statistics for so-called ‘adult’ traffic.²¹

¹⁵ Cooper, A. (1998). Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), 181-187.

¹⁶ Delmonico, D. L., Griffin, E. J., & Moriarty, J. (2001). *Cybersex Unhooked: A workbook for breaking free from compulsive online sexual behavior*. Center City: MN: Hazelden Educational Press.

¹⁷ Cooper, A., Boies, S., Maheu, M., & Greenfield, D. (1999). Sexuality and the Internet: The next sexual revolution. In F. Muscarella & L. Szuchman (Eds.), *The psychological science of sexuality: A research based approach* (pp. 519-545). New York, NY: Wiley.

¹⁸ Leiblum, S., & Döring, N. (1998). Internet sexuality: Known risks and fresh chances for women. In Cooper, A. (1998). Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), p.29.

¹⁹ Buzzell, T. (2005). The effects of sophistication, access and monitoring on use of pornography in three technological contexts. *Deviant Behavior*, 26, 109-132.

²⁰ Cooper, A., Putnam, D. E., Planchon, L. A., & Boies, S. C. (1999). Online sexual compulsivity: Getting tangled in the net. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 6, 79-104.

²¹ Nielsen//NetRatings. (April 2005). Retrieved directly from Nielsen//NetRatings May 25, 2005.

THE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON INDIVIDUALS: AN OVERVIEW

A vast body of research and literature deals with the impact of pornography consumption on individuals, especially males.²² Research regarding the impact of pornography consumption on individuals has been gathered through various means.²³ For example, surveys, federal commissions, experimental laboratory studies, clinical work, qualitative research, anecdotal accounts, and research with sex offenders have all been sources of pornography-related research. Some of the main criticism of this research body to date relates to the merits of experimental versus non-experimental research; definitions of pornography; the role of confounding variables (e.g., genre of pornography used or degree of violence in the material); and insufficient statistical power due to small sample sizes.²⁴

While the scientific community has not reached a consensus regarding pornography's effect,²⁵ substantial data show that pornography correlates with various negative outcomes. Criticism of such claims points to other associations and explanations for the correlates²⁶ or dismisses the existence of reliable effects all together.²⁷ Much of the criticism of this literature is a result of researchers inferring that correlational relationships translate into causal relationships.

Overview of the Negative Effects of General Pornography Consumption

Prior to the advent of Internet pornography, two of the most frequently cited researchers of pornography's effects were Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant. Zillman and Bryant's (1984 and 1988) findings sparked considerable debate and criticism for a number of reasons. The main criticisms pertained to the fact that their research was: (a) limited to experimental situations, (b) lacked real punishment or social controls, (c) used college students as the normative group, and (d) was unable to ethically produce real violence.²⁸ With that said, many consider their results to be reliable and valid, and their work has continued to be referenced for nearly two decades.

For this paper, Zillman and Bryant's (1984 and 1988) work is used to give a general overview of the kinds of effects with which pornography has been associated and those that have fueled debate. Zillman and Bryant found the effects of repeated exposure to standard, non-violent, and commonly available pornography included: (1) increased callousness toward women; (2) trivialization of rape as a criminal offense; (3) distorted perceptions about sexuality; (4) increased appetite for more deviant and bizarre types of pornography (escalation and addiction);

²²Malamuth, N. M. (1996). Sexually explicit media, gender differences and evolutionary theory. *Journal of Communication*, 46, 8–31.

²³Itzin, C. (2002). Pornography and the construction of misogyny. *The Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 8(3), 4–42.

²⁴Allen, J. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 5–14.

²⁵Allen, M., D'Alessio, D., & Brezgel, K. (1995). A meta-analysis summarizing the effects of pornography II: Aggression after exposure. *Human Communication Research*, 22(2), 258–283.

²⁶Allen, M. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 5–14.

²⁷Brannigan, A. (1997). The postmodern experiment: Science and ontology in experimental social psychology. *British Journal of Sociology*, 48, 594–610; Fisher, W. A., & Grenier, G. (1994). Violent pornography, antiwoman thoughts, and antiwoman acts: In search of reliable effects. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 31, 23–38.

²⁸Davies, K. A. (1997). Voluntary exposure to pornography and men's attitudes toward feminism and rape. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 34(2), 131–137.

(5) devaluation of monogamy; (6) decreased satisfaction with a partner's sexual performance, affection, and physical appearance; (7) doubts about the value of marriage; (8) decreased desire to have children; and (9) viewing non-monogamous relationships as normal and natural behavior.²⁹

Catherine Itzin is another researcher who argues pornography is associated with harm.³⁰ In her edited compilation *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties*, Itzin points out that papers by Einsiedel,³¹ Weaver,³² and Russell,³³ review over 300 pieces of research and that the majority of the studies reviewed provide support for pornography-related harm. Additionally, Einsiedel's work regarding the negative impact of sexually violent materials is also supported by Donnerstein, Linz, and Penrod;³⁴ Linz and Penrod,³⁵ and Check.³⁶

Mulac, Jansma, and Linz's 2002 study added an important layer of empirical support to the harm-related position, as well as overcoming some of the limitations of prior research conducted in laboratory settings and lacking real-life applicability.³⁷ Mulac, Jansma, and Linz studied 71 men interacting with women in problem-solving dyads after watching one of three types of films: (1) sexually explicit and degrading to women, (2) sexually explicit but non-degrading, and (3) non-sexual. Results showed that the men who viewed either of the sexually explicit films displayed more dominance and anxiety, ignored the contributions of their partner more often, touched their partner for longer periods of time, and averted gaze more than the participants who had viewed the non-sexual film. The researchers concluded the impact of sexually explicit material on behavior is more complex than is often assumed in pornography research, but that a negative impact exists.

Meta-Analyses of Individual Effects

Although reviews by social scientists can be useful in generating research questions and general understanding, meta-analyses provide a more rigorous comparison of research studies because they average the effects across multiple studies and subsequently simulate the effect of

²⁹Drake, R. E. (1994). Potential health hazards of pornography consumption as viewed by psychiatric nurses. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 8(2), 101–106; Zillman, D., & Bryant, J. (1982). Pornography, sexual callousness, and the trivialization of rape. *Journal of Communication*, 32(4), 10–21; Zillman, D., & Bryant, J. (1984). Effects of massive exposure to pornography. In N. M. Malamuth & E. Donnerstein (Eds.), *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (pp. 115–138). Orlando, FL: Academic; Zillman, D., & Bryant, J. (1988, December). Effects of prolonged consumption of pornography on family values. *Journal of Family Issues*, 9(4), 518–544.

³⁰Itzin, C. (2002). Pornography and the construction of misogyny. *The Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 8(3), 4–42.

³¹Einsiedel, E. (1992). The experimental research evidence: Effects of pornography on the “average individual.” In C. Itzin (Ed.), *Pornography: Women, violence and civil liberties*. pp. 248–284.

³²Weaver, J. (1992). The social science and psychological research evidence: Perceptual and behavioral consequences of exposure to pornography. In C. Itzin (Ed.), *Pornography: Women, violence and civil liberties*. (pp. 284–310). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

³³Russell, D. E. H. (1995). *Against pornography: The evidence of harm*. Berkeley, CA: Russell Publications.

³⁴Donnerstein, E., Linz, D., & Penrod, S. (1987). *The question of pornography: Research findings and policy implications*. New York, NY: Free Press.

³⁵Linz, D., & Penrod, S. (1988). Effects of long-term exposure to violent and sexually degrading depictions of women. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 55, 758–768.

³⁶Check, J. V. P. (1992). The effects of violent pornography, nonviolent dehumanizing pornography and erotica: Some legal implications from a Canadian perspective. In C. Itzin (Ed.), *Pornography: Women, violence and civil liberties*. (pp. 350–359). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

³⁷Mulac, A., Jansma, L. L., & Linz, D. G. (2002). Men's behavior toward women after viewing sexually-explicit films: Degradation makes a difference. *Communication Monographs*, 69(4), 311–328.

having a larger sample in one study.³⁸ Another way of describing this is to think of meta-analyses as putting diverse studies on a level playing field so that they can be compared in a consistent way, thereby increasing the power of the respective studies.

Overview of Effects

One of the most comprehensive meta-analyses regarding pornography's effects on individuals is a relatively recent study conducted by Oddone-Paolucci, Genius, and Violato (2000).³⁹ For this meta-analysis, 46 studies published in various academic journals were analyzed to determine the effect of pornography on: (a) sexual deviancy (e.g., excessive or ritualistic masturbation); (b) sexual perpetration (e.g., rape); (c) attitudes regarding intimate relationships (e.g., viewing people as sexual objects); and (d) attitudes regarding the rape myth (e.g., believing women cause rape or rapists deserve lenient sentences). In order to be selected for the meta-analysis, each study had to include a sample size of 12 or greater and include a comparison group. The studies ranged in date from 1962 to 1995 and comprised a total sample of 12,323 people. Eighty-five percent of the studies (39) were conducted in the United States, 11 percent (5) were conducted in Canada, and two studies were conducted in Europe. Table 1 shows the number of studies and sample size for each outcome examined in the meta-analysis.

One reason this study is particularly useful is that nine different characteristics of the participants and the pornographic material consumed are taken into consideration: age of exposure, gender, socioeconomic status, number of exposure incidents, relation of person who introduced pornography to the user, degree of sexual explicitness, subject of the pornography, medium used to consume pornography, and definition of pornography.

Oddone-Paolucci, Genius, and Violato found that exposure to pornographic material puts one at increased risk for developing sexually deviant tendencies, committing sexual offenses, experiencing difficulties in one's intimate relationships, and accepting rape myths. In terms of the degree of risk, the analysis revealed a 31 percent increase in the risk of sexual deviancy, a 22 percent increase in the risk of sexual perpetration, a 20 percent increase in the risk of experiencing negative intimate relationships, and a 31 percent increase in the risk of believing rape myths.⁴⁰

The researchers acknowledged that while pornography is likely not a solitary influence in people's lives, exposure to pornography is one important factor that contributes directly to the development of sexually dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors. The researchers concluded, "In order to promote a healthy and stable society, it is time that we attend to the culmination of sound empirical research."⁴¹

Negative Effect on Aggression

³⁸Allen, M. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 5–14.

³⁹Oddone-Paolucci, E., Genius, M., & Violato, C. (January 2000). A meta-analysis of the published research on the effects of pornography. *The Changing Family and Child Development*, 48–59.

⁴⁰These percentages were based on the average weighted Cohen *d* scores, which is a measure of effect size.

Uncorrected average weighted *d* scores were also available for all of the outcomes. Correcting for demographics (i.e., age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.), the effect sizes were higher for deviancy and intimate relations; corrected *d* scores were not available for the sex perpetration or rape myth outcomes.

⁴¹Oddone-Paolucci, E., Genius, M., & Violato, C. (January 2000). A meta-analysis of the published research on the effects of pornography. *The Changing Family and Child Development*, p. 53.

One of the most popular research questions related to effects has been whether or not pornography consumption correlates with aggression after exposure. It is therefore important to summarize findings from a meta-analysis that looked specifically at effects on aggression. A total of 30 studies with a total of 33 effect sizes and a combined total of 2,040 participants were included in the 1995 meta-analysis conducted by Allen, D'Alessio, and Brezgel⁴²— a study applauded for meeting rigorous methodological standards.⁴³ All of the studies in the meta-analysis were conducted between 1971 and 1984, prior to the advent of Internet pornography, and were carried out in experimental laboratory situations, therefore limiting the generalizability of the findings to the outside world. The meta-analysis included film, videotape, written texts, and still pictures as the mediums of pornography and included both male and female participants. The findings indicated:

- There is a modest correlation between exposure to pornography and subsequent behavioral aggression.⁴⁴
- Pictorial nudity reduces subsequent aggressive behavior (9 studies) while material depicting nonviolent sexual activity slightly increases aggressive behavior (24 studies).
- The strongest correlation exists between depictions of violent sexual activity and aggression (7 studies).

Although Allen, D'Alessio, and Brezgel's (1995) study is considered rigorous, one of its limitations is that it does not isolate the possible correlation between pornography use and sexual aggression.⁴⁵ Boeringer's (1994) and Crossman's (1995) work, however, complements this data by looking at this specific relationship.⁴⁶ Both studies reveal a significant relationship between levels of sexual aggression and use of certain forms of pornography among non-criminal populations.

Malamuth, Addison, and Koss (2000) took the meta-analytic process one step further when they analyzed a compilation of meta-analyses that looked at pornography and sexual aggression.⁴⁷ Their work concluded there are reliable associations between frequent pornography use and sexually aggressive behaviors, and these associations are strongest when violent pornography is viewed and/or when men at high risk for sexual aggression are the consumers.

Negative Effect of Rape Myth Acceptance

⁴²Allen, M., D'Alessio, D., & Brezgel, K. (1995). A meta-analysis summarizing the effects of pornography II: Aggression after exposure. *Human Communication Research*, 22(2), 258–283.

⁴³Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26–94.

⁴⁴($r = 0.132$, $k = 33$, $N = 2,040$).

⁴⁵Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26–94.

⁴⁶Boeringer, S. B. (1994). Pornography and sexual aggression: Association of violent and nonviolent depictions with rape and rape proclivity. *Deviant Behavior*, 15, 289–304; Crossman, L. L. (1995). Date rape and sexual aggression by college males: Incidence and the involvement of impulsivity, anger hostility, psychopathology, peer influence and pornography use. Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A & M University. Dissertation Abstract International, 55 (10-B), 4640B.

⁴⁷Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26–94.

Acceptance of rape myths has been a common area of investigation, in part, because violent pornography often promotes and eroticizes rape as a sexual act that is enjoyed and/or desired by females.⁴⁸ In 1980, Burt coined the term “rape myth”⁴⁹ to describe beliefs held by a person or persons regarding the act of rape, rapists, and victims of rape.⁵⁰ It was theorized that males who subscribed to rape myths would be less tolerant of rape victims and less likely to convict if serving on a rape-trial jury. Similarly, women who accept rape myths would be less likely to report rape as a crime or offer social support to victims.⁵¹

In 1995, Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, and Giery conducted a meta-analysis of 24 rape myth acceptance studies conducted between 1980 and 1993 with a grand total of 4,268 participants. Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, and Giery found experimental investigations positively correlated exposure to nonviolent or violent pornography with increased acceptance of rape myths compared to a control group.⁵² Violent pornography was also shown to have a significantly stronger relationship with rape myth acceptance.⁵³ Although the non-experimental studies in the meta-analysis showed almost no effect on rape myth acceptance, it is important to note that only self-reported data was collected in the methodologies of these studies and the actual behavioral outcomes were not incorporated.⁵⁴ Furthermore, three other meta-analyses by Kim and Hunter (1993)⁵⁵ and Sheppard, Hartwick, and Warshaw (1988)⁵⁶ supported the existence of an attitude-behavior linkage between pornography consumption and acceptance of rape myths.

