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Children Australia / Volume 40 / Issue 03 / September 2015, pp 232 - 241
DOI: 10.1017/cha.2015.28, Published online: 04 August 2015

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1035077215000280

How to cite this article:

Russell Pratt and Cyra Fernandes (2015). How Pornography May Distort Risk Assessment of Children and Adolescents Who Sexually Harm. *Children Australia*, 40, pp 232-241 doi:10.1017/cha.2015.28

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How Pornography May Distort Risk Assessment of Children and Adolescents Who Sexually Harm

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Over the past three decades, an accepted “given” of adolescent sexually abusive behaviour assessment and treatment has been that the more serious the sexual acts committed, the more entrenched that adolescent’s behaviours are likely to be, with a likely progression from minor assaults through to more serious, intrusive acts. We assume youth engaging in the sexually abusive behaviour may have become both desensitised to the harm they are causing, whilst needing to engage in more severe offences to gain the level of arousal originally achieved through lesser acts. This conceptualisation suggests a somewhat causal relationship between the duration of the sexually abusive behaviour; the severity of the behaviour and the length of treatment required to manage and treat the issue.

Has pornography consumption potentially impacted the assessment and treatment of youth who sexually harm? Does a relationship exist between the severity and the entrenchment of the sexually assaultive acts committed, or has viewing pornography and re-enacting what has been viewed altered this relationship? This article explores a number of these themes and questions.

■ **Keywords:** adolescents, assessment, case study, sexual abuse, pornography

Introduction

“... Certainly it is easy to see how pornography can act as an instructional aid in the ‘mechanics’ of sex, particularly with young, sexually inexperienced adolescents. The highest child-developmental priorities for most adolescents are how positively their peers perceive them, what reputations they have, and how well they fit into the ‘right’ peer groups. When it comes to sexual relationships, those same adolescents want to be perceived as ‘good’ in bed; however, pornography fails to provide its young viewers with realistic, everyday interactions between couples. Pornography further fails to show how people develop and maintain intimate relationships over time . . . most adolescents inherently have few, if any, courtship experiences predating their pornography exposure”.

(Prescott & Schuler, 2011)

Over the past three decades, there has been increased awareness and understanding of youth who sexually abuse. Prior to the early 1980s, there was little recognition of sexually abusive youth and, when there was such recognition, sexually abusive youth were not particularly well under-

stood; with sexual abuse by a young person of another young person being viewed through the lens of adult sex offending. Indeed, the patterns of understanding, managing, and treating children and youth were all based upon adult theories of sex offending (Chaffin, 2008; Rich, 2003). It has really only been over the last ten to fifteen years that a shift to child developmentally appropriate theories of sexually abusive youth has occurred; and with it the shift to treatment paradigms that also take into account background trauma, attachment, and brain developmental issues.

Regardless of current or past theoretical directions, it is now well established that sexually abusive youth cause considerable concern for the community. Research indicates that a significant proportion of sexual abuse is committed by adolescents, with the majority of the abuse being

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committed against siblings, cousins, and close peer aged or younger family friends (Hatch, 2002, 2005). What is also acknowledged is that youth who sexually abuse have excellent rehabilitation prospects and, in the majority of cases, do not continue to sexually abuse. Nonetheless, all ethical treatment and management programs undertake individual assessment of sexually abusive youth, which generally incorporates the youth's family, peer, schooling, and social situation, and considers what a safe placement, as well as safety considerations in other domains, would be for a particular youth. Placement considerations where there are younger children in the home present further complexities, and assessment considers many issues that can either moderate or raise risk situations. One area of consideration that requires assessment may be that of a youth's access to pornography.

In an earlier article in which safe placements of youth who sexually abuse were considered, Pratt (2013) questioned whether youths' access to pornography might impact assessment of risk, as well as safety planning. This concern echoed others' concerns (e.g., Kraus & Russell, 2008; Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006a, 2006b; Skau, 2007) regarding the impact of viewing pornography – particularly at an early age – on emerging sexual practice. Other studies have also either theorised or attempted to link viewing of pornography by youth to aggression, sexual aggression, and sexually abusive behaviours (Burton, Leibowitz, Booxbaum, & Howard, 2010; Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012; Sinkovic, Stulhofer, & Bozic, 2012).

