

From Pornography to Porno to Porn: How Porn Became the Norm

By Pamela Paul

“It’s all mainstream now!”

That’s what Zack, Seth Rogan’s character, says to his best friend and intended love, Miri, about pornography, in an effort to get her to make a pornographic film with him. The film is “Zack and Miri Make a Porno,” the latest gross-out comedy/romance from Kevin Smith, and one of many recent comedies (and romances, shockingly) to make light of pornography. Indeed, in Seth Rogan’s last romantic hit, “Knocked Up,” his character’s “job” is creating a pornographic website. The women in the film? After a quick, symbolic “yuck!”, they become willing participants.

It is all mainstream now. Over the past ten years, technological advances, cultural shifts and social attitudes have transformed the pornography landscape. Today, men, women and children are affected by the ubiquity and mainstreaming of pornography in unprecedented ways. The Internet, in particular, has made pornography more anonymous, more accessible and more affordable than ever before, bringing in new users, increasing use among existing fans, and catapulting others into sexual compulsiveness. Children are being exposed to pornography earlier than ever before, in ways that may profoundly affect their sexuality.

Not only is pornography itself more ubiquitous, the entire culture has become pornified. By that, I mean that the aesthetics, values, and standards of pornography have seeped into mainstream popular culture. Young girls brazenly pose in pornographic ways on their MySpace pages, even creating porn-like videos of themselves gyrating and preening before untold numbers of strangers. Porn stars are regularly featured in the same tabloid magazines that profile actors, singers, and other celebrities, equating those who sell sex with those who create art on the basis of other talents (though of course, one could argue the relative merits of that “art.”)

All of this wouldn't be possible without the hyperspeed spread of pornography over the past two decades. Today, the number of people looking at pornography is staggering. Americans rent upwards of 800 million pornographic videos and DVDs (about one in five of all rented flicks is porn), and porn far outpaces Hollywood's yearly slate of 400 movies with 11,000 porn films shot each year. Four billion dollars a year is spent on video pornography in the United States, more than on football, baseball or basketball. One in four Internet users look at a pornography website in any given month. Men look at pornography online more than they look at any other subject. And 66% of 18-to-34 year old men visit a pornographic site every month.

Pornography regularly makes headlines and sells products, even within the mainstream culture. In 2004, a wave of pornography-related incidents made headlines. First there was Janet Jackson's Super Bowl incident, in which the pop star notoriously bared her breast during primetime family television viewing hours. She was shortly thereafter joined by Paris Hilton's amateur sex video, which became an Internet sensation. More media attention followed—there was Howard Stern fleeing to satellite radio and soon porn star Jenna Jameson and Playboy bunny Pamela Anderson were topping the bestseller lists. A glossy coffee table book of porn star portraits accompanied by essays from writers like Salman Rushdie was published. Showtime ran a special in which porn stars, Jameson among them, bragged about the power women had in the pornography business. Pornography was everywhere—and only ever-so-slightly scandalous. Pornography was hip, sexy and fun.

Celebrity couples boasted about their trips to the hottest strip clubs. Characters on primetime sitcoms extolled the benefits of porn. Even mainstream women's magazines advised women to enliven their marital bedtime routine by turning on late night Skinemax. Pornography, we are being told, is good for you, and especially good for relationships.

But particularly on the Internet, where much of pornography today is consumed, the type of sexuality depicted often has more to do with violence, extreme fetishes and mutual degradation than with sexual or emotional connection. For those who haven't double-clicked: These aren't airbrushed photos of the girl next door or images of coupling; they are vivid scenes of crying women enduring aggressive multiple penetration. These are images created by pornographers for

a singular purpose: To help men masturbate and get them to pay for it. Sex, in pornography, is a commercialized product, devoid of emotion, stripped of humanity, an essentially empty experience. As one porn fan put it, after an evening of porn surfing, “You feel like, yeah, that was a release, but I don’t know, maybe not the best thing. Like eating a bag of potato chips.”

“You get into a slippery slope,” cautions Massachusetts-based psychologist and sex therapist Aline Zoldbrod. “The majority of porn out there is degrading and has only gotten worse. The women are plasticized; there’s no longer as much diversity or naturalism as there was two decades ago.” Zoldbrod believes many young men today are terrible lovers. “In real life, sexually-speaking, women are crock pots and men are microwaves. But in pornography, all a man does is touch a woman and she’s howling in delight. Today, pornography is so widely used by young men, they learn these falsehoods. There’s good evidence that the more porn men watch, the less satisfied they are with their partner’s looks and sexual performance.”