While not a meta-analysis, Corne, Briere, and Esses’s (1992) study is an important contribution to our understanding of pornography and rape myth acceptance. This study examined women’s rape myths as a function of early exposure to pornography.⁵⁷ A total of 187 female university students responded to a questionnaire regarding: (a) childhood exposure to pornography, (b) current sexual fantasies, and (c) endorsement of rape-supportive attitudes. Eighty-six (46 percent) of the respondents reported direct exposure to pornography as a child, and statistical analysis showed that this exposure significantly related to rape fantasies and rape-supportive beliefs in adulthood. The researchers suggest early contact with pornography affects female socialization by not only normalizing sexual aggression, but also portraying it as culturally desirable to women.⁵⁸

⁴⁸Russell, D. E. H. (1998). *Dangerous relationships: Pornography, misogyny, and rape*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁴⁹Burt, M. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 38(2): 217–230.

⁵⁰Allen, M., Emmers, R., Gebhardt, L., & Giery, M. A. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 5–14.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Allen, M., D’Alessio, D., & Brezgel, K. (1995). A meta-analysis summarizing the effects of pornography II: Aggression after exposure. *Human Communication Research*, 22(2), 258–283.

⁵⁵Kim, M., & Hunter, J. (1993a). Attitude-behavior relations: A meta-analysis of attitudinal relevance and topic. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 101–142; Kim, M. & Hunter, J. (1993b). Relationship among attitudes, behavioral intentions, and behavior: A meta-analysis of past research, Part 2. *Communication Research*, 20, 331–364.

⁵⁶Sheppard, B., Hartwick, J., & Warshaw, P. (1988). The theory of reasoned action: A meta-analysis of past research with recommendations for modifications and future research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 5, 325–343.

⁵⁷Corne, S., Briere, J., & Esses, L. M. (1992). Women’s attitudes and fantasies about rape as a function of early exposure to pornography. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 7(4), 454–461.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 458.

Negative Effects on Sex Offenders

Another common research question related to pornography is how pornography consumption and subsequent effects differ between sex-offending and non-criminal populations. Allen, D'Alessio, and Emmers-Sommer (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 studies focusing on this question and examined several dependent measures such as (a) frequency of pornography use, (b) age of first exposure, (c) the degree to which pornography was a direct prelude to a sexual act, and (d) the degree of sexual arousal evoked by the sexually explicit material.⁵⁹ Across the seven studies in which sexual activity after viewing pornography was examined, a relatively strong effect was found. Results revealed that after viewing pornography, criminals were more likely than non-criminals to perform a sex act.

In 1995, Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, and Giery looked at the levels of physiological arousal in sex offenders versus non-criminal populations after viewing pornography.⁶⁰ After analyzing 32 studies comprising a total of 2,099 participants, it was concluded that sex offenders were more aroused than non-criminals while viewing pornographic material and that sex offenders were more aroused by violent sex than non-criminal consumers. In contrast, sex offenders were less aroused by depictions of consensual sex than the non-criminal population.

⁵⁹Allen, M., D'Alessio, D., & Emmers-Sommer, T. M. (2000). Reactions of criminal sexual offenders to pornography: A meta-analytic summary. In M. Roloff (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook* 22, 139–169. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

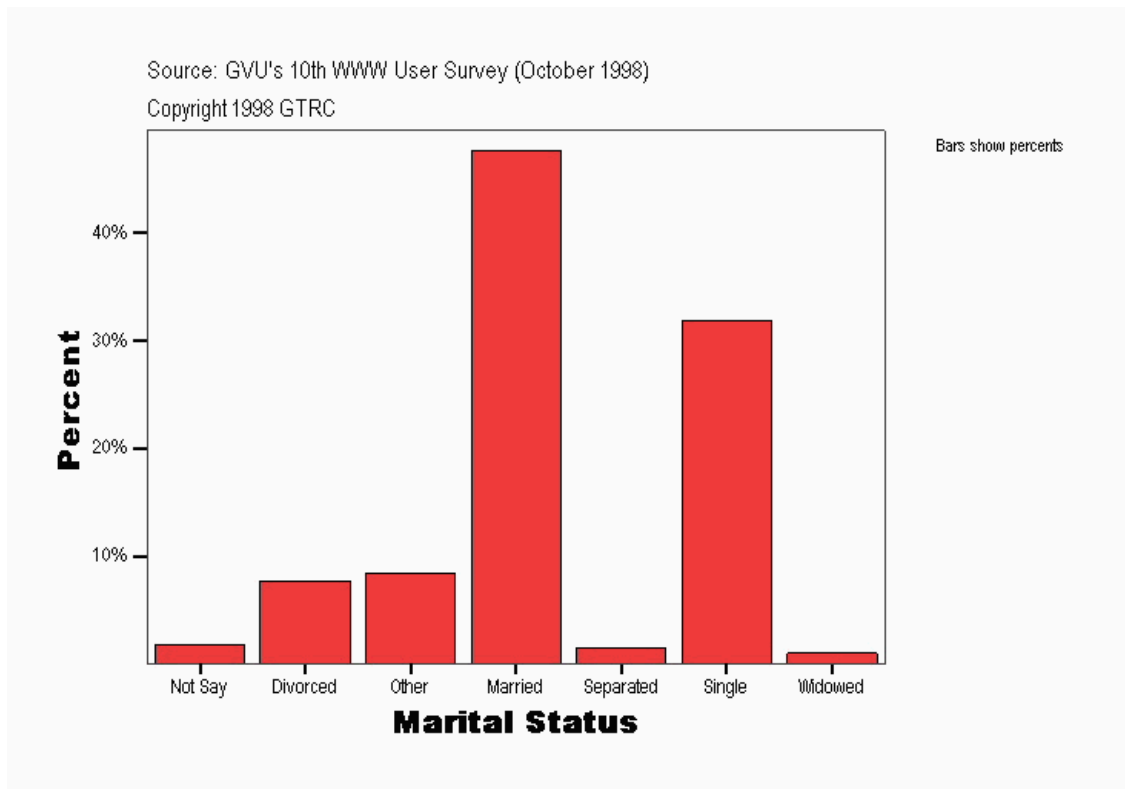
⁶⁰Allen, M., Emmers, R., Gebhardt, L., & Giery, M. A. (1995). Exposure to pornography and acceptance of rape myths. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 5–14.

IMPACT ON MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although Internet pornography is commonly consumed by one household member in a solitary, secret fashion, the impact of sexually explicit material is being felt by entire family systems, not to mention whole communities and corporate circles. The marital relationship, in particular, is a logical point of impact to examine because it is the foundational familial and social unit, as well as a sexual union that can be easily destabilized by sexual pursuits outside the marital contract.

Research further clarifies marriage as a priority in the pornography debate. For instance, when one considers: (a) the magnitude and growth of online sexual activity based on multiple Internet traffic measurements,⁶¹ (b) that the majority of Internet users in the United States are married males,⁶² (c) that more than half of Americans (172 million) use the Internet and 20 to 33 percent of users go online for sexual purposes,⁶³ and (d) that the majority of people struggling with sexual addictions and compulsivities involving the Internet are married, heterosexual males.⁶⁴

Internet Use and Marital Status



⁶¹Refer to Appendix B for information related to online sexual activity.

⁶²Cooper, A., Galbreath, N., & Becker, M. A. (2004). Sex on the Internet: Furthering our understanding of men with online sexual problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 18(3), 223–230.

⁶³Cooper, A. (2004). Online sexual activity in the new millennium. *Contemporary Sexuality*, 38(3), i–vii.

⁶⁴Cooper, A., Delmonico, D. L., & Burg, R. (2000). Cybersex users, abusers, and compulsives: New findings and implications. *Sexual Addictions & Compulsivities*, 7, 5–29.

Based on the current data, the following topics will be addressed: (1) online sexual pursuits as a predictor of marital distress, separation, and divorce; (2) decreased sexual satisfaction; (3) decreased sexual intimacy; and (4) infidelity.

Characteristics of Healthy, Stable Marriages

In order to put the impact of Internet pornography into perspective, let us first consider the characteristics of strong, stable, and satisfying marriages. Highlighting these characteristics lays a foundation for understanding how Internet pornography consumption can be incongruent with stable marital relationships. Although there are many ways to have a stable and satisfying marriage,⁶⁵ some common factors are worth highlighting because of their empirical support and widespread applicability to diverse couples.

In North American culture, it is most common for people to select a marriage partner according to romantic love as opposed to family arrangement or economic necessity. Research by Roberts (1982),⁶⁶ Davis and Todd (1982),⁶⁷ Davis (1985),⁶⁸ and Bergner (2000)⁶⁹ is useful in clarifying what romantic love entails from a social science perspective. They found that romantic love embodies the following characteristics: (a) investment in the well-being of the beloved, (b) respect, (c) admiration, (d) sexual desire, (e) intimacy, (f) commitment, (g) exclusivity, and (h) understanding.⁷⁰

The researchers found that when these characteristics are present in a romantic relationship, people tend to feel fully loved. On the other hand, when there are violations to these characteristics and the violations are sufficient in magnitude, partners will commonly conclude that they are no longer loved as they once were and re-evaluates their place in their partners' world. As Bergner and Bridges (2002) point out, many women who discover a partner's intense involvement with pornography engage in just such a reappraisal of their relationship.⁷¹

When we look at marriages from a holistic view and not just at romantic love, social science data helps us to understand the following characteristics as common factors in healthy, stable marital relationships.⁷²

⁶⁵Gottman, J. M. (1993). The roles of conflict engagement, escalation, and avoidance in marital interactions: A longitudinal view of five types of couples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(1), 6–15; Driver, J., Tabares, A., Shapiro, A., Young Nahm, E., & Gottman, J. M. (2002). Interactional patterns in marital success or failure. In Froma Walsh (Ed.), (2003). *Normal family processes*. 3rd Ed. NY: Guilford Press.

⁶⁶Roberts, M. (1982). Men and women: Partners, lovers and friends. In K. Davis & T. Mitchell (Eds.), *Advances in descriptive psychology*, 2, pp. 57–78: Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

⁶⁷Davis, K., & Todd, M. (1982). Friendship and love relationships. In K. Davis & T. Mitchell (Eds.), *Advances in descriptive psychology*, 2, pp. 79–122: Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

⁶⁸Davis, K. (1985, February). Near and dear: Friendship and love compared. *Psychology Today*, 22–30.

⁶⁹Bergner, R. (2000). Love and barriers to love: An analysis for psychotherapists and others. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 42, 254–259.

⁷⁰Bergner, R. M. & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Kaslow, R., & Robinson, J. (1996). Long-term satisfying marriages: Perceptions of contributing factors. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 24(2), 69–78; Wallerstein, J., & Blakeslee, S. (1995). *The good marriage*. New York, NY: Warner Books; Klagsburn, F. (1995). Marriages that last. In J. Rank & E. Kain (Eds.), *Diversity and change in families: Patterns, prospects and policies*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall; Levenson, R., Carstenson, L., & Gottman, J. M. (1993). Long-term marriage: Age, gender and satisfaction. *Psychology and Aging*, 8(2), 310–313; Wolcott, I. (1999). Strong families and satisfying marriages. *Family Matters*, 53, 21–30.

Maurer's work also helps clarify what satisfying sexual relationships entail. Maurer found three common traits that distinguish sexually satisfied couples from unsatisfied couples: (1) acceptance of one's own sexuality, (2) listening to one's partner and being aware of a partner's likes and dislikes, and (3) open and honest communication.⁷³

Moreover, according to data from the General Social Survey in 2000 (N = 531), people who report being happily married are 61 percent less likely to report using Internet pornography compared to those who also used the Internet and who had completed the General Social Survey in 2000.⁷⁴ As Stack, Wasserman, and Kern (2004) conclude, "The strengthening of adult social bonds, especially those to religion and marriage, might reduce the attraction to cyberpornography in general."⁷⁵

Predictor of Marital Distress, Separation, and Divorce

According to research studies and professional observations, the impact of Internet pornography consumption on marriages is slowly coming into focus. For example, survey research conducted by Bridges, Bergner and Hesson-McInnis (2003)⁷⁶ found married women are significantly more distressed by a partner's online pornography consumption than women in dating relationships, and that Internet pornography consumption is viewed as a threat to the relationship.⁷⁷ This study included a non-clinical sample (N = 100) who were 18 years of age or older and who had a partner involved in Internet pornography. The distress reported by the women increased according to the perceived frequency of online sexual activities and, surprisingly, was not as strongly influenced by religious beliefs. Therefore, married women who perceived greater levels of Internet pornography consumption tended to have the greatest levels of distress than any other group of women. Bridges, Bergner and Hesson-McInnis' (2003) research is significant because it supports the assertion that married women generally are distressed by their husbands use of sexually explicit material and that this may threaten the stability of the marital bond.

Looking to more extreme situations, a 2000 study by Schneider found that cybersex addiction was a major contributing factor to separation and divorce for affected couples.⁷⁸ This study analyzed survey responses from 94 individuals (91 women, 3 men) who (a) ranged in age from 24 to 57, (b) had been in a relationship for an average of 12.6 years (range of 0.5 to 39 years), and (c) were seeking therapy to cope with a partner's Internet involvement. The sample was recruited through 20 therapists who were treating sex addicts and who were aware of individuals who would be interested in participating in this research. Although a range of online

⁷³Maurer, H. (1994). *Sex: Real people talk about what they really do*. New York: Penguin Books. In J. DeLamater & W. N. Friedrich (2002). Human sexual development, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 39(1), 10–14.

⁷⁴Stack, S., Wasserman, I., & Kern, R. (2004). Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(1), 75–88.

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 86.

⁷⁶Bridges, A. J., Bergner, R. M., & Hesson-McInnis, M. (2003). Romantic partners' use of pornography: Its significance for women. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 29, 1-14.

⁷⁷ After running one-way-between-group ANOVAs, post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated the mean score for the dating group ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.26$, $N = 19$) was significantly different from the married group ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.73$, $N = 38$).

⁷⁸Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31-58.

sexual activities were listed, viewing and/or downloading pornography accompanied by masturbation was present in 100 percent of the cases.

Although not a formal study, important survey data was collected at the November 2002 meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in Chicago, Illinois, regarding the impact of Internet usage on marriages.⁷⁹ This professional organization comprises the nation's top 1,600 divorce and matrimonial law attorneys who specialize in matrimonial law, including divorce and legal separation. At this meeting, 62 percent of the 350 attendees said the Internet had been a significant factor in divorces they had handled during the last year. Additionally, the following observations were made by the lawyers polled with regard to why the Internet had played a role in divorces that year:

- 68 percent of the divorce cases involved one party meeting a new love interest over the Internet.
- 56 percent of the divorce cases involved one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.
- 47 percent of the divorce cases involved one party spending excessive time on the computer.
- 33 percent of the divorce cases cited excessive time communicating in chat rooms (a commonly sexualized forum).