Specifically in regards to sexually abusive behaviours, risk assessment of adolescents has historically developed along parallel lines to that of adults who sexually harm, and the use of empirically guided checklists and clinical interview is generally believed to be the “best practice” approach (Rich, 2003, 2009). A potential pathway described in the literature has been that the more serious the act or acts committed against victims by abusers, the more entrenched the behaviours are likely to be. Additionally, in some cases the young person who has harmed may progress from minor acts to more serious and intrusive acts as they become both desensitised to the harm they are causing and to their need to engage in more serious sexually abusive behaviour to gain the level of arousal originally achieved through the lesser acts. This understanding underpins the notion that the longer the sexually assaultive behaviour continues, the more potential for it to become entrenched and difficult to shift (Rich, 2011).

As this article considers the impacts of hard-core pornography on youth who sexually abuse, the actual term “hard-core pornography” should be defined. Whilst the content of, and mode of, access to pornography changes over time, Webster's Law Dictionary (2006) defines it as:

Media or photographs showing erotic or sexual behaviour in a way designed to cause sexual arousal.

In an often-quoted supreme court decision (Jacobellis v. Ohio, 1964), Justice Potter Stewart characterised pornography as follows: “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [‘hard-core pornography’], and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it”.

The questions this article considers are as follows:

- Does the hard core pornography readily available in 2015, and the ease with which it can be accessed and viewed in multiple situations and formats, have an impact upon our accepted theories of assessment and treatment of youth who sexually harm, and if so, how?
- Does a relationship still exist between the severity of the sexually assaultive acts committed and the entrenchment of the behaviour over time by the young person committing the act or acts, or has viewing pornography and re-enacting what has been viewed altered this relationship?

Porn is Everywhere

The phenomenon of sexually explicit material, also known as pornography, is neither new nor unique to one culture or time in history (Skau, 2007). Many researchers have described the long history of pornography, which includes pornography from ancient Egyptian times, the Indian Kama Sutra of the second century, and Victorian-era England, where photography was first used to produce pornographic postcards and pictures. Technological advances such as photography in the mid-19th century, movies in the early 20th century, and the advent of the Internet in the late 20th century, have all contributed to the explosion in the dissemination and consumption of pornography, which Cooper (2002) refers to as the Triple A Engine of *access, affordability, and anonymity* (authors' emphasis).

The “epidemic” of pornography in the Internet age is illustrated by the explosion of Internet porn web sites, expanding from 70,000 worldwide on the web in 2001 to currently 4.2 million porn sites in the United States alone (Glass, 2014). Additionally, at any given time there are over thirty million unique viewers (Glass, 2014). Most improvements in computer Internet download quality and speed are linked to the pornography industry, with great emphasis placed on providing pornographic content faster and in higher definition. Pornography is big business, with annual income in the United States topping \$10 billion (Arlidge, 2002).

The last two decades have also seen an explosion in portable devices on which pornography can be viewed, including smart phones, personal tablets, interactive gaming devices and lightweight laptops. The advent of these devices means easier, faster, and more anonymous access. Additionally, phones, tablets and gaming devices are increasingly provided to children and adolescents, with over 96%

of those with Internet access reporting being online in 2009 and 60% on a mobile device (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Thus, more than ever before, pornography can be accessed anytime, anywhere by virtually anyone, including our children, with our boys accessing pornography at a higher rate than our girls, and seemingly being more likely to view it positively, use it for sexual excitement, and consider it a valuable source of sex education (Horvath et al., 2013; Pratt, 2015).