Such signs of dissatisfaction are on the rise. In interviews for *Pornified*, a book I wrote about pornography’s effects, men – even those who were avid porn fans – confessed that their pornography habits had damaged their sex lives. A 28-year-old man explained, “I used to view porn online, but I began to find it more difficult to stay aroused when having sex with a real woman...During a dry spell, I discovered i-porn, and the easiness of it made it easy to glut—to the point where now, even though the dry spell is over, real sex has now lost some of its magic.” When they are having sex with real women, such men need to conjure images they’ve viewed in pornography in order to maintain their level of excitement. Other times, they want to focus on their partner, but find their minds filled with pornographic images instead – like getting a bad song trapped in their heads.

Advice columnists across North America receive letter after letter in which women complain about their partner’s pornography. Men who watch a lot of porn seem to focus more intensely on the visual, even when in bed with a woman, asking her to emulate the look and moves of porn stars. Women have distorted body images and feel the need to remodel their appearances – no matter how they personally feel about pornography. Though pressured to accept pornography as a sign of being sexy and hip, many women admit that in practice, their boyfriend’s porn hurts. A

24-year-old from Baltimore complained to me about how her boyfriend got lap dances at a strip club every month. “If he were to do that with a woman in front of me on the living room couch, that would be considered cheating. Why is it somehow OK just because he’s at a strip club?”

Pornography’s effects have slinked out of the bedroom and infiltrated couples’ overall sense of wellbeing. Men say they are losing the ability to relate to, be close to, and achieve orgasm with real women. A single twentysomething graphic designer told me he would find himself in bars, berating himself over the way he scanned potential dates. “I’d be saying, ‘No, her breasts are too small, she’s not worth it, then wonder, ‘Who have I become? Why am I judging women like this?’” After months of rampant porn use, he had to “restrict” himself in order to regain perspective. Women view men’s relationship with pornography as a sign of betrayal, even cheating. A 38-year-old mother of two from Kentucky said finding her husband’s secret stash of porn “pretty much wiped out the trust in our relationship.” Once she knew about his years-long subterfuge, she recalled, “I would find myself worrying all the time. If I were going to take a trip for my job, I’d wonder about what he might look at while I was gone.”

Matrimonial lawyers attest to a growing docket of cases in which pornography becomes a major source of tension. “Pornography wrecks marriages,” says Marcia Maddox, a Virginia-based attorney. Among the five lawyers in her office, there’s always a case involving pornography being worked on at any given time. In one case, a wife found out her husband was involved in Internet pornography while she and their daughter were working on a school project. The two were seated at the family computer together when suddenly a large window popped up depicting a giant penis ejaculating. Horrified, the mother quickly shut down the computer. She then hired a computer technician, who discovered a trove of hardcore pornography on the hard drive. The couple wound up divorced, the mother awarded sole custody.

•••

Yet lest pornography get written off as a “women’s problem,” consider the effects on pornography on the primary users, men. Countless men have described to me how, while using porn, they have lost the ability to relate or be close to women. They have trouble being turned on

by “real” women, and their sex lives with their girlfriends or wives collapse. These are men who seem like regular guys, but spend hours each week with porn – usually online. And many of them admit they have trouble cutting down their use. They also find themselves seeking out harder and harder pornography.

Men told me they found themselves wasting countless hours looking at pornography – on their televisions and DVD players, and especially online. They looked at things they would have once considered appalling – bestiality, group sex, hardcore S&M, genital torture, child pornography. They found the way they looked at women in real life warping to fit the pornography fantasies they consumed on screen. Their daily interactions with women became pornified. Their relationships soured. They had trouble relating to women as individual human beings. They worried about the way they saw their daughters, and girls their daughters’ age. It wasn’t only their sex lives that suffered – pornography’s effects rippled out, touching all aspects of their existence. Their work days became interrupted, their hobbies tossed aside, their family lives disrupted. Some men even lost their jobs, their wives and their children. The sacrifice is enormous.

Nor is it only the most violent hardcore pornography that wreaks damage. According to a large-scale 1994 report summarizing 81 peer-reviewed research studies, most studies (70 percent) on non-aggressive pornography find that exposure to pornography has clear negative effects.¹ Gary Brooks, a psychologist who studies pornography at Texas A&M University, explains that “soft-core pornography has a very negative effect on men as well. The problem with soft-core pornography is that it’s voyeurism – it teaches men to view women as objects rather than to be in relationships with women as human beings.”