In response to this survey data, J. Lindsey Short, Jr., then president of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, poignantly stated, "While I don't think you can say the Internet is causing more divorces, it does make it easier to engage in the sorts of behaviors that traditionally lead to divorce."⁸⁰

Decreased Sexual Satisfaction

Prior to Internet pornography becoming readily available, Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (1988) conducted a study that looked at the impact of consuming common, nonviolent pornographic material on male and female participants.⁸¹ The participants represented college and non-student populations from a Midwestern city (N = 160).⁸² As part of the study, participants were exposed to either pornographic or innocuous, non-pornographic content in hourly sessions over six consecutive weeks. In the seventh week, participants were asked to rate their personal happiness regarding various domains of experience and the relative importance of gratifying experiences.

Results showed that exposure to pornography negatively impacted self-assessment of sexual experience, while other aspects of life (e.g., professional satisfaction) remained constant. Participants reported less satisfaction with their intimate partner and specifically with their partner's affection, physical appearance, sexual curiosity, and sexual performance.

⁷⁹Dedmon, J. (November 2002). Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces. Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Zillman, D., & Bryant, J. (1988). Pornography's impact on sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 438-453.

⁸²Ibid.

Additionally, participants who were repeatedly exposed to pornographic material assigned increased importance to sexual relations without emotional involvement. Furthermore, all of these effects were uniform across male and female participants. Although the authors point out that pornography is unlikely to be the only genre of entertainment to affect aesthetic dissatisfaction with self and/or one's partner, it appears from the research that pornography is the only genre that impacts sexual dissatisfaction specifically.

Because Internet pornography tends to be more immediate and powerful than other mediums due to its interactive and consumer-driven nature (e.g., viewers can select exactly who and what they want to see and can interact with real people via video cameras), it is reasonable to assume Zillman and Bryant's 1988 findings have at least similar, if not greater applicability to Internet pornography. In fact, data from more current research on the impact of Internet pornography and online sexual pursuits on sexual satisfaction is congruent with previous findings.

For example, Bergner and Bridges' 2002 study revealed two distinct themes related to sexual desire and satisfaction.⁸³ The two themes, along with other characteristics, emerged out of analyzing 100 letters posted online to four different message boards created for spouses, fiancés and girlfriends of men perceived to be heavily involved in pornography. The male partners did not necessarily meet the criteria for cybersex⁸⁴ or sexual addiction.⁸⁵ The first theme these women voiced was that of decreased sexual desire by their partners. As one participant stated, "I am no longer sexually attractive or desirable to him. He's more attracted to the women depicted in his movies, magazines, and websites than he is to me, and I feel completely unable to compete with these women."⁸⁶

Secondly, it was common for pornography users to continue sexual relations with their female partner, but the sexual advances conveyed a message of objectification as opposed to meaningful interaction. For example, one woman stated, "I am no longer a sexual *person* or partner to him, but a sexual *object*. He is not really with *me*, not really making love to *me*.... He seems to be thinking about something or someone else—likely those porn women.... He is just using me as a warm body."⁸⁷

Decreased Sexual Intimacy

Schneider's 2000 study involving the spouses of cybersex addicts is another study that supports Zillman and Bryant's 1988 findings regarding decreased sexual satisfaction.⁸⁸ Schneider's work revealed that compulsive cybersex has several adverse effects on the conjugal

⁸³Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206.

⁸⁴See Appendix A (A. 6) for a definition of cybersex.

⁸⁵Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58.

sexual relationship, including decreased sexual intimacy.⁸⁹ Schneider collected data from 94 respondents who were in different types of committed relationships to individuals struggling with cybersex addictions.⁹⁰ Two-thirds (68 percent) of the respondents experienced decreased sexual intimacy with their partner. Moreover, the participants reported that these difficulties coincided with the *beginning* of the cybersex activities—a point that is important to highlight for those who wish to limit the findings to those who have dealt with chronic sexually addictive or compulsive behavior.

More than half (52.1 percent) of the cybersex users had lost interest in relational sex, as had one-third of the partners. Furthermore, in 18.1 percent of the relationships surveyed, *both* partners had decreased interest in sex. Schneider also points out that spouses of pornography users often report being repulsed by the user's sexual pursuits. For the cybersex users who have already substituted online sexual activity for relational sexual intimacy, their partner's repulsion and loss of interest is not as problematic or distressing.

Schneider outlined the following recurrent themes in the survey data:

- The user makes excuses to avoid sexual intimacy with the partner (e.g., not in the mood or too tired).
- The partner feels hurt, angry, sexually rejected, inadequate, and unable to compete with computer images and sexy online women (or men) who are willing to do “anything.”
- During relational sex, the cybersex user appears distant, emotionally detached, and interested only in his/her own pleasure.
- The partner ends up doing most or all of the initiating, either to get her/his own needs met or as an attempt to get the user to decrease the online activities.
- The user blames the partner for their sexual problems.
- The user wants the partner to participate in sexual activities that she or he finds objectionable.⁹¹

For those who may argue decreased sexual intimacy is an effect linked solely with cybersex addicts, Bergner and Bridges' 2002 study supports the fact that women in relationships (married, engaged, or dating) with men perceived as heavy pornography consumers report decreased and altered sexual intimacy as a common symptom.⁹²

An example of what the researchers categorized as decreased intimacy included statements such as, “I have been excluded, isolated, barred from intimacy with him. I have lost someone whom I thought was my best friend and most intimate companion in life. He now has a

⁸⁹Schneider, J. P. (1998). The new “elephant in the living room”: Effects of compulsive cybersex behaviors on the spouse. In A. Cooper (1998). *Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium. CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), 169–186.

⁹⁰Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effect of cybersex addiction on the family. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58.

⁹¹Schneider, J. P. (1998). The new “elephant in the living room”: Effects of compulsive cybersex behaviors on the spouse. In A. Cooper (1998), *Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium. CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), p. 178.

⁹²Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206.

whole secret life from which I am completely excluded and about which he continually lies to me.”⁹³

From a male perspective, Cooper, Galbreath, and Becker’s 2004 study of men with online sexual problems revealed two important subgroups with regard to the impact on sexual activity with a committed partner.⁹⁴ The researchers found that sexual activity with a partner increased for men who used the Internet to: (a) educate themselves, (b) meet people to date and/or with whom to have offline sexual relations, and (c) socialize as compared to men who do not go online for these reasons. In contrast, participants who turned to online sexual activity to deal with stress had increased problems in their real-time relationships and received complaints from others about this involvement. These findings corroborate earlier research⁹⁵ and support Schneider’s claim⁹⁶ that the emotional distance online sexual problems foster can be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life sexual infidelity.

To put Cooper, Galbreath, and Becker’s results in context, it is important to keep in mind that being in a marital relationship was not a criterion for the study, so the results reflect the general impact on various levels of commitment. Sixty percent of the 384 male participants were in “some kind of a committed relationship,” 51 percent indicated they were married and 88 percent indicated being heterosexual. The results are further put into perspective when we consider that the majority of the participants fell into the second subgroup—the group that experienced problems in their real-time relationships. Results showed that:

- 80.5 percent used online sexual activity (OSA) to distract themselves or take a break,
- 56.5 percent used OSA to deal with stress,
- 43.0 percent used OSA to engage in sexual activities they would not do in real life,
- 25.3 percent used OSA to educate themselves,
- 16.1 percent used OSA to meet people with whom to have offline sexual activities,
- 11.7 percent used OSA to meet people to date, and
- 9.1 percent used OSA to get support with sexual matters.

The group who used online sexual activity to deal with stress also reported having increased masturbatory activity, “thus engaging in what might be a long-term pattern of turning inward and away from others as a primary coping strategy”⁹⁷ of which decreased marital intimacy would be a part.

A Form of Infidelity

⁹³Ibid. p. 197.

⁹⁴Cooper, A., Galbreath, N., & Becker, M. A. (2004). Sex on the Internet: Furthering our understanding of men with online sexual problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behavior*, 18(3), 223–230.

⁹⁵Cooper, A., Griffin-Shelley, E., Delmonico, D. L., & Mathy, R. M. (2001). Online sexual problems: Assessment and predictive variables. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 8, 267–286.

⁹⁶Schneider, J. P. (2002). Effects of cybersex problems on the spouse and family. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 169–186). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

⁹⁷Cooper, A., Galbreath, N., & Becker, M. A. (2004). Sex on the Internet: Furthering our understanding of men with online sexual problems. *Psychology of Addictive Behavior*, 18(3), p. 227.

In virtually all marital contracts or agreements, fidelity is implied or specifically declared.⁹⁸ Infidelity, on the other hand, is commonly understood as a violation of the marital agreement, a betrayal of one's trust, and a threat to the marital bond.

Stack, Wasserman, and Kern (2004) found individuals who had had an extramarital affair were 3.18 times more likely to have used Internet pornography than individuals who had not had an affair (N = 531).⁹⁹ The same study also revealed that people who have engaged in paid sex (i.e., prostitution) were 3.7 more apt to use Internet pornography than those who had not used Internet pornography. What these statistics indicate is that Internet pornography is associated with activities that undermine marital exclusivity and fidelity. What cannot be determined, however, is what comes first. Does Internet pornography influence unfaithful behavior or does unfaithful behavior coincide with pre-existing traits that predispose someone to normalize Internet pornography viewing? Either way, this cluster of behaviors may be understood to validate and legitimize each another.

At least three studies support the fact that women view cybersex and/or pornography consumption as a form of infidelity that reduces the exclusivity of the relationship.¹⁰⁰ Whitty (2003) also found that both men and women perceive online sexual activity as an act of betrayal that is as authentic and real as offline acts and that Internet pornography use correlated significantly with emotional infidelity (N = 1,117; 468 males and 649 females).¹⁰¹

Women commonly report feelings of betrayal, loss, mistrust, devastation, and anger as responses to the discovery or disclosure of a partner's pornography use and/or online sexual activity.¹⁰² Schneider's 2000 study concluded that women "overwhelmingly" felt cyber affairs were as emotionally painful to them as live or offline affairs, and many viewed the online sexual activity to be just as much adultery or cheating as live affairs.¹⁰³

Additionally, Bergner and Bridges' (2002) qualitative research found that the majority of women in their study used the words "betrayal," "cheating," and "affair" to describe the significance their partner's pornography use had for them. Bergner and Bridges analyzed 100

⁹⁸Schneider, J. P., Corley, M. D., & Irons, R. R. (1998). Surviving disclosure of infidelity: Results of an interactional survey of 164 recovering sex addicts and partners. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 5, 189–217; Brown, E. M. (1991). *Patterns of infidelity and their treatment*. New York: Brunner/Mazel; Hyde, J. S. (1990). *Understanding human sexuality* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill; Reiss, I. L. (1980). *Family systems in America* (3rd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

⁹⁹Stack, S., Wasserman, I., & Kern, R. (2004). Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(1), 75–88.

¹⁰⁰Bridges, A. J., Bergner, R. M., & Hesson-McInnis, M. (2003). Romantic partner's use of pornography: Its significance for women. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 29, 1–14; Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206; Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58.

¹⁰¹Whitty, M. T. (2003). Pushing the wrong buttons: Men's and women's attitudes toward online and offline infidelity. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 6(6), 569–579.

¹⁰²Bridges, A. J., Bergner, R. M., & Hesson-McInnis, M. (2003). Romantic partner's use of pornography: Its significance for women. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 29, 1–14; Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206; Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58.

¹⁰³Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58.

letters posted online by women in relationships with men perceived to be heavily involved with pornography. Even though the male partners were not in actual contact with other females, the female participants viewed pornographic activities as a form of infidelity and breach of the relationship's exclusivity. As the researchers describe, a consistent theme surfaces in these women's experiences, in that their partner "has taken the most intimate aspect of the relationship, sexuality, which is supposed to express the bond of love between the couple and be confined exclusively to the relationship, and shared it with countless fantasy women."¹⁰⁴ Understandably, a wife's experience of the marital relationship, as well as her own sense of self, is deeply impacted by a husband who finds fantasy women more desirable than herself.

Overspending and Debt

The affordability of sexually explicit material online is a major draw for many consumers. Although there is a plethora of pornographic material that is free, many websites require a pay-per-view charge or membership fee. With global profits for sexually explicit material estimated at \$57 billion dollars and Internet pornography generating approximately \$2.5 billion alone, it is an understatement to say that a lot of pornography is being purchased in addition to cost-free material.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, overspending and pornography-related debt are common symptoms of online sexual activity, especially if it has reached compulsive or addictive levels.¹⁰⁶ Many clinicians, including the author, have encountered the negative financial ramifications of online sexual activity—with some debts reaching \$30,000.¹⁰⁷

Financial debt of any kind can become a marital and familial hardship depending on individual, couple, and familial circumstances. In fact, according to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, financial stress is considered one of the most common causes of marital conflict and divorce,¹⁰⁸ and this observation is also supported by social science data.¹⁰⁹

Decreased Job Security

Job security is also jeopardized when online sexual activity is occurring in the workplace or excessive computer usage elsewhere is affecting daytime productivity.¹¹⁰ When one considers

¹⁰⁴Bergner, R. M., & Bridges, A. J. (2002). The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: Research and clinical implications. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 28, 193–206.

¹⁰⁵Internet Pornography Statistics. (2005). *Internet Filter Review*. Retrieved June 3, 2005, from <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>.

¹⁰⁶King, S. (2003). The impact of compulsive sexual behaviors on clergy marriages: Perspectives and concerns of the pastor's wife. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 10, 193–199; Leiblum, S., & Döring, N. (1998). Internet sexuality: Known risks and fresh chances for women. In A. Cooper (1998), *Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium*. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), p. 22–23.

¹⁰⁷Manning, J. C. (2005). A qualitative study of the supports women find most beneficial when dealing with a spouses sexually addictive or compulsive sexual behavior. Doctoral Dissertation. In progress.

¹⁰⁸American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. (2005). *Making marriage last*. Retrieved June 3, 2005, from http://www.aaml.org/Marriage_Last/MarriageMain.htm.

¹⁰⁹Lowenstein, L. F. (2005). Causes and associated features of divorce as seen by recent research. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 42(3/4), 153–172.

¹¹⁰Schneider, J. P. (2000). A qualitative study of cybersex participants: Gender differences, recovery issues and implications for therapists. *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 7, 249–278; Schneider, J. P. (1989). Rebuilding the marriage during recovery from compulsive sexual behavior. *Family Relations*, 38, 288–294.

that approximately 70 percent of all adult content traffic occurs during the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday,¹¹¹ the risk of financial and employment ramifications becomes more apparent.