Pornography's Impact

What impact does viewing pornography have on those who view it? Research indicates that sexual practice by adults has changed considerably over the past three decades, as has adolescent sexual practice. Additionally, research suggests that youth are engaging in sexual practices earlier, and that those who view pornography engage in oral sex and intercourse at an earlier onset age than those who do not view pornography (Kraus & Russell, 2008; Mitchell, Patrick, Heywood, Blackman, & Pitts, 2014; Skau, 2007).

In their review of Internet pornography and adolescent health, Guy and colleagues (Guy, Patton, & Kaidor, 2012) cited evidence of a link between engagement in aggressive or violent sexual practices and exposure to sexually explicit material, although only in adult samples. Adult women also reported more pressure to engage in acts seen in pornography. However, Guy et al. (2012) also suggest that a major issue in researching adolescents and pornography is the unidirectional nature of studies. In other words, is it possible that adolescents who are predisposed to earlier sexual activity are the ones who will seek out Internet pornography, rather than exposure to pornography leading to later sexual behaviours?

In a study of 470 Canadian adolescents (average age 19 years, 49% male), Skau (2007) and Skau and Barbour (2011) reported that 98% of the sample had been exposed to pornography, with average age of first exposure being 12.2 years. Nearly one-third had seen pornography by the age of 10, and pornography exposure tended to occur prior to sexual activity. Skau's research indicated disturbing differences between those who initially viewed pornography at age 9 or younger compared with youth aged 10 or over. The younger age group sample reported having engaged in more sexually questionable acts, a desire to engage in more varied sex, more sexual aroused to violence, higher consumption of pornography later in life, and spending more time each week looking at pornography. Skau (2007) suggested some strategies for working with youth who had engaged in viewing pornography, but also highlighted the difficulties of attributing problematic behaviour to pornography, quoting Slade (2001) on the "truth" about pornography: "Some pornography under some circumstances may affect some people in some ways some of the time" (p. 40).

Kraus and Russell (2008) found little evidence of a relationship between Internet usage, the nature of pornography,

and engagement in sexual activity at earlier ages. These results may be due to methodological issues, with Kraus and Russell using an adult sample with a mean age of 29 years reflecting back to between 12 and 17 years of age. Reflecting back that far may present issues of accuracy regarding those reflections. Additionally, the Internet and pornography as it exists today may bear little resemblance to that which existed in the early 1990s. However, Sinkovic et al. (2012) reported similar findings, concluding that, although they found weak correlations between early exposure to pornography and sexual risk taking, there was no substantial association between pornography use and sexual risk taking in early adulthood. They did, however, report that early exposure to pornography was a factor in later sexual risk taking.

Alternatively, Mosher et al. (2005) found evidence that between 1993 and 2008, the rate of oral sex in adolescence had increased, with 54% of female adolescents and 55% of male adolescents in their sample reporting having engaged in oral sex. Youth who had seen pornography online reported having higher numbers of sexual partners, a wider diversity of sexual practice, and drug and alcohol use while engaging in sexual encounters (Braun-Corville & Rojas, 2009; Lo & Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006a, 2006b)

Australian research (Green, Brady, Olafsson, Hartley, & Lumbey, 2011) suggests that adolescent sexual practice is heavily influenced by both technology and pornography. Green et al. reported that nearly 30% of Australian youth aged 9–16 had seen sexual material online. A 2014 Australian study (Mitchell, et al., 2014) noted that over half of students in the sample (full sample $n = 2136$) had received a sexually explicit text message, a quarter had sent a sexually explicit photo of themselves, and 70% reported having received a sexually explicit photo or text over social media.

Youth Exhibiting Sexually Abusive Behaviours

In fact, the relationship between pornography exposure and engagement in sexually abusive behaviours is neither well researched nor understood. While Horvath and colleagues (2013) suggest that access and exposure to pornography may contribute to engagement in *risky* sexual behaviour, Burton et al. (2010) found that viewing pornography did not lead to engagement in sexually *harmful* behaviours; however, adolescents who sexually abused reported more exposure to pornography than those who engaged in non-sexual