Because pornography involves looking at women but not interacting with them, it elevates the physical while ignoring or trivializing all other aspects of the woman. A woman is literally reduced to her body parts and sexual behavior. Not surprisingly, half of Americans say pornography is demeaning towards women, according to the *Pornified*/Harris poll. Women are far more likely to believe this – 58 percent compared with 37 percent of men. Only 20 percent of women – and 34 percent of men – think pornography *isn’t* demeaning. Of course, with increased

viewing, pornography becomes acceptable and what once disturbed fails to upset with habituation. While 60 percent of adults age 59 and older believe pornography is demeaning towards women, only 35 percent of Gen Xers – the most tolerant and often heaviest users – agree.

But pornography doesn't just change how men view women – it changes how men see themselves and how their own lives play out. Advocates aren't shy about extolling pornography's enticing effects. The first step is usually an increase in frequency and quantity of viewing. More times logging online or clicking the remote control, prolonged visits to certain Web sites, a tendency to fall into a routine. In a 2004 *Elle*/MSBNC.com poll, nearly one in four men admitted they were afraid they were “overstimulating” themselves with online sex. In fact, that routine is an essential ingredient in the financial success of high-tech porn. Wendy Seltzer, an advocate for online civil liberties, argues that pornographers should not even be concerned over piracy of their free material. According to Seltzer, “People always want this stuff. Seeing some of it just whets their appetite for more. Once they get through what's available for free, they'll move into the paid services.”ⁱⁱ And once they've indulged in more quantity, they want more quality – meaning more action, more intensity, more extreme situations. The impetus to find harder core fare affects the entire industry.

Particularly on the Internet, men find themselves veering off into pornographic arenas they never thought they could find appealing. Those who start off with soft-core develop a taste for harder core pornography. Men who view a lot of pornography talk about their disgust the first time they chanced upon an unpleasant image or unsolicited child porn. But with experience, it doesn't bother them as much – shock wears thin quickly, especially given the frequent image assault they encounter on the Internet. They learn to ignore or navigate around unwanted imagery, and the third time they see an unpleasant image, it's merely an annoyance and a delay. At the same time that such upsetting imagery becomes less unpleasant, arousing imagery becomes less interesting, leading the online user to ratchet up the kind of pornography he seeks, seeking more shocking material than he started out with.

Most women have no idea how often their boyfriends and husbands look at pornography. Usually, the deception is deliberate, though many men also deny how often they look at it. Most simply don't think about quantifying the amount they view. And while men consider trust crucial for a healthy relationship, they seem willing to flout that trust when it comes to pornography – deceiving their significant others into thinking they're either not looking at it at all or are looking at it less frequently. Fitting pornography into one's life isn't always easy.

...

Having won over men, the pornography industry is eager to tap into the other potential 50% of the market: women. A number of companies are increasing production of pornography made by and for women, and the industry is keen to promote women's burgeoning pornography predilection. Playgirl TV announced its launch in 2004 with programming to include an "erotic soap opera" from a woman's point of view, a 1940s style romantic comedy with "a sexual twist," and roundtable discussions of "newsworthy women's topics."

In recent years, women's magazines have regularly featured a discussion of pornography from a new perspective: how women can introduce it into their own lives. While many women continue to have mixed or negative feelings towards pornography, they are told to be realistic, to be "open-minded." Porn, they are told, is sexy, and if you want to be a sexually attractive and forward-thinking woman, you've got to catch on. Today, the pornography industry has convinced women that wearing a thong is a form of emancipation, learning to pole dance means embracing your sexuality and taking your boyfriend for a lap dance is what every sexy and supportive girlfriend should do. According to a 2004 Internet poll conducted by *Cosmopolitan* magazine, 43 percent of women have been to a strip club. In an *Elle* magazine poll, than half the respondents described themselves as "pro-stripping" (56 percent) and said they weren't bothered if their partner went to strip clubs (52 percent).

Some attribute the rise in female consumption to an increased supply in pornography for women. That may be part of the reason, but there's more at play than a simple supply-and-demand

equation. Broader societal shifts in men's and women's roles in relationships and a corresponding swing in women's expectations and attitudes towards their sexuality are driving women to pornography too. Sociologist Michael Kimmel, who studies pornography and teaches sexuality classes at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, says, "Twenty years ago, my female students would say, 'Ugh, that's disgusting,' when I brought up pornography in class. The men would guiltily say, 'Yeah, I've used it.' Today, men are much more open about saying they use pornography all the time and they don't feel any guilt. The women now resemble the old male attitude: They'll sheepishly admit to using it themselves." Women's attitudes have merged even more closely with men's.