In one of the first large-scale studies of online sexual pursuits, Cooper, Scherer, Boies, and Gordon (1999) found that 5.8 percent of respondents admitted using an office computer for sexual pursuits, and 12.7 percent said they use both home and work computers for this (N = 9,177).¹¹² Furthermore, a survey conducted by SurfControl (2000) revealed 59 percent of Internet use at the office is not work related,¹¹³ and Goldberg's work (1998) revealed adult content websites were the fourth most visited category on the Internet while at work during the month of April 1998.¹¹⁴

Many companies, like Xerox, have begun to enforce Internet abuse policies by firing employees who violate them.¹¹⁵ As more employers implement sophisticated ways of monitoring Internet abuse and clarify related policies, those who engage in online sexual activity, especially those who meet the criteria for compulsive or addictive Internet use, will be at greater risk for job loss and/or disciplinary action of some kind.

¹¹¹Carnes, P. (1989). *Contrary to love: Helping the sexual addict*. Minneapolis, MN: CompCare.

¹¹²Cooper, A., Scherer, C., Boies, S. C., & Gordon, B. (1999). Sexuality on the Internet: From sexual exploration to pathological expression. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 3(2), 154–164.

¹¹³Griffiths, M. (2003). Internet abuse in the workplace: Issues and concerns for employers and employment counselors. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 40, 87–96.

¹¹⁴Goldberg, A. (1998). *Monthly users report on adult sexually oriented sites for April 1998*. Washington, D.C.: Relevant Knowledge.

¹¹⁵Mirchandani, D. (Winter 2003). Reducing Internet abuse in the workplace. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 68(1), 22–26, 55.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Childhood and adolescence are foundational developmental stages in the formation of habits, values, attitudes, and beliefs. Experiences that distort or constrain healthy development or affect a person's long-term success in marital and family relationships need to be top priorities for parents, policymakers, and educators to address. Internet pornography may be considered one such priority with regard to youth.

While the marital bond may be the most vulnerable relationship to online sexual activity, children and adolescents are considered the most vulnerable audience of sexually explicit material. Youth are considered a vulnerable audience because they: (a) can be easily coerced into viewing pornography or manipulated into the production of it; (b) have limited ability to emotionally, cognitively, and physiologically process obscene material they encounter voluntarily or involuntarily; (c) can be the victims of another's pornography consumption in ways adults are often more resilient to; (d) can have their sexual and social development negatively impacted through exposure to fraudulent and/or traumatic messages regarding sexuality and relationships; and (e) can develop unrealistic expectations about their future sexual relationship through repeated exposure to fantasy-based templates. For these reasons and others, it is illegal to knowingly display or distribute obscenity or pornography defined as harmful to minors. However, this legal reality is rapidly losing momentum as widespread availability and accessibility of pornography normalizes illegal exposure.

There are obvious ethical barriers to studying the impact of Internet pornography on unaffected youth.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, it is important to carefully consider the findings on related topics and research from other countries, as well as clinical observations and expert opinion. Research from Australia and Sweden is particularly relevant because, after the United States, Sweden has the second highest Internet use and Australia has the third highest Internet use.¹¹⁷ Although more research is needed, the voids in the research need not delay responding to what we do know.

The following two sections cover the available research: (1) the indirect impact on children and adolescents (e.g., youth who live in a home where pornography consumption is occurring) and (2) the direct impact on children and adolescents (e.g., youth who encounter/consume Internet pornography themselves).

Indirect Impact on Children and Adolescents

When reviewing studies that deal with the impact of sexually addictive or compulsive behavior on the whole family, it is important to realize the majority of cited risks do not need to reach a certain threshold of compulsivity or addiction to be problematic. For example, a father may lose his job on account of his first perusal of pornography at work, or a child may encounter sexually explicit pop-ups associated with the first pornographic website a parent views on the family computer. The bottom line is that Internet pornography consumption in the home increases

¹¹⁶Malamuth, N. M. (1993). Pornography's impact on male adolescents. *Adolescent Medicine: State of the Art Reviews*, 4(3), 563–576.

¹¹⁷Stanley, J. (Summer 2001). Child abuse and the Internet. *National Child Protection Clearinghouse*, 15, 1–18.

the risks delineated by several researchers¹¹⁸ regardless of the degree of consumption. On the other hand, the severity or intensity of the effects is moderated with the presence or absence of addictive behavior.

Schneider's 2000 study examined the effects of cybersex addiction on the family (N = 91), including the impact on children (N = 70).¹¹⁹ While her work focused on families severely affected by online sexual activity, it provides one of the most ethical and credible indicators available for how online sexual activity, including pornography, can affect youth.

Schneider found that the following negative effects could impact children in homes where a parent's compulsive and/or addictive sexual behavior is occurring:

- Decreased parental time and attention (from the consumer and the parent preoccupied with the consumer);
- Encountering pornographic material a parent has acquired;
- Encountering a parent masturbating;
- Overhearing a parent engaged in phone sex;
- Increased risk of parental separation and divorce;
- Increased risk of parental job loss and financial strain;
- Increased risk for consuming pornography themselves;
- Exposure to the objectification of human beings, especially women;
- Witnessing and/or being involved in parental conflict; and
- Witnessing and/or experiencing stress in the home related to online sexual activities.

Premature sexual dialogue between parent and child is another effect of problematic sexual behavior in the home that researchers Black, Dillon, and Carnes (2003) brought forth.¹²⁰ Black, Dillon, and Carnes found dialogue about sexuality may surface before the parent and especially the child is ready.¹²¹ For example, if there is a chance a child will learn about a parent's online or offline sexual activity from another source (e.g., television, church, friends, or family), it may be necessary to discuss sexual problems prior to the recommended age of mid-adolescence.¹²²

Black, Dillon, and Carnes also examined adolescents' experiences and reactions to being told of a parent's struggle with online sexual activity (N = 89, 13 years of age or older).¹²³ Prior

¹¹⁸Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58; Schneider, J. P. (2003). The impact of compulsive cybersex behaviors on the family. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 329–354; Black, D., Dillon, D., & Carnes, S. (2003). Disclosure to children: Hearing the child's experience. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 10, 67–78.

¹¹⁹Schneider, J. P. (2000). Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 31–58; Schneider, J. P. (2003). The impact of compulsive cybersex behaviors on the family. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 329–354.

¹²⁰Black, D., Dillon, D., & Carnes, S. (2003). Disclosure to children: Hearing the child's experience. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 10, 67–78.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

to a formal disclosure by a parent, 60 out of 89 respondents reported already knowing of their parent's behavior. As one respondent stated, "I was surprised that my mother was not aware that I knew. I carried this secret with me my entire adolescence and no one knew!"¹²⁴

Many youth in Black, Dillon, and Carnes' (2003) study experienced: (a) anger for the pain caused to the family, (b) embarrassment, (c) fear of the financial ramifications, (d) guilt, (e) confusion over the implications for their parent's marriage and the family as a whole, or (f) reached out emotionally to take care of the other parent. Other children found relief and validation at having the problem formally disclosed to them because it validated the confusion, anger, and mixed messages that they had lived with for so long.

Direct Impact on Children and Adolescents

The Internet is a powerful resource through which youth can access information, entertainment, and social connection.¹²⁵ While it is important to ensure our youth have access to this increasingly important medium, it is equally important to minimize the associated risks of sexual solicitation, abuse, harassment, and exposure to obscenity¹²⁶ in the virtual square.

The number of children exposed to such risks is unfortunately increasing as Internet usage starts earlier and becomes more popular. For example, between 1998 and 2001, Internet usage among 3 to 4 year-olds jumped from 4.1 percent to 14.3 percent; 5 to 9 year-olds experienced a 16.8 percent to 38.9 percent increase; and 14 to 17 year-olds experienced a 51.2 percent to 75.6 percent hike in Internet usage.¹²⁷

Research also shows that families with children are more likely to use computers and access the Internet than homes without children.¹²⁸ For example, in 2001, 70.1 percent of households with children used computers and 62.2 percent accessed the Internet.¹²⁹ On the other hand, in households without children, 58.8 percent used computers and 53.2 percent accessed the Internet.¹³⁰

Despite the illegalities of exposing or marketing sexually explicit material to minors, the pornography industry does not discriminate against young consumers. In a study funded by the U.S. Congress through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2003) concluded that sexually explicit material on the Internet is "very intrusive" and can be inadvertently stumbled upon while searching for other material or opening

¹²⁴Ibid, p. 70.

¹²⁵Subrahmanyam, K., Kraut, R. E., Greenfield, P. M., & Gross, E. F. (2000). The impact of home computer use on children's activities and development. *Children and Computer Technology*, 10(2), 123-144.

¹²⁶Refer to Appendix A, (A. 3) for a definition of obscenity.

¹²⁷Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). Victimization of youths on the Internet. In J. L. Mullings, J. W. Marquart, & D. J. Hartley (Eds.), *The victimization of children: Emerging issues*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press.

¹²⁸U. S. Department of Commerce, Economic and Statistics Administration, and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (February 2002). *A nation online: How Americans are expanding their use of the Internet*, p. 42. Retrieved July 5, 2005, from <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/dn/anationonline2.pdf>.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

e-mail.¹³¹ Additionally, a 2002 Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Report found that 70 percent of youth ages 15 to 17 reported accidentally coming across pornography online, and 23 percent of those youth said this happens “very” or “somewhat” often.¹³²

Viewers of all ages are commonly greeted with “Click here if you are 18 years of age or older” prior to entering a sexually explicit website.¹³³ However, this farcical honor system fails at protecting youth from inappropriate material because: (a) approximately 75 percent of pornographic websites display visual teasers on their homepages before asking if viewers are of legal age,¹³⁴ (b) only 3 percent of pornographic websites require proof of age before granting access to sexually explicit material,¹³⁵ and (c) two-thirds of pornographic websites do not include adult content warnings.¹³⁶ Although age verification measures are readily available through the use of credit cards, adult access codes, and/or personal identification numbers, the pornography industry has neglected to implement these measures even half-heartedly.

To make matters worse, unsuspecting youth are commonly tricked into opening pornographic websites by attaching misspelled words to pornographic pages¹³⁷ or by making it difficult to shut down or get out of a site once opened, a strategy referred to as “mouse trapping.” In fact, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak found that in 26 percent of unwanted exposure incidents, youth reported being exposed to another sex site while they were trying to exit another.¹³⁸

According to figures from Nielsen//NetRatings,¹³⁹ during the month of April 2005 in the United States alone, 4,803 children and adolescents between the ages of 2 and 17 had access to “adult” websites. This age group represented 13.97 percent of all online pornography consumption.

Negative Reactions to Pornography

Challenging the prevalent assumption that young people are motivated to actively seek out pornography, the Youth Internet Safety Survey (2000) found that in a nationally representative sample of 1,501 youth ages 10 to 17 (796 boys and 705 girls), 25 percent reported unwanted exposure to sexual material, 19 percent reported unwanted sexual solicitation, and 6 percent had been harassed online.¹⁴⁰

¹³¹Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). The exposure of youth to unwanted sexual material on the Internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention. *Youth & Society*, 34(3), 330–358.

¹³²Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Report. (2002). Retrieved May 24, 2005, from <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14095>.

¹³³Freeman-Longo, R. E. (2000). Children, teens, and sex on the Internet. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 75–90.

¹³⁴Thornburg, D., & Lin, H. S. (2002). *Youth, pornography & the Internet*. Committee to Study Tools and Strategies for Protecting Kids from Pornography and Their Applicability to Other Inappropriate Content, Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. In Third Way Culture Project. (July 2005). The porn standard: Children and pornography on the Internet. Retrieved August 3, 2005, from www.third-way.com.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). The exposure of youth to unwanted sexual material on the Internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention. *Youth & Society*, 34(3), 330–358.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Nielsen//NetRatings, April 2005. Retrieved directly from Nielsen//NetRatings May 25, 2005.

¹⁴⁰Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). The exposure of youth to unwanted sexual material on the Internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention. *Youth & Society*, 34(3), 330–358.

Additionally, Von Feilitzen and Carlsson (2000) reported that youth tend to be upset or embarrassed by online pornography.¹⁴¹ Opinion polls and later research support this finding. For example, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2003) found 23 percent of youth were “very” or “extremely upset” by exposure to sexual material,¹⁴² and a Canadian survey of parents suggests that one in five children have found undesirable sexual material online.¹⁴³ Youth ages 11 to 17 in an Australian survey, used the words “sick,” “yuck,” “disgusted,” “repulsed,” and “upset” to describe how they felt about exposure to online sexual material.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, a 2000 survey by Kids.net found that while up to 25 percent of 7 to 16 year olds have been upset by online materials, few have reported this to an adult.¹⁴⁵ Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak’s (2003) study also found that 49 percent of youth did not tell anyone about online sexual solicitation and that, even when the sexual solicitation was aggressive, 36 percent of youth still did not tell anyone.¹⁴⁶ This suggests that the number of youth encountering upsetting material may be underestimated if the parents are not aware of the frequency of these encounters and if parents are the people being polled.

In contrast, a 2002 study of university students found that viewers who masturbated while viewing sexually explicit material assessed the material more favorably than those who did not masturbate.¹⁴⁷ While this study does not involve children or adolescents, it does highlight how attitudinal shifts may occur when sexually explicit material is paired with a mood-altering experience, thereby reinforcing it. Although more research is needed with regard to this possible attitudinal shift in young populations, ethical difficulties in conducting such research make studies of young adult populations only more important to consider.

Lasting Negative Impression

In 2003, a study was conducted in which college students were asked to recall one significant sexual media experience from their youth and their responses to it (N = 196).¹⁴⁸ Participants used eight negative emotions to describe these experiences while only three positive

¹⁴¹Von Feilitzen, C., & Carlsson, U. (2000). *Children in the new media landscape: Games, pornography, perceptions*. Goteburg: UNESCO/Nordicom.

¹⁴²Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). Victimization of youths on the Internet. In J. L. Mullings, J. W. Marquart, & D. J. Hartley (Eds.), *The victimization of children: Emerging issues*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press.

¹⁴³Media Awareness. (2000). *Canada’s children in a wired world: The parent’s view*. A survey of Internet use in Canadian families, *Media Awareness*, 20(2), 17–18. In S. Livingstone (2003), *Children’s use of the Internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda*. *New Media & Society*, 5(2), 147–166.

¹⁴⁴Flood, M., & Hamilton, C. (2003). Youth and pornography in Australia: Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects. The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper Number 52, ISSN 1322-5421.

¹⁴⁵Wigley, K. & Clarke, B. (2000). Kids.net. London: National Opinion Poll. Retrieved January 2003 from <http://www.nop.co.uk>. In S. Livingstone (2003), *Children’s use of the Internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda*. *New Media & Society*, 5(2), 147–166.

¹⁴⁶Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2003). Victimization of youths on the Internet. In J. L. Mullings, J. W. Marquart, & D. J. Hartley (Eds.), *The victimization of children: Emerging issues*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press.