The Internet measurement firm comScore tracked close to 32 million women visiting at least one adult Web site in January 2004. Seven million of them were ages 35 to 44, while women over the age of 65 totaled only 800,000.ⁱⁱⁱ Nielsen NetRatings has found the figures to be somewhat lower, with 10 million women visiting adult content Web sites in December 2003.^{iv} In a 2004 *Elle*/MSNBC.com poll, 41% of women said they have intentionally viewed or downloaded erotic films or photos and 13% watched or sexually interacted with someone on a live Webcam.

As much as women are touted as the new pornography consumer, they still lag far behind men. The spitfire headlines do little to reflect the reality of most women's experiences. Statistics belie the assertions of the pro-porn movement and the go-go girl mentality espoused by female pornography purveyors. While some polls show that up to half of all women go online for sexual reasons, the percentage of women who say they do are likely exaggerated by the inclusion of erotica, dating, and informational sites in the definition of "adult" Internet content, areas to which women are disproportionately drawn compared with men. Many women who are tracked through filtering sites are linked to pornography by accident, visit out of curiosity, or are tracking down their male partner's usage. Others feel like admitting they don't look at pornography at all is akin to affixing a "frigid" sticker to their chastity belts; better not to come off as uptight.

Many women try to write porn off as "a guy thing," but are profoundly disturbed when they are forced to come to terms with the way porn plays into their lives – and the lives of their boyfriends or husbands – today. They find themselves constantly trying to measure up to the

bodies and sexual performance of the women their men watch online and onscreen. They fear that they've lost the ability to turn their men on anymore – and quite often, they have.

One 24-year-old woman from Baltimore confided, “I find that porn’s prevalence is a serious hindrance to my comfort level in relationships. Whether it’s porn DVDs and magazines lying around the house, countless porn files downloaded on their computers, or even trips to strip clubs, almost every guy I have dated (as well as my male friends) is very open about his interest in porn. As a result, my body image suffers tremendously...I wonder if I am insecure or if the images I see guys ogle every day has done this to me...” She later confessed that she felt unable to air her concerns to anyone. “A guy doesn’t think you’re cool if you complain about it,” she explained. “Ever since the Internet made it so easy to access, there’s no longer any stigma to porn.”

A 38-year-old woman from a Chicago suburb described her husband’s addiction to pornography: “He would come home from work, slide food around his plate during dinner, play for maybe half an hour with the kids, and then go into his home office, shut the door and surf Internet porn for hours. I knew – and he knew that I knew. I put a filter on his browser that would email me every time a pornographic image was captured.... I continually confronted him on this. There were times I would be so angry I would cry and cry and tell him how much it hurt.... It got to the point where he stopped even making excuses. It was more or less: ‘I know you know and I don’t really care. What are you going to do about it?’”

For many wives and girlfriends, it becomes immediately clear that the kind of pornography their men are into is all about the men – about their needs, about what they want, not about their women or their relationships or their families. Men aren’t completely in denial either; they often recognize their kind of pornography doesn’t exactly reflect well on themselves or on their partners. It’s not surprising to either party when a woman ends up feeling second rate. Not only does pornography dictate how women are supposed to look; it skews expectations of how they should act. Men absorb those ideals, but women internalize them as well. According to the *Pornified*/Harris poll, most women (six out of ten) believe pornography affects how men expect

them to look and behave. In fact, only 15 percent of women believe pornography *doesn't* raise men's expectations of women.

Men tell women their consumption of pornography is natural and normal, and if a woman doesn't like it, she is controlling, insecure, uptight, petty, or a combination thereof. The woman demands. She is unreasonable. He has to give up something he's cherished since boyhood. She's not supportive. She blows everything out of proportion. If it weren't for this attitude of hers, the relationship would be fine. For a woman to judge pornography as anything but positive is read as a condemnation of her man or at the very least, of his sexual life. Discomfort with pornography also becomes a woman's discomfort with her own sexuality. Still, the *Pornified*/Harris poll found that only 22 percent of Americans believe pornography improves the sex life of those who look at it. Indeed one-third of respondents to this book's nationwide poll believe looking at pornography *won't* harm a couple's relationship.

Despite appearances, pornography isn't precisely a solo activity. As interviews with men and women attest, it plays into how people approach and function in relationships. Whether a couple watches together, or one or both partners uses it alone, pornography plays a significant role not only in sex but in a couple's sense of trust, security, and fidelity. As Mark Schwartz, clinical director of the Masters and Johnson Clinic in St. Louis, Missouri, says, "Pornography is having a dramatic effect on relationships at many different levels and in many different ways – and nobody outside the sexual behavior field and the psychiatric community is talking about it."

Not knowing who to turn to when their boyfriends turn away from them and towards pornography, many women write in to magazine advice columnists for help or ask for support in online forums. Female-oriented Internet communities (chat rooms, bulletin boards, online forums, etc.) teem with discussions on the subject. Every week, an advice columnist across the country addresses the issue; presumably many similar letters go unanswered in print. Just one example: A woman writes to a local newspaper, "We've been together five years, lived together half that time. We have a loving, happy relationship. Recently, I discovered via the computer that he's fascinated by hardcore pornography, lots of it. When confronted, he said I have no right to be upset, though he's aware it offends me; he insisted I let it go. He's still spending hours

looking at this and I'm disgusted... I've tried to discuss how degrading and controlling this seems to me but he's not willing to give it up. I know many people think it's harmless but it's making me question whether I'm willing to continue a relationship with someone who can disregard my feelings so easily.”^v

The nationally representative *Pornified*/Harris poll found that overall, 34 percent of women see men using pornography as cheating in absolutely all cases. Yet only 17 percent of men equated pornography with cheating. Indeed, most men tend to see pornography as *not* cheating: A man has his needs and he's fulfilling them in a way that prevents him from cheating on his wife with a real woman. According to the *Pornified*/Harris poll, 41 percent of men say pornography should never be considered cheating (only 18 percent of women felt the same way).

Once she's discovered his pornography, what next? Psychotherapist Marlene Spielman says when a woman finds out about a man's pornography habit, the result is usually a back and forth of very strong emotions. The woman typically feels hurt, angry and betrayed. Confronted husbands often begin with denial before confessing the truth, followed by a big fight, blaming and accusations. He may accuse her of driving him to it; she might point to his avoidance of problems in the relationship.

More women are installing programs like NetNanny on their computers to limit their home computer Internet access to PG Web sites. According to one filtering company, WiseChoice.net, more than half the company's 3,000 customers are adults who use the software not to block their kids' access but to keep themselves and other adults from looking.^{vi} Others see the need for a stronger dose of intervention. In the 2004 *Elle*/MSBNC.com poll, one in four women said they were concerned their partner had an “out-of-control habit” with online pornography, and one in four divorced respondents said Internet pornography and chat had contributed to their split. At the 2003 meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, a gathering of the nation's divorce lawyers, attendees documented a startling trend. Nearly two-thirds of the attorneys present had witnessed a sudden rise in divorces related to the Internet; 58 percent of those were the result of a spouse looking at excessive amounts of pornography online. According to the association's president Richard Barry, “Eight years ago, pornography played almost no role in

divorces in this country. Today, there are a significant number of cases where it plays a definite part in marriages breaking up.”

Matrimonial lawyers across the country attest to the growing docket of cases. “Pornography wrecks marriages,” says Marcia Maddox, a Vienna, Virginia-based attorney. Among the five attorneys in her office, there’s always a case involving pornography being worked on at any time. In one case, a wife found out her husband was involved in Internet pornography while she and their daughter were working on a school project. Horrified, the woman hired a computer technician, who discovered a trove of hardcore pornography on the hard drive. The couple ended up getting a divorce; the mother was awarded sole custody. In another case that also ended in divorce, the husband was regularly using porn on the computer until 2 in the morning. According to Maddox, most cases settle rather than go to court because it’s embarrassing for the man’s pornography to come out in public, particularly when children are involved. “I’m 62,” Maddox says. “I didn’t grow up with computers and these cases blow my mind.” The fact is, she says, “Using pornography is like adultery. It’s not *legally* adultery, which requires penetration. But there are many ways of cheating. It’s often effectively desertion – men abandoning their family to spend time with porn.” Often the judges find that even if children aren’t directly exposed to a father’s pornography, they are indirectly impacted because their fathers ignore them in favor of porn. Visitation in such cases may be limited.