¹⁴⁷Boies, S. C. (2002). University students’ uses of and reactions to online sexual information and entertainment: Links to online and offline sexual behavior. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 11(2), 77–89.

¹⁴⁸Cantor, J., Mares, M. L., & Hyde, J. S. (2003). Autobiographical memories of exposure to sexual media content. *Media Psychology*, 5, 1–31. In P. M. Greenfield (2004), *Inadvertent exposure to pornography on the Internet: Implications for peer-to-peer file sharing networks for child development and families*. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25, 741–750.

emotions were cited (interest, amusement, and happiness or pleasure). The most common emotional responses to sexually explicit material were disgust (24 percent), shock or surprise (23.6 percent), embarrassment (21.4 percent), anger (18.4 percent), fear (11.2 percent), and sadness (9.2 percent).

When the exposure occurred between 5 and 12 years of age, embarrassment, fear, guilt, and confusion were significantly more common than for youth 13 years of age or older. It was also concluded that sexual media have different meanings and impacts on girls and boys, with males reporting more positive memories of sexually explicit material (arousal and interest) than females.¹⁴⁹

Developmental Effects

Patricia M. Greenfield, a researcher with the Children’s Digital Media Center and the Department of Psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles reviewed findings related to developmental effects and media. Greenfield paid close attention to chat rooms due to the popularity of this forum among youth. She concluded from her analysis of online communications in chat rooms that the following effects would likely occur for youth regularly involved in this mode of social interaction:

1. Disinhibition in sexuality, aggression, and race relations [e.g., making inappropriate comments about sexual activity or race that would be considered anti-social in other contexts or acting out sexually in risky, maladaptive, or illegal ways (e.g., with children)].
2. Early sexual priming.
3. Modeling of racism, negative attitudes toward women, and homophobia.
4. Breeding of personal and social irresponsibility due to anonymity.¹⁵⁰

Greenfield concludes, “We often consider the Internet to be a repository of information; my experience in the chat room led to the conclusion that we had better also think of the Internet in terms of the values that we wish to socialize.”¹⁵¹

Negative Impact on Sexual Development

The sexual maturation process begins at conception and is developed over a person’s life span through the combined influence of biological phases and development, socially defined stages, and various types of relationships with others.¹⁵² However, children and adolescents can receive conflicted messages about sexuality from the adult society around them,¹⁵³ and because parents often remain reluctant to discuss sexual topics with their children,¹⁵⁴ today’s youth are

¹⁴⁹Greenfield, P. M. (2004). Inadvertent exposure to pornography on the Internet: Implications for peer-to-peer file sharing networks for child development and families. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 25*, 741–750.

¹⁵⁰Greenfield, P. M. (2004). Developmental considerations for determining appropriate Internet use guidelines for children and adolescents. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 25*, p. 751–762.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 757.

¹⁵²DeLamater, J., & Friedrich, W. N. (2002). Human sexual development. *The Journal of Sex Research, 39*(1), p. 10.

¹⁵³Longo, R. E., Brown, S. M., & Price Orcutt, D. (2002). Effects of Internet sexuality on children and adolescents. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 87–105). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

¹⁵⁴Brown, J. D. (2002). Mass media influences on sexuality. *Journal of Sex Research, 39*(1), 42–45.

often left to their own devices to navigate the complex task of developing beliefs about sexuality and maintaining reproductive health.¹⁵⁵

Studies have also shown that while there is an abundance of sexual content in the media, little is shown regarding sexual responsibility and the consequences of risky sexual behaviors, thereby complicating this developmental task further.¹⁵⁶ Dolf Zillman, Dean Emeritus for Graduate Research in the College of Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama, even went so far as to suggest that sexualized media is serving as “the primary agent of sexual socialization” despite findings that show young adults prefer to learn about sexuality from peers, using pornography primarily to learn about anal and oral sex,¹⁵⁷ while adolescents prefer parents as their primary source of information (N = 672).¹⁵⁸

Some have argued that restricting access to Internet pornography would negatively impact youths’ access to health-related topics (e.g., pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth control) that could assist their sexual development and understanding.¹⁵⁹ Given that the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation’s 2001 report indicated 70 percent of youth aged 15 to 17 have used the Internet to look up general health information and that 40 percent of adolescents have specifically looked up sexual health topics (e.g., pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases), it is important to ascertain how efforts to increase Internet safety may unwittingly hinder access to useful information.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, because of concerns about confidentiality and the fact that many teens do not have their own health provider, access to the Internet for health information is even more critical for certain adolescents.¹⁶¹

In response to this quandary of access, Richardson, Resnick, Hansen, Derry, and Rideout (2002) examined how pornography-blocking software affected access to health information online.¹⁶² These researchers found that pornography-blocking software has a minimal impact on one’s access to information about sexual and reproductive health.¹⁶³ For example, they found blocking software set at moderate settings blocked 90 percent of the pornographic content online while blocking only 5 percent of health information.¹⁶⁴

According to research with first-year college students, the following effects and/or risks are associated with frequent exposure to erotica. These effects and/or risks are listed here because

¹⁵⁵Longo, R. E., Brown, S. M., & Price Orcutt, D. (2002). Effects of Internet sexuality on children and adolescents. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 87–105). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

¹⁵⁶Pardun, C. J., Ladin L’Engle, K., & Brown, J. D. (2005). Linking exposure to outcomes: Early adolescents’ consumption of sexual content in six media. *Mass Communication & Society*, 8(2), 75–91.

¹⁵⁷Trostle, L. C. (2003). Overrating pornography as a source of sex information for university students: Additional consistent findings. *Psychological Reports*, 92, 143–150.

¹⁵⁸Somers, C. L., & Surmann, A. T. (2004). Adolescent’s preferences for source of sex education. *Child Study Journal*, 34(1), 47–59.

¹⁵⁹Richardson, C. R., Resnick, P. J., Hansen, D. L., Derry, H. A., & Rideout, V. J. (2002). Does pornography-blocking software block access to health information on the Internet? *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288(22), 2887–2894.

¹⁶⁰Rideout, V. (December 2001). Generation Rx.com: How young people use the Internet for health information. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Foundation.

¹⁶¹Richardson, C. R., Resnick, P. J., Hansen, D. L., Derry, H. A., & Rideout, V. J. (2002). Does pornography-blocking software block access to health information on the Internet? *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288(22), 2887–2894.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

of the potential they have for shaping sexual development as well as future marital and familial relationships:¹⁶⁵

- Normalization of adverse reactions to offensive material;
- Developing tolerance toward sexually explicit material, thereby requiring more novel or bizarre material to achieve the same level of arousal or interest;
- Misperceptions of exaggerated sexual activity in the general populace;
- Overestimating the prevalence of less common sexual practices (e.g., group sex, bestiality, and sadomasochistic activity);
- Diminished trust in intimate partners;
- Abandoning the goal of sexual exclusivity with a partner;
- Perceiving promiscuity as a normal state of interaction;
- Perceiving sexual inactivity as constituting a health risk;
- Developing cynical attitudes about love;
- Believing superior sexual satisfaction is attainable without having affection for one's partner;
- Believing marriage is sexually confining;
- Believing that raising children and having a family is as an unattractive prospect; and
- Developing a negative body image, especially for women.¹⁶⁶

Robert E. Freeman-Longo, an expert in sexual abuse assessment, prevention, and treatment, adds to the list:¹⁶⁷

- Increased risk for developing sexual compulsions;
- Increased risk for developing a sexual addiction;
- Increased risk of exposure to incorrect information about human sexual behavior (e.g., bestiality or sex with children); and
- Exposure to age-inappropriate sexual material

Effect on Sexual Behavior

Compared to past generations, today's youth are reaching puberty earlier, engaging in sexual intercourse earlier, and getting married significantly later.¹⁶⁸ Exactly how exposure to

¹⁶⁵Zillman, D. (2000). Influence of unrestrained access to erotica on adolescents' and young adults' dispositions toward sexuality. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 27*, 41–44.

¹⁶⁶Siegel, S. (1997). Applying social comparison theory to women's body image and self-esteem: The effects of pornography. Dissertation, Pacific University, Palo Alto, CA.

¹⁶⁷Freeman-Longo, R. E. (2000). Children, teens, and sex on the Internet. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity, 7*, 75–90.

¹⁶⁸Longo, R. E., Brown, S. M., & Price Orcutt, D. (2002). Effects of Internet sexuality on children and adolescents. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 87–105). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

pornography is impacting these trends, if at all, is still unclear; however, research indicates that pornography consumption is affecting sexual behavior in youth.

A group of Swedish researchers (2005) recently examined the association between pornography consumption and sexual practices among 718 high school students from 47 different high school classes.¹⁶⁹ They found that:

- Internet and cable television were the most common sources of pornography.
- 83 percent of the youth watched pornography at home.
- 71 percent believed pornography influenced others' sexual behavior.
- 29 percent reported pornography had influenced their own sexual behavior. However, in a previous Swedish study (2004), 53 percent of young men reported that pornography had impacted their sexual behavior by “inspiring” them.¹⁷⁰
- Males considered “high pornography consumers” and men with an early age of first sexual intercourse (15 years) were more likely than low male consumers and women to engage in sexual activities such as oral sex, group sex, and anal intercourse.
- Engaging in anal intercourse was significantly associated with high consumption of pornography.
- Engaging in sexual intercourse with a friend (i.e., someone with whom they were not having a loving relationship) was also significantly associated with high consumption of pornography.

Sexual Aggression

In recent years, an Australian Child at Risk Assessment Unit in Canberra, New South Wales, noticed a disturbing increase in the number of sexually abusive or aggressive children under the age of 10 who were being referred to their services. In the early 1990s, approximately 3 children per year were being referred for sexually aggressive behavior. However, by 2003, approximately 70 children per year were being referred, many of whom had preyed on other children by forcing them to take part in sexual acts.

To determine why this increase was occurring, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse and the Canberra Hospital conducted a retroactive study on case files. The review revealed, among other commonalities, a pattern between such sexually abusive children and their access to sexually explicit material on the Internet.¹⁷¹ Social worker, Cassandra Tinning, stated,

We noticed a number of really interesting issues. Of course, this primary issue is around the use of the Internet. Almost all of the children who accessed our services in the last three years in relation to sexually harmful behaviors, almost all those children had accessed the Internet and specifically had accessed the Internet for pornographic

¹⁶⁹Hägström-Nordin, E., Hanson, U., & Tydén, T. (2005). Associations between pornography consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 16(2), 102–107.

¹⁷⁰Tydén, T., & Rogala, C. (2004). Sexual behavior among young men in Sweden and the impact of pornography. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 15(9), 590–593.

¹⁷¹Limb, J. November 26, 2003, Alarming rise in children's sexually-abuse behavior. *The World Today*. Retrieved June 10, 2005, from <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2003/s997751.htm>.

material.¹⁷²

Victor B. Cline, a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Utah, has made clinical observations that support the Australian findings. For example, he stated:

I have also interviewed some children, where as a result of hearing Dial-A-Porn messages, they engaged in sexual assaults on other children. One 12 year-old boy in Hayward, California listened to Dial-A-Porn for nearly two hours on the phone.... A few days later he sexually assaulted a four-year-old girl in his mother's day care center. He had never been exposed to pornography before. He had never acted out sexually before and was not a behavior problem in the home. He had never heard or knew of oral sex before listening to Dial-A-Porn. And this was how he assaulted the girl, forcing oral sex on her in direct imitation of what he had heard on the phone.¹⁷³

Additionally, Malamuth, Addison, and Koss (2000) found that very frequent pornography use was associated with much higher rates of sexual aggression among older adolescent boys and young men already at high risk for aggressive behavior.¹⁷⁴ High risk factors that were taken into consideration for this study included impulsivity, hostility toward women, and promiscuity. Youth who had the same risk levels of aggressive behavior, but who consumed pornography "somewhat," "seldom," or "never" did not show the same levels of sexual aggression.

Sexual Compulsivity

Although there are no long-term studies examining the relationship between childhood behavioral patterns and adult sexual addiction, we do know that children and teens can and do develop compulsive sexual behavior, a common precursor to sexual addiction.¹⁷⁵ Freeman-Longo points out in his journal article "Children, Teens, and Sex on the Internet" that an increasing number of clinicians are having youth referred for problems associated with online sexual activity.¹⁷⁶

Freeman-Longo's research (2000) within the field of sexual abuse assessment, prevention, and treatment revealed several risks associated with online sexual activity for youth that, if left untreated, could lead to increased compulsivity and possible sexual addiction in the future. He identified the following trends as particularly problematic:

- Many online relationships are not based in reality; what they read and see about people, relationships, and sex is distorted.
- Many users begin to seek higher levels of excitement, as current experiences result in a lack of gratification; their tolerance levels change and/or they become satiated to particular activities.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Cline, V. (2001). *Pornography's effects on adults & children*. New York: NY: Morality in Media, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26–91.

¹⁷⁵Ryan, F., & Lane, S. (Eds.) (1997). *Juvenile sexual offending: Causes, consequences, and correction*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers; Barbaree, H. E., Marshall, W. L., & Hudson, S. M. (Eds.) (1993). *The Juvenile Sex Offender*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. In R. E. Freeman-Longo (2000), Children, teens, and sex on the Internet. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 75–90.

¹⁷⁶Freeman-Longo, R. E. (2000). Children, teens, and sex on the Internet. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 75–90.

- With some youth there may be the potential to increase sexual drive and urges resulting in possible compulsive and/or addictive behavior. When this occurs, healthy sexual drive may no longer be exciting. This is especially problematic for youth who engage in sexually abusive and aggressive behaviors.
- For underage persons, such activities may increase the youth's sexual desire for in-person sex and thus result in earlier real-life sexual experiences.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 81.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Looking at the impact of Internet pornography from a family-oriented perspective represents a relatively new shift. Because of this, many research questions need answering and would be worthy of support. Given the previous review, the following research questions need to be answered:

Top Priorities

- How are family dynamics (parent-child, sibling-sibling, husband-wife, and nuclear-extended family) specifically affected when one or more family members are consuming pornography on a regular basis?
- How does pornography consumption correlate, if at all, with rates of incest, child abuse, and physical violence in families?
- How does female pornography consumption and its related effects differ, if at all, from male consumption?
- What is the exact demographic prevalence of Internet pornography consumption and sexual addictions in the U.S., and what is the prevalence for males vs. females, and those of various marital statuses?
- Is there a correlation between viewing Internet depictions of unhealthy and dangerous sexual practices and increases in sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV?
- How does pornography affect the brain?
- How does parental pornography consumption affect rates of consumption in children?
- How does childhood consumption of pornography affect long-term relational outcomes? This question could be incorporated into one of the longitudinal surveys presently underway (e.g., Add Health Survey and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 and 1997).
- Is sexually aggressive behavior in juveniles represented across diverse populations consuming pornography, or is it limited to high-risk, vulnerable youth?