Mary Jo McCurley, an attorney who has practiced family law in Dallas since 1979, agrees. In the past five years, more and more cases are brought forth in which a husband’s pornography habit is a factor. “We see cases in which the husband becomes so immersed in online porn it destroys the marriage,” she explains. “Not only is it unsettling for the wife that he’s using other women to get off, but it takes away from the time they could spend together as a couple.” In divorce cases these days, enormous amounts of time and money are spent recovering pornography off computers. “You can hire experts who specialize in digging through hard drives,” McCurley says. “There are people who have made a profession out of it. It’s become quite common in Texas divorce.”

•••

These statistics are frightening, but even more appalling are the effects of pornography on the next generation. According to a 2001 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, seven in ten 15-to-17-year-olds admitted to “accidentally” stumbling across pornography online. Girls were more likely than boys to say they were “very upset” by the experience (35 percent versus 6 percent). While a majority of 15-to 24-year-olds (65 percent) said they thought viewing such pornography could have a serious impact on people under 18, younger kids were more likely to take it in stride: 41 percent of 15-to-17-year-olds said it wasn’t a big deal.

Statistics show that about half – if not all – teenagers are exposed to pornography one way or another. A 2004 study by Columbia University found that 11.5 million teenagers (45 percent) have friends who regularly view Internet pornography and download it.^{vii} The prevalence of teens with friends who view and download Internet pornography increases with age, from nearly one-third of 12-year olds to nearly two-thirds of 17-year olds saying they have friends who use online porn. Boys are significantly more likely than girls to have friends who view online pornography: 46 percent of 16- and 17-year old girls say they have friends who regularly view and download Internet pornography, compared with 65 percent of boys the same age; the comparable percentage for 12- and 13-year old girls and boys are 25 percent and 37 percent respectively.^{viii}

Bear in mind that most of these statistics, while troubling, are already outdated.

Psychotherapists and family counselors across the country attest to the popularity of pornography among pre-adolescents. “I’ve had my own therapy practice for over 25 years,” says Judith Coché, a clinical psychologist who runs The Coché Center in Philadelphia and teaches psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. “I feel like I’ve seen everything.” She pauses and says almost apologetically, “I’m going to say something really strong. I’ve been walking around my practice saying, ‘We have an epidemic on our hands.’ The growth of pornography and its

impact on young people is really, really dangerous. And the most dangerous part is that we don't even realize what's happening."

Coché describes one case in which an 11-year-old girl, was found creating her own pornographic Web site. When her parents confronted her, she said that pornography was considered 'cool' among her friends. Perhaps it wasn't a very good idea, the girl admitted, but all her friends were doing it. Her parents were horrified." More boys – often pre-adolescents – are being treated for pornography addiction, Coché says. "Before the Internet, I never encountered this."

According to Coché, the effects on such ever-present pornography on kids who are still developing sexually – or who haven't hit puberty – has yet to be fully understood. Coché has talked to parents who have witnessed their sons playing computer games when pornographic pop-ups come onto the screen. "Pornography is so often tied into video game culture and insinuates itself even into non-pornographic areas of the Web. It's very hard for a 12-year-old boy to avoid." As a result, boys are learning to sexually cue to a computer, rather than to human beings. "This is where they're learning what turns them on. And what are they supposed to do about that? Whereas once boys would kiss a girl they had a crush on behind the school, we don't know how boys who become trained to cue sexually to computer-generated porn stars are going to behave, especially as they get older."

Pornography is wildly popular with teenage boys in a way that makes yesteryear's sneaked glimpses at *Penthouse* seem monastic. The prevalence of the Internet among teenagers has made pornography just another online activity; there is little barrier to entry and almost no sense of taboo. Instead, pornography seems to be a natural rite and an acceptable pastime. One teenage boy in Boston explained recently to *The New York Times*, "Who needs the hassle of dating when I've got online porn?"^{ix} Pornography is integrated into teenage pop culture; videogame culture, for example, exalts the pornographic. One 2004 video, "The Guy Game," features women exposing their breasts when they answer questions wrong in a trivia contest; the game, available on Xbox and PlayStation 2, didn't even get an "Adults-Only" rating. (The game manufacturer is being sued because one woman included in the footage was only 17 and didn't give her consent to be filmed.)^x