Secondary Priorities

- Controlling for demographics, income, education, and religious practice, what differentiates couples who consume pornography in a mutual manner from those who view pornography in a secretive, solitary manner and from those who do not use it at all?
- How does Internet pornography differ in its effects on individuals from other forms of pornography (e.g., print and video)?
- How does long-term pornography consumption affect sexual development over a person's life span?

CONCLUSIONS

Internet pornography is altering the social and sexual landscape. While there is much more to learn about these shifts regarding their impact on marriages and families, the research currently available indicates many negative trends. Unfortunately, these trends are expected to continue for sometime unless drastic changes in social norms, public education, parenting approaches, Internet restructuring, and law enforcement occur.

As the first Internet generations reach adulthood, it is anticipated that the full magnitude of online pornography's effects will become more evident and alter the pornography debate accordingly. Future research in neuroscience, marriage and family therapy, and developmental psychology will augment what is now only a nascent area of social psychology and clinical research. This issue promises to be around for some time.

APPENDIX A

Glossary

(A. 1) Pornography

Although adult females are the staple of adult pornography, it is important to have a gender-neutral definition that encompasses the expanding repertoire of material containing animals, children, inanimate objects, and males.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, pornography is defined as “material that is sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.”¹⁷⁹ To be clear, material can refer to the full spectrum of representations disseminated via diverse media (e.g., film, literature, photographs, magazines, websites, e-mail, cartoons, phone sex, or cell phone downloads).

(A. 2) Internet Pornography

Internet pornography is defined as sexually explicit material disseminated via the World Wide Web, whether through e-mail, websites, peer-to-peer file sharing, chat rooms, and/or Usenet groups (a worldwide network of news discussion groups).

(A. 3) Obscenity

Obscenity is a legal term delineated in the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Miller v. California*.¹⁸⁰ According to this ruling, material is determined to be obscene, and therefore unprotected by the First Amendment, if a judge or jury representing a cross-section of the community determines that the average person, applying contemporary adult community standards, would find that a work:

1. Taken as a whole, appeals to a prurient interest in sex (i.e., an erotic, lascivious, abnormal, unhealthy, degrading, shameful, or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion);
2. Depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct (i.e., ultimate sex acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated; masturbation; excretory functions; lewd exhibition of the genitals; or sadomasochistic sexual abuse); and
3. Taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.¹⁸¹

(A. 4) Erotica

While erotica has also been defined as literature or art intended to arouse sexual desire, it is distinguished from pornography in that it is void of violence, illegal portrayals (e.g., children), sexism, racism, and homophobia, and is respectful of the human beings involved.¹⁸² Although definitions of erotica can be as subjective as definitions of pornography, for the purposes of this

¹⁷⁸Russell, D. E. H. (1998). *Dangerous relationships: Pornography, misogyny, and rape*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

¹⁷⁹Cline, V. B. (2001). *Pornography's effects on adults & children*. New York, NY: Morality in Media.

¹⁸⁰413 U.S. 15 (1973).

¹⁸¹LaRue, J. M., Chief Counsel for Concerned Women for America. (May 19, 2005). *Obscenity and the First Amendment*. Summit on Pornography, Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2322, Washington, D.C..

¹⁸²Russell, D. (1994). *Against pornography: The evidence of harm*. Berkeley, California: Russell Publications.

paper, they are treated as distinct genres of work, with erotica viewed as less severe in its consequences, albeit less researched in the current body of data.

(A. 5) Online Sexual Activity

Online sexual activity is defined as the “use of the Internet (including text, audio, or graphic files) for any activity that involves sexuality, whether for purposes of recreation, entertainment, exploration, support, education, commerce, or finding and/or meeting sexual or romantic partners.”¹⁸³

(A. 6) Cybersex

Cybersex is a subcategory of online sexual activity and can be defined as pursuing sexual gratification via the Internet (i.e., looking at sexually explicit images, engaging in sexual chat or e-mails, or sharing sexual fantasies with another person or group while masturbating).¹⁸⁴

(A. 7) Sexual Addiction

While the term sexual addiction is relatively new, clinical observations of “pathological sexuality” have existed for more than 100 years.¹⁸⁵ For the purposes of this compilation, the following criteria are borrowed from a recent textbook chapter entitled “Sexual Addiction: Nosology, Diagnosis, Etiology, and Treatment.”¹⁸⁶ Some clinical terminology has been modified for the lay audience:

Sexual addiction is a maladaptive pattern of sexual behavior, *leading to clinically significant impairment or distress*, as manifested by three (or more) of the following, occurring at any time in the same 12-month period:

- (1) Tolerance, as defined by either:
 - a. A need for markedly increased amount or intensity of the sexual behavior to achieve the desired effect or
 - b. Markedly diminished effect with continued involvement in the sexual behavior at the same level of intensity.
- (2) Withdrawal, as manifested by either:
 - a. Physiological symptoms that are manifested upon discontinuation of the sexual behavior or
 - b. The same (or a closely related) sexual behavior is engaged in to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms.
- (3) The sexual behavior is often engaged in over a longer period, in greater quantity, or at a higher level of intensity than was intended.

¹⁸³Cooper, A., & Griffin-Shelley, E. (2002). A quick tour of online sexuality. Retrieved May 23, 2005, from <http://www.americanpsychotherapy.com/ce-novdec-2002-AQuickTourOfOnlineSexuality.php?cameFrom=3>.

¹⁸⁴Cooper, A. (2004). Online sexual activity in the new millennium. *Contemporary Sexuality*, 38(3), i–vii.

¹⁸⁵Black, D. W., Kehrberg, L. L. D., Flumerfelt, D. L., & Schlosser, S. S. (1997). Characteristics of 36 subjects reporting compulsive sexual behavior. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 154(2), 243–249.

¹⁸⁶Goodman, A. (2005). Sexual addiction: Nosology, diagnosis, etiology, and treatment. In J. H. Lowinson & P. Ruiz (Eds.), *Substance abuse: A comprehensive textbook* (4th Ed.) Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

- (4) There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control the sexual behavior.
- (5) A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to prepare for the sexual behavior, to engage in the behavior, or to recover from its effects.
- (6) Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of the sexual behavior.
- (7) The sexual behavior continues despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the behavior.

Patrick Carnes, a pioneer in the field of sexual addictions, clarified that sexually addictive behavior includes substituting a sick relationship to an event or process for a healthy relationship with others and that the addict's relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his or her life.¹⁸⁷ Although not all consumers of pornography struggle with a sexual addiction, it is understood that the majority of sexual addictions include pornography consumption to some degree, or did at some point in its etiology. This assumption is rooted in clinical observations by mental health professionals,¹⁸⁸ as well as the persistent theme of pornography use in the sexual addiction research literature. In terms of a medical perspective, Stein, Black, Shapira, and Spitzer (2001) present a case example of someone struggling with a preoccupation with Internet pornography.¹⁸⁹ Excerpts from their case example give insight into how this problem can manifest itself:

Mr. A was a 42-year-old married man, an academic sociologist who was seen with the chief complaint of a recurring depressed mood, despite ongoing treatment with an antidepressant agent.... On further exploration, Mr. A also revealed that during this period he had increased his use of the Internet, spending several hours a day searching for particular pornographic images. He clearly articulated distress at the loss of control this behavior represented for him and also noted that he was spending more money on Internet downloads than he could afford.... Although Mr. A was preoccupied with pornographic materials when he was depressed, significant use of Internet pornography was present even when his depression had responded to medication.... The university had provided office access to the Internet to all faculty around 3 years previously. Initially, Mr. A had mostly used this for research purposes.... Over time, however, the bulk of his use of the Internet had become devoted to searching for particular kinds of pornographic photographs.¹⁹⁰

Prevalence of Sexual Addictions

In terms of how many people struggle with this kind of problem, experts in the field of sexual addictions estimate approximately 3 to 6 percent of the U.S. adult population has a

¹⁸⁷Carnes, P. (1982). *Out of the shadows: Understanding sex addiction*. Center City, MN: Hazeldon.

¹⁸⁸Cooper, A., & Griffin-Shelley, E. (Cooper, A. & Griffin-Shelley, E. (2002). A quick tour of online sexuality: Part 1. *American Psychotherapy*, November/December, 11–13.

¹⁸⁹Stein, D. J., Black, D. W., Shapira, N. A., & Spitzer, R. L. (October 2001). Hypersexual disorder and preoccupation with Internet pornography. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158, 1590–1594. Retrieved August 12, 2005, from <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/158/10/1590>.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

diagnosable sexual addiction, or in other words approximately 6,534,000 to 13,068,000 people.¹⁹¹ In 1992, Coleman¹⁹² estimated 5 percent of the population met the criteria for sexual compulsivity, and the previous year Carnes¹⁹³ estimated 3 to 6 percent of the adult population was sexually addicted. How these estimates were arrived at is not clear; however, additional research by Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg found that out of 9,265 respondents to an online survey, 17 percent scored in the problematic range for sexual compulsivity.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, from available empirical indicators, it is reasonable to suggest that sexually compulsive and addictive behavior is a substantial problem in the U.S. and that estimates provided by experts in the field are close to the mark. Furthermore, if 3 to 6 percent of the U.S. adult population is indeed struggling with this condition, it is possible there are more Americans adults dealing with a sexual addiction than have been formally diagnosed with diabetes or are living with HIV.¹⁹⁵

(A. 8) Sexual Compulsivity

Jennifer P. Schneider is an expert in the field of sexual addictions who specializes in addiction medicine. According to Schneider, sexual compulsivity is the loss of ability to choose freely whether to stop or continue a sexual behavior.¹⁹⁶ Sexual behavior can include, but is not limited to: autoerotic asphyxiation, cybersex, exhibitionism, fantasy, frotteurism, fetishes, masturbation, pedophilia, phone sex, pornography, sex within a relationship, sex with multiple partners, sex with prostitutes, sexual role play, sexual violence, and voyeurism.

It should be noted that sexual compulsivities can be one aspect of a sexual addiction, as well as behavior that precedes a full-blown sexual addiction. In other words, someone struggling with a sexual compulsivity does not necessarily have a sexual addiction, but a sex addict would almost always suffer from sexual compulsivities. Unlike a sexual addiction, it is not required for the compulsive behavior to have occurred within a specific timeline, such as six months as is the criterion for sexual addictions.

¹⁹¹U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. Retrieved May 25, 2005, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/index.html>.

¹⁹²Coleman, E. (1992). Is your patient suffering from compulsive sexual behavior? *Psychiatric Annals*, 22(6), 320–325.

¹⁹³Carnes, P. (1991). *Don't call it love: Recovery from sexual addiction*. New York: Bantam Books.

¹⁹⁴Cooper, A., Delmonico, D. L., & Burg, R. (2000). Cybersex users, abusers, and compulsives: New findings and implications. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 7, 5–29.

¹⁹⁵Center for Disease Control. (2005). Retrieved July 5, 2005 from <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/estimates.htm#methods> & News release dated June 13, 2005 from 2005 National HIV Prevention Conference, Atlanta, GA, accessed through CDC Media Information Line 1-866-584-5030.

¹⁹⁶Schneider, J. P. (1994). Sex addiction: Controversy within mainstream addiction medicine, diagnosis based on the DSM-III-R and physician case histories. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, 1, 19–44.

APPENDIX B

Key Assumptions

There are several undergirding assumptions that influenced this compilation.

(B. 1)

It is assumed that “sexuality is a fundamental quality of human life, important for health, happiness, individual development, and indeed for the preservation of the human race.”¹⁹⁷

(B. 2)

It is assumed that marriage between a man and a woman is the most stable, healthy, and adaptive context wherein the full scope of sexual expression may be developed and expressed.

(B. 3)

The distinction between healthy and addictive sexual behavior, as outlined in Table 3 from the *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*,¹⁹⁸ is viewed as a concise and informed paradigm for understanding the differences between these two types of behavior.

<i>Healthy Sexual Behavior</i>	<i>Addictive Sexual Behavior</i>
Mutual consent (free will)	Coercion, victimization, and force
Behavior is a want or desire	Behavior is a compulsion for instant gratification
Fulfilling, enhancing, mood stabilizing	Associated with severe mood shifts
Personal interchange of emotion	Impersonal and emotional detachment
Rare negative consequences	Negative consequences
Enhanced self-worth	Negative self-worth, shame, guilt
Sexual behavior is fulfilling, satiating	Lack of satiation, tolerance
Balanced sexual behavior	Erratic sexual behaviors (excessive vs. anorexic)

¹⁹⁷Friedman, H. L. (1992) Changing patterns of adolescent sexual behavior: Consequences for health and development. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 13, 345–350.

¹⁹⁸Coleman-Kennedy, C. & Pendley, A. (2002). Assessment and diagnosis of sexual addiction. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 8(5), 143–151.

(B. 4)

Marriage between a man and a woman is a fundamental unit of society,¹⁹⁹ and social trends or policies that threaten the stability and vitality of marriage simultaneously destabilize society. As stated in *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences*,

Marriage is more than a private emotional relationship. It is also a social good....
[C]ommunities where good-enough marriages are common have better outcomes for children, women, and men.²⁰⁰

(B. 5)

Internet pornography is considered a threat to the stability and success of marital and familial relationships, and subsequently the social good.

(B. 6)

Although physical and emotional states of sexual arousal can be highly adaptive, when such states are repeatedly paired with violent, criminal, objectifying, and/or persistently solitary experiences, the context of adaptive, healthy sexual experience is distorted in a highly charged, misleading manner. By eroticizing behaviors and values that are destabilizing to marriage, family, and the social good (e.g., rape, incest, child abuse, and bestiality), pornography becomes a powerful means through which maladaptive sexual behavior is normalized and learned.

(B. 7)

Internet pornography is understood to be a potentially addictive delivery system²⁰¹ and is therefore understood within an addiction framework as opposed to a form of speech or expression. Viewing Internet pornography as addictive is a distinction that neuroscience has helped us clarify.²⁰²

(B. 8)

The Internet is not viewed as the cause of sexual problems or relational impact, but rather a catalyst for existing problems to be easily exacerbated and manifested, as well as for new problems to arise for individuals, couples, and families,²⁰³ especially among vulnerable or young populations.

¹⁹⁹Waite, L., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage: Why married people are happier, healthier and better off financially*. Random House; United Nations (December 1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16. Retrieved June 10, 2005, from <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

²⁰⁰Center of the American Experiment; Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education; and Institute for American Values. (2002). *Why marriage matters: Twenty-one conclusions from the social sciences*. Retrieved June 2, 2005, from <http://www.marriagemovement.org/pdfs/WhyMarriageMatters.pdf>.

²⁰¹Satinover, J. (2004). Senate Committee Hearing on the Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities, November 18, 2004.

²⁰²Senate Hearing on the Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities. November 18, 2004, Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. Testimonies from Drs. Judith Reisman, Jeffrey Satinover, Mary Anne Layden, and James B. Weaver, III.

²⁰³Leiblum, S., & Döring, N. (1998). Internet sexuality: Known risks and fresh chances for women. In A. Cooper (1998), *Sexuality and the Internet: Surfing into the new millennium*. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 1(2), 22–23.

(B. 9)

An anti-pornography position does not represent an anti-sex view. Claiming these two perspectives are synonymous is viewed as a common tactic for avoiding the core issues related to pornography. Because pornography contains fraudulent messages that can misinform children, adolescents, and adults about human sexuality, an anti-pornography stance may be interpreted as an effort to defend healthy human sexuality, as well as accurate information regarding it.

APPENDIX C

The Virtual Square

Although sexually explicit material is not new, the proximity of the sex industry to the public and private squares is unprecedented. Additionally, the distinction between the private and the public square has been blurred by the creation of the cyber or virtual square—a square that is relatively unregulated, and wherein the traditional pornography debate is no longer adequate in addressing the virtual landscape.

Historically, technology has structured the opportunities for pornography use and affected the degree of accessibility consumers have to it. As Tim Buzzell states,

Technologies are rooted in broader aspects of social change and constitute macro-social forces that alter lifestyles and choices. Certain time periods carry with them a dominant technology for viewing pornography...and consequently technology socially organizes opportunities for viewing pornography.²⁰⁴

In the 1970s, film was the contemporary means through which pornography was consumed; in the 1980s, videotapes reorganized the viewing arena; and in the 1990s, the Internet revolutionized pornography consumption to the point that some have even touted it as the catalyst for the next sexual revolution.²⁰⁵ More recently, the cell phone has become the up and coming medium for pornography.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴Buzzell, T. (2005). The effects of sophistication, access and monitoring on use of pornography in three technological contexts. *Deviant Behavior*, 26, 112.

²⁰⁵Cooper, A., Boies, S., Maheu, M., & Greenfield, D. (1999). Sexuality and the Internet: The next sexual revolution. In F. Muscarella & L. Szuchman (Eds.), *The psychological science of sexuality: A research based approach* (pp. 519–545). New York: Wiley.

²⁰⁶Cell phone porn. *Softpedia*, March 18, 2005. Retrieved June 16, 2005, from <http://news.softpedia.com/news/Cell-phone-pornography-696.shtml>.

APPENDIX D

The Pornography Debate

With regard to the pornography debate, the issue has traditionally been entrenched in: (a) linear, cause-and-effect assumptions; (b) a focus on the individual as the consumer or victim; (c) legal, feminist, or moral perspectives; and (d) dispute over the continuum between censorship and freedom of speech.²⁰⁷

Each philosophical or political camp cites research to support their view.²⁰⁸ For example, conservatives condemn the negative influence of pornography on values, attitudes, behavior, and moral decay, while liberals tend to regard pornography as having negligible impact, emphasizing its constitutional protection under the First Amendment. Anti-pornography feminists highlight the objectification, degradation, and abuse of women both in and through pornography, and anti-censorship feminists view the cost of regulation as outweighing the benefits, taking somewhat of a pro-pornography position.²⁰⁹

While many of these assumptions and philosophical views were fitting in the pre-Internet era, additional assumptions and information are needed to extend the debate and subsequent social policies into more current and comprehensive directions. It is hoped that this compilation may spark fresh thinking about an old issue in modern form.

It is also important to note that certain couples and even clinicians claim pornography consumed in a mutual, consensual, and open manner can be an enriching aspect of marital intimacy, thereby adding another perspective to the pornography debate. However, this mutual scenario is not the predominant experience coming forth in today's cultural milieu. Mutual consumption is also more likely to involve erotic content as opposed to hard-core pornography involving animals, children, adolescents, violence, homosexual themes, group sex, and/or sodomy involving weapons (e.g., knives or glass), inanimate objects, or unusual body part (e.g., fist or arm).

Moreover, pornography-induced fantasy, employed in a mutual way, is inherently different from solitary Internet viewing because it is used as a bridge to become closer and more present with one's partner, as opposed to a wall that cuts one's partner off, draws sexual energy away from the marriage, and heightens distance between partners.²¹⁰ Pornography used by couples also tends to include books or videos as the predominant media because they are more conducive to shared consumption. On the other hand, Internet pornography is distinguished from this type of shared consumption because it is almost always consumed in a solitary, secret fashion and has a potential for compulsive or addictive elements to arise in the individual viewer. To be clear, this paper focuses on Internet consumption when addressing relational impact and

²⁰⁷Thompson, M. E., Chaffee, S. H., & Oshagan, H. H. (1990). Regulating pornography: A public dilemma. *Journal of Communication*, 40(3), 73–83.

²⁰⁸Malamuth, N. M., Addison, T., & Koss, M. (2000). Pornography and sexual aggression: Are there reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 11, 26–94.

²⁰⁹Strossen, N. (1995). The perils of pornophobia. *Humanist*, 55(3), 7–10.

²¹⁰Full credit is given to Dr. Barry McCarthy for this idea, as well as the “bridge” and “wall” metaphor. Personal communication, June 1, 2005.

considers mutual pornography consumption to be the exception rather than the rule among couples.

APPENDIX E

Internet Usage

When one considers the pace at which Internet usage has penetrated North American culture and the phenomena associated with online sexual pursuits, a critical context is provided for understanding the impact of Internet pornography on marriage and the family. The purpose for using statistical data regarding Internet usage is to provide parameters and perspective for online sexual activities. Every attempt was made to cite the most current data available.

According to current Internet statistics, there are over 221 million Internet users in North America, and there has been a 104.9 percent increase in Internet usage since 2000.²¹¹ Internet accessibility now penetrates 67.4 percent of the North American population and this represents the highest level of accessibility in the world.²¹²

In terms of who is using the Internet, results from the 10th World Wide Web User Survey, conducted by the Georgia Institute of Technology's Graphic, Visualization, and Usability (GVU) Center provide an insightful composite.²¹³ The GVU survey was conducted between October and December 1998 with a total of 5,022 respondents. In general, the data indicate that the most common profile of an Internet user is that of an American, college-educated, Caucasian, married male, 37.6 years old, who uses the Internet daily from home and work. Data regarding new users, however, shows that young people between the ages of 11 and 20 represent the majority of new users within the last 1 to 3 years.

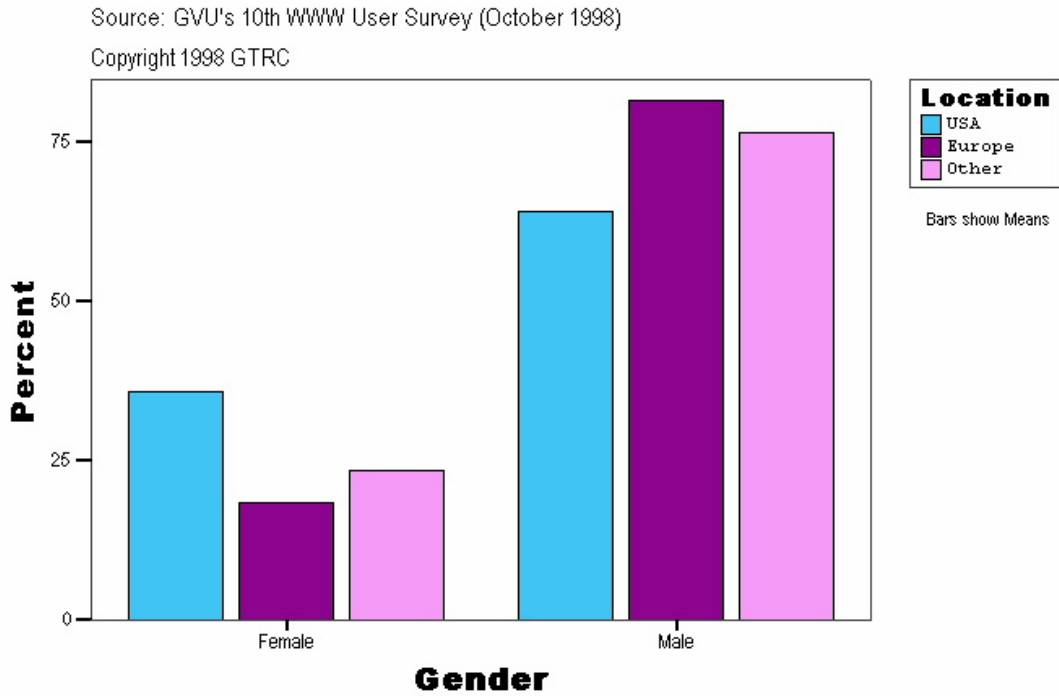
The following graphs outline specific survey results pertaining to demographics of Internet users in the United States, compared to respondents from Europe and other countries. Respondents from Canada and Oceania were the most represented in the other category.

²¹¹Internet world stats: Usage and population statistics. Retrieved May 23, 2005, from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats2.htm>.

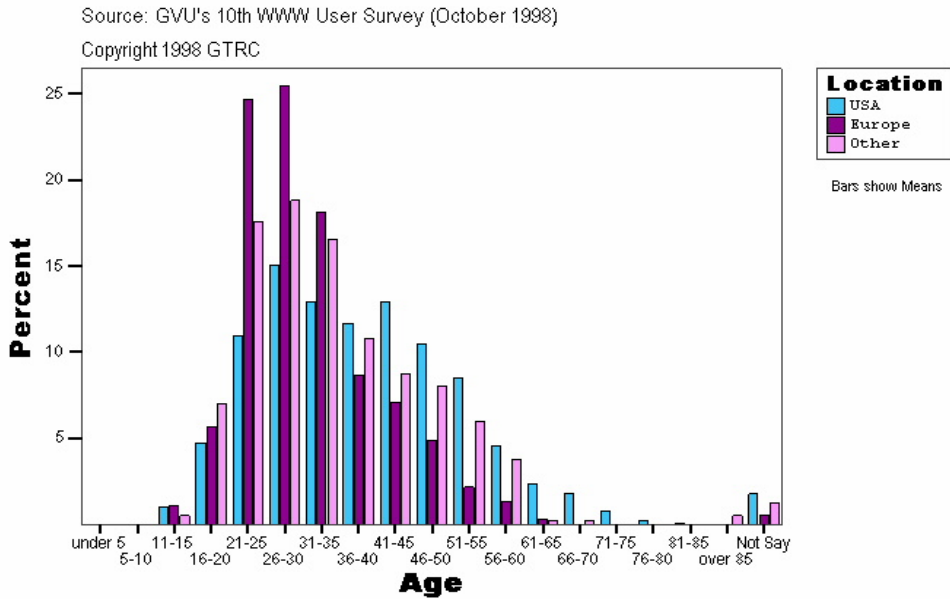
²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Kehoe, C., Pitkow, J., Sutton, K., Aggarwal, G., & Roders, J. (1999). Results of GVU's tenth World Wide Web user survey. Retrieved May 23, 2005, from http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-10/tenthreport.html.

(E. 1) Percentage of Male and Female Internet Users



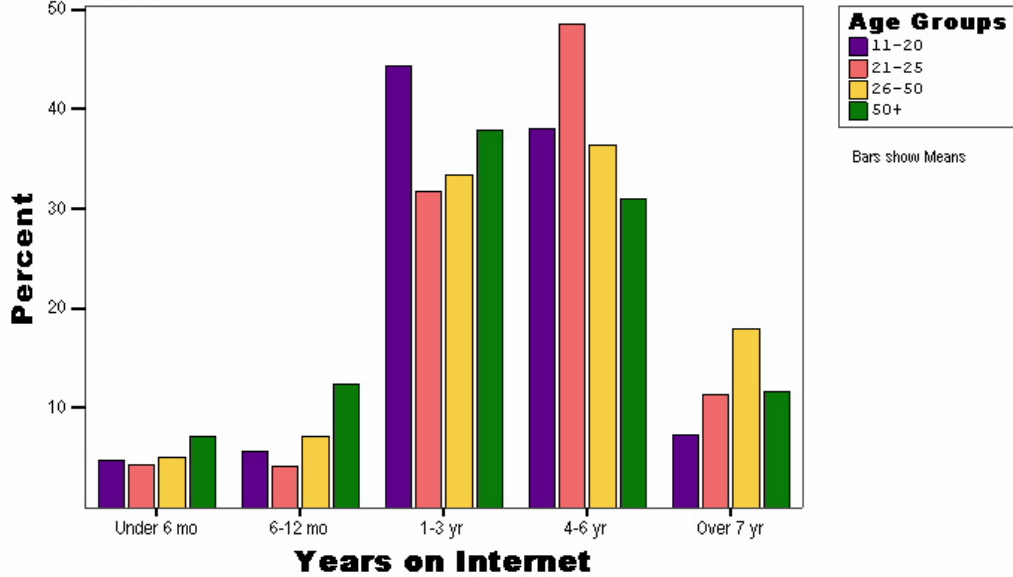
(E. 2) Age of Internet Users



(E.3) New Users by Age Group

Source: GVI's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)