Like all good marketers, pornographers know it's important to reel consumers in while they're young. MTV recently announced the launch of a Stan Lee/Hugh Hefner collaboration, *Hef's Superbunnies*, an "edgy, sexy animated series" from the creator of the *Spider-Man* comic book series featuring a buxom team of specially trained Playboy bunnies.^{xi} Marketers have extended the porn brand to everything from sporting equipment to clothing. Two snowboarding companies, Burton Snowboards and Sims, now offer boards emblazoned with images of Playboy bunnies and Vivid porn stars. Sims boasts that their so-called "Fader" boards, which feature photographs of Jenna Jameson and Brianna Banks, are their bestsellers. Such boards are clearly marketed to teenagers, which form the backbone of the snowboarding market. Mainstream videogames regularly feature pornographic elements. "BMX XXX", for example, adds a pornographic sheen to bike stunts and racing. Another game, "Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude" features full-on nudity as gamers live out the player lifestyle, trying to score hot babes. The game's manufacturers are fighting to obtain an "M" rating (the equivalent of a movie's "R") in order to ensure carriage at Wal-Mart's across America.^{xii} Groove Games and ARUSH Entertainment has developed "Playboy: The Mansion," a videogame in which gamers adopt the role of Hugh Hefner as they "live the lifestyle" by hosting "extravagant parties" and undertaking "empire-building challenges." Given that *Playboy* readers already spend \$300 million on video games annually and more than three million readers own a video game system, "residents" of the new mansion look to be built in.

Kids also absorb pornography very differently from the way adults do. Not only are kids like sponges, they are also quite literal. Even young teenagers are generally not sophisticated enough consumers to differentiate between fantasy and reality. What they learn from pornography are direct lessons, with no filter, and with no concept of exaggeration, irony, or affect. They learn what women supposedly look like, how they should act, and what they're supposed to do. They learn what women "want" and how men can give it to them. They absorb these lessons avidly, emulating their role models. Still, many older kids at least partly recognize the negative side. When asked in a 2001 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 59 percent of 15-to-24-year-olds said they thought seeing pornography online encouraged young people to have sex before they are ready, and 49 percent thought it would lead people to think unprotected sex is OK. Nearly

half (49 percent) thought Internet pornography could lead to addiction and promote bad attitudes towards women. In a 2002 nationwide Gallup poll, 69 percent of teenage boys between the ages of 13 and 17 said that even if nobody ever knew about it, they would feel guilty about surfing pornography on the Internet. Not surprising, an even greater number of girls – 86 percent – felt the same way.

Pornography in all its permutations affects developing sexuality; the younger the age of exposure and the more hardcore the material, the more intense the effects. Boys who look at pornography excessively become men who connect arousal purely with the physical, losing the ability to become attracted by the particular features of a given partner. Instead, they recreate images from pornography in their brain while they're with a real person. "It's sad that boys who are initiated to sex through these images become indoctrinated in a way that can potentially stay with them for the rest of their lives," Gary Brooks says. "Boys learn that you have sex in spite of your feelings, not because of your feelings. Meanwhile, girls are taught that you don't have intimacy without relationships."

Watching pornography, kids learn that women always want sex and that sex is divorced from relationships. They learn that men can have whomever they want and that women will respond the way men want them to. They learn that anal sex is the norm and instant female orgasm is to be expected. "Kids today are going to run into pornography online, not erotica," explains Aline Zoldbrod, the Lexington, Massachusetts-based psychologist and sex therapist. "They're getting a very bad model. Pornography doesn't show how a real couple negotiates conflict or creates intimacy." For girls especially, Zoldbrod believes pornography, particularly online, is a "brutal way to be introduced to sexuality," since much of it she deems "rape-like" in its use of violence. When asked in the *Pornified*/Harris poll what the greatest impact of pornography on children is, 30 percent of Americans said the fact that it distorts boys' expectations and understanding of women and sex, 25 percent said that it makes kids more likely to have sex earlier than they might have, 7 percent cited the way it distorts girls' body images and ideas about sex, and 6 percent said it makes kids more likely to look at pornography as adults (men were twice as likely to believe this last as women). Only 2 percent of Americans actually believe that pornography helps kids better understand sexuality. And only 9 percent think it has no impact on children at all.

No matter what kind of pornography they look at, spending one's pre-pubescence and puberty on porn can have lifelong implications. Masters and Johnson's clinical director Mark Schwartz has seen 14- and 15-year-old boys who are addicted to pornography. "It's awful to see the effect it has on them," he says. "At such a young age, to have that kind of sexual problem." Schwartz isn't surprised about the growing number of young addicts in the Internet age. "Your brain is much more susceptible," he explains. "Many of these boys are very smart and academically successful; a lot of computer geeks are the ones who get drawn in. It affects how they develop sexually. Think about a 12-year-old boy looking at *Playboy* magazine. When you're talking about Internet pornography, you can multiply that effect by the relative size of the Internet itself."