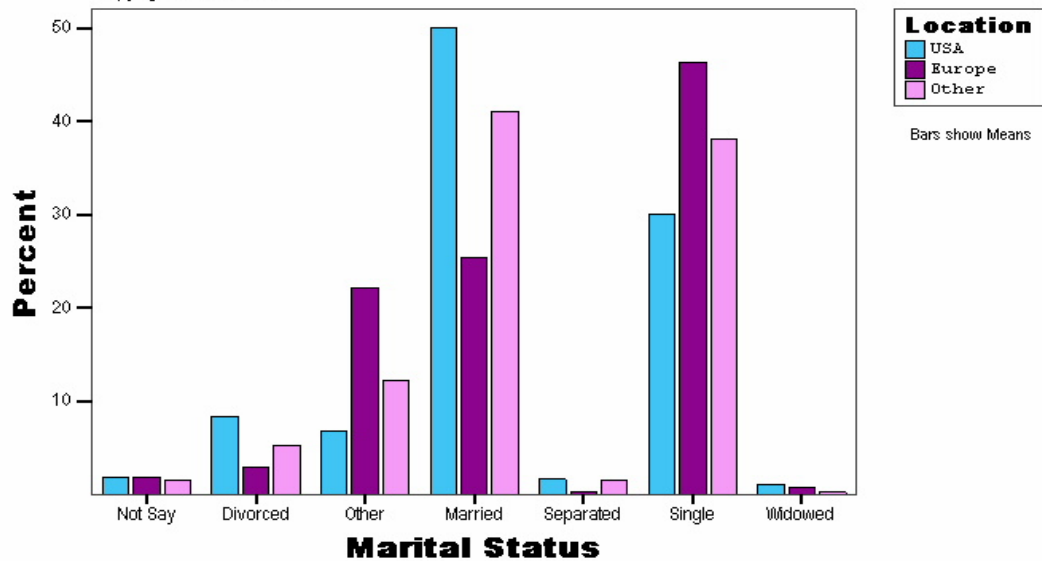
Copyright 1998 GTRC



(E.4) Marital Status of Internet Users

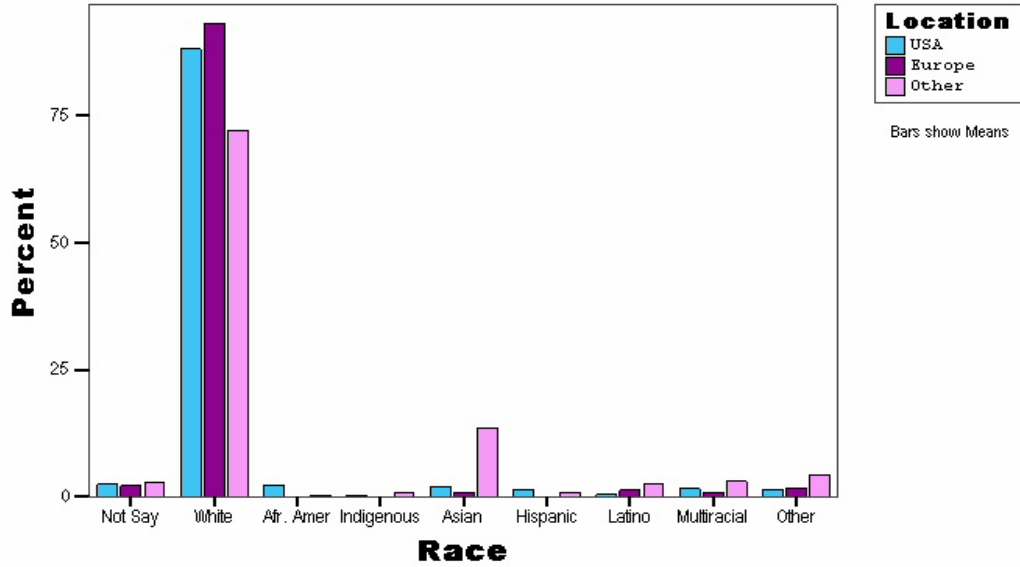
Source: GVI's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)

Copyright 1998 GTRC



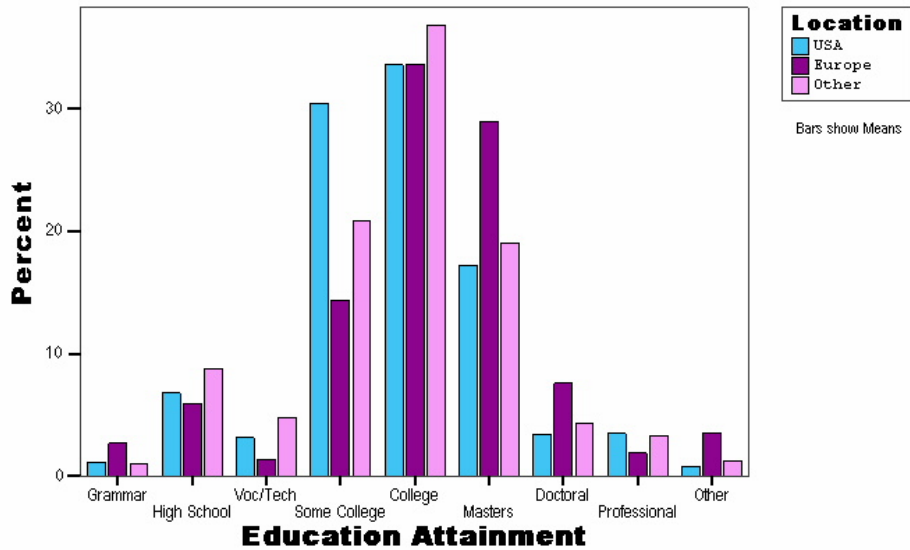
(E. 5) Race of Internet Users

Source: GVU's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)
 Copyright 1998 GTRC



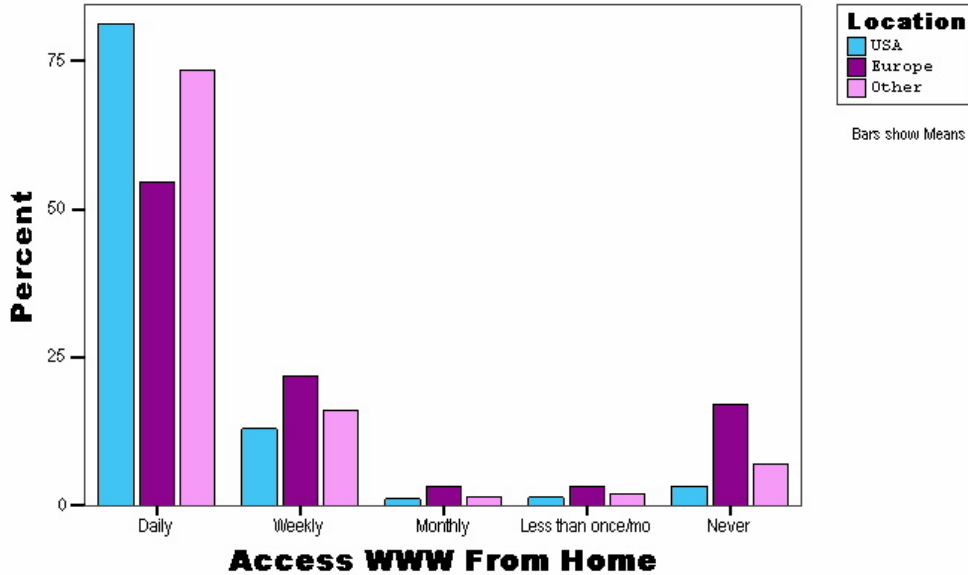
(E. 6) Education Attainment of Internet Users

Source: GVU's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)
 Copyright 1998 GTRC



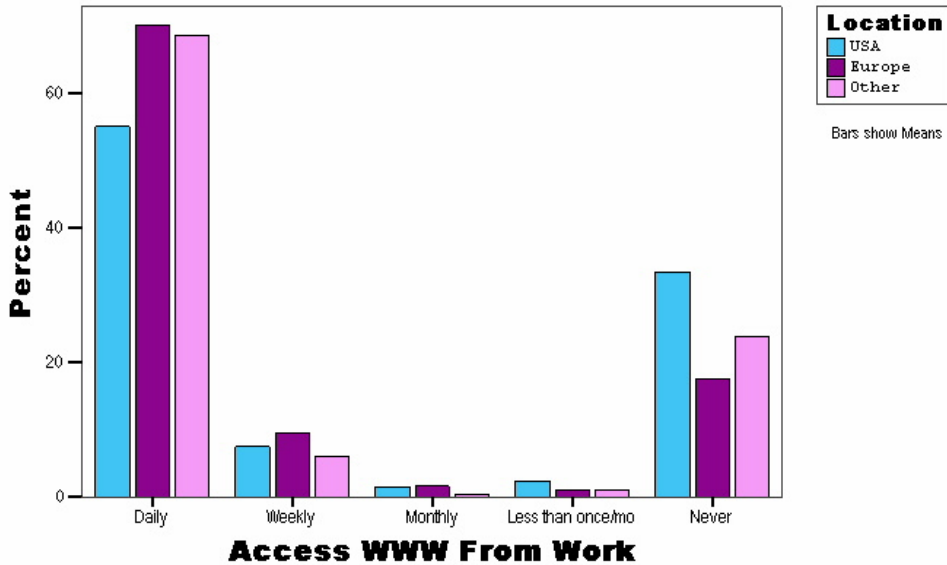
(E. 7) Frequency of Internet Use at Home

Source: GVU's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)
 Copyright 1998 GTRC



(E. 8) Frequency of Internet Use at Work

Source: GVU's 10th WWW User Survey (October 1998)
 Copyright 1998 GTRC



APPENDIX F

Online Sexual Activity

In light of the seemingly infinite array of subjects that may be searched via the World Wide Web, it is significant that “sex” is the most frequently searched topic.²¹⁴ In 1997, approximately one out of every six Internet searches related to sex.²¹⁵ By 2001, e-commerce had affected this sexual monopoly and commerce, travel, employment, and economic subjects dominated Internet searches.²¹⁶ While this shift may appear encouraging, a recent Wordtracker report of unfiltered search terms during May and June 2005 found that 10 of the top 20 search terms were directly associated with pornography, with “sex” and “porn” taking the top two positions, respectively. Additionally, three other search terms in the report referenced female celebrities associated with sexually explicit material (e.g., Paris Hilton).²¹⁷

Spink and Ozmutlu also found that “sex,” “nude,” and “naked” were high frequency terms used on the *Ask Jeeves* Web search engine.²¹⁸ Analyzing sexually related queries more in-depth, Spink and Ozmutlu determined sexually related queries tend to be longer in duration, contain more queries, and typically involve opening more Web pages than non-sexual searches.²¹⁹ Although research looking at which terms are used most frequently is clearly affected by which search engine is being monitored, it is fair to say that sexuality is a consistent theme in the virtual square.

The most popular search topics are further put into perspective considering that approximately 172 million Americans are online, representing more than half of the U.S. population, and 20 to 33 percent of those online use the Internet for sexual purposes.²²⁰ The pornography industry has also become increasingly mainstream, with several Internet pornography companies now listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange.²²¹

According to a 2004 Web traffic report published in *World Watch*, there are 23 to 60 million unique visitors to pornography websites each day.²²² Pornography revenue is now greater than the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball, and basket franchises and is almost twice the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.²²³ In a very real sense, pornography has become the most viewed spectator “sport” in America. This sport-like consumption is especially prevalent for computer-literate males who, according to Stack, Wasserman, and Kern’s 2004 study, are 6.43 times more likely to use Internet pornography than

²¹⁴Cooper, A. (2004). Online sexual activity in the new millennium. *Contemporary Sexuality*, 38(3), i–vii.

²¹⁵Spink, A., Jansen, B. J., Wolfram, D., & Saracevic, T. (2002). From e-sex to e-commerce: Web search changes. *IEEE Computer*, 35, 133–135.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

²¹⁷Mindel, A. (2005). Wordtracker report. Personal communication June 21, 2005.

²¹⁸Spink, A., & Ozmutlu, H. C. (2002). Characteristics of question format Web queries: An exploratory study. *Information Processing and Management*, 38, 453–471.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 453–471.

²²⁰Cooper, A. (2004). Online sexual activity in the new millennium. *Contemporary Sexuality*, 38(3), i–vii.

²²¹Morais, R. C. (1999, June 14). Porn goes public. *Forbes Magazine*, p. 214.

²²²Web Traffic. (November/December 2004). *World Watch*, 17(6), p. 40.

²²³Internet pornography statistics. Internet filter review. Retrieved May 24, 2005, from <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>.

females (N = 531) and experience a 12 percent increase in Internet pornography use for every one-unit increase in computer knowledge.²²⁴

Purveyors of online pornography also have an increasingly impressive assortment to choose from. As of July 2003, there were 260 million pages of pornography online—an increase of 1,800 percent since 1998.²²⁵ By the end of 2004, 420 million pages of pornography existed, and it is believed that less than 50 companies owned most of these sites.²²⁶

According to figures from Nielsen//NetRatings,²²⁷ in the United States during the month of April 2005:

- 34,376,000 unique users (23.68 percent of all Internet users) visited pornography websites and viewed an average of 239 pornographic web pages each.
- 71.61 percent of all online pornography consumers were male and 28.39 percent were female. [While the majority of consumers are indeed male, it is interesting to note that a Swedish study revealed that young women (18 to 24 years) consume more pornography than older men (50 to 65 years).]²²⁸
- 4,803 children and adolescents between the ages of 2 and 17 were exposed to or sought out pornography online. This age group represented 13.97 percent of all online pornography consumption.

For those who think online sexual activities are limited to the sexually eccentric or permissive, Laaser and Gregoire point out that an increasing number of clergy from all religious traditions are increasingly struggling with Internet pornography and sexually addictive behavior.²²⁹ For example, in Thoburn and Balswick's 1998 study of Protestant clergy, 45 percent of the pastors surveyed reported using pornography (N = 186),²³⁰ and this figure is congruent with less rigorous survey data of larger samples.²³¹ Internet pornography has been a significant enough problem for clergy that Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian group led by James Dobson, launched the website www.pureintimacy.org to serve as a resource for church leaders who struggle with pornography and online sexual activity.²³²

This phenomena with clergy is interesting when we consider that Stack, Wasserman, and Kern (2004) found that each unit change in church attendance was associated with a 26 percent

²²⁴Stack, S., Wasserman, I., & Kern, R. (2004). Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(1), 75–88.

²²⁵Paul, P. (2004). The porn factor. *Time*, 163(3), 99–100.

²²⁶LaRue, J. M., Chief counsel for Concerned Women for America. (2005). *Obscenity and the First Amendment*. Summit on Pornography, Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2322, May 19, 2005.

²²⁷Nielsen//NetRatings, April 2005. Retrieved directly from Nielsen//NetRatings May 25, 2005.

²²⁸Lewin, B., Fugl-Meyer, K., Helmius, G., et al. (1996). Sex in Sweden: A national survey on adult sexual behavior. Stockholm: The National Institute of Public Health. In E. Häggström-Nordin, U. Hanson, & T. Tydén (2005), Associations between pornography consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 16(2), 102–107.

²²⁹Laaser, M. R., & Gregoire, L. J. (2003). Pastors and cybersex addiction. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 395.

²³⁰Thoburn, J. W., & Balswick, J. O. (1998). Demographic data on extra-marital sexual behavior in the ministry. *Pastoral Psychology*, 46(6), 447–457.

²³¹Johnson, D., & Shenfeld, H. (2004). Preachers and porn. *Newsweek*, 143(15), p. 52.

²³²Ibid.

decrease in the odds of Internet pornography consumption²³³ and that religious bonds had a stronger negative influence on Internet pornography than being happily married.²³⁴

²³³(1.00 – OR 0.74, N = 531).

²³⁴Stack, S., Wasserman, I., & Kern, R. (2004). Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(1), 75–88.

APPENDIX G

Contrary Findings

In an attempt to present key findings in a fair manner, data regarding the benign and/or positive impact of Internet pornography on marriage and family were sought. While research exists to support children, adolescents, and adults having access to the Internet,²³⁵ no studies could be found regarding the positive impact of Internet pornography specifically.

²³⁵Subrahmanyam, K., Kraut, R. E., Greenfield, P. M., & Gross, E. F. (2000). The impact of home computer use on children's activities and development. *Children and Computer Technology*, 10(2), 123–144.