Research trickling in has begun to document the effects of pornography on kids, a difficult area to study given obvious ethical challenges. Certainly, no parent would consent to have their children view pornography in order to further research on the damage done. Still, some evidence has been gathered. A recent study of 101 sexually abusive children in Australia documented increased aggressiveness in boys who use pornography. Almost all had Internet access and 90 percent admitted to seeing pornography online. One-fourth said an older sibling or friend had shown them how to access pornography online, sometimes against their will; another fourth said that using pornography was their primary reason for going online. When questioned separately, nearly all of their parents said they doubted their child would access any pornography via the Internet.^{xiii} In Ireland, scientists are reportedly developing a program, in conjunction with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, designed specifically for teenagers who have become addicted to pornography.^{xiv} Interestingly, when asked about the effect of pornography for the *Pornified*/Harris poll, young people between the ages of 18 and 24 were often most likely of all generations to report negative consequences. Four in ten 18-to-24-year-olds believe pornography harms relationships between men and women, compared with only three in ten 25-to-40-year-olds. The Internet generation is also more likely to believe that pornography changes men's expectations of women's looks and behavior.

Touring around this country to promote my book, I heard again and again from concerned parents. “I know my 14-year-old son is looking at extremely hard-core pornography, but what can I do about it? He tells me he needs the computer for schoolwork.” “I have a 10-year-old daughter. I don’t want to even think about what boys her age are learning about the opposite sex online.” “My daughter found pornography that my husband downloaded on the family computer.” A pediatric nurse told me there was an incident in her practice in which *toddlers* acted out moves from a pornographic movie. A day’s worth of nationwide headlines inevitably brings up stories of children encountering pornography at the local library, child pornography arrests, and school incidents in which teachers are caught looking at pornography on school computers during school hours. It is terrible enough that adults are suffering the consequences of a pornified culture. But we must think about the kind of world we are introducing to our children. Certainly everyone – liberals and conservatives – can agree with the statement, “It wasn’t like this when we were kids.” And I can’t imagine anyone would have that thought without simultaneously experiencing a profound sense of fear and loss.

ⁱ Lyons, J.S., Anderson, R.L. and Larsen, D., “A Systematic Review of the Effects of Aggressive and Nonaggressive Pornography,” in Zillman, Bryant & Huston (ed.) *Media, Children & The Family: Social Scientific, Psychodynamic, and Clinical Perspectives*, (Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ), p. 305

ⁱⁱ Schwartz, John “The Pornography Industry vs. Digital Pirates,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2004, Section 3, p. 1

ⁱⁱⁱ Olbermann, Kieth “Countdown,” MSNBC, February 23, 2004

^{iv} Navarro, Mireya “Women Tailor Sex Industry to their Eyes,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004, p. A1

^v “His Porn Habit Has Become a Hardcore Problem,” *The Toronto Star*, July 4, 2004, p. B04

^{vi} Harris, Lynn “Stop Him Before He Clicks Again!” Salon.com, April 15, 2004

^{vii} Radsch, Courtney C. “Teenagers Sexual Activity is Tied to Drugs and Drink,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 2004, p. A15. “(Incidentally, teenagers with a majority of friends who do so is three times more likely to smoke, drink or use illegal drugs than a teen who has no such friends.)

^{viii} “National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse IX: Teen Dating Practices and Sexual Activity,” The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, p. 23

^{ix} Denizet-Lewis, Benoit “Friends, Friends with Benefits and the Benefits of the Local Mall,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 2004, Section 6, p. 30

^x Thorsen, Tor “Take-Two, Sony, and Microsoft Sued Over ‘The Guy Game’” Gamespot.com, 12/21/04

^{xi} Littleton, Cynthia “Hugh Hefner, Stan Lee to Hop to ‘Superbunnies’”, Reuters/Hollywood Reporter, September 7, 2004

^{xii} Morris, Chris “Video Games Get Raunchy,” CNN Money.com, May 12, 2004

^{xiii} Goodenough, Patrick “Online Porn Driving Sexually Aggressive Children,” CNS News, November 25, 2003

^{xiv} Oakley, Richard and Battles, Jan “Cork to Research Teen Porn Addicts,” *Sunday Times*, January 25, 2004, Eire News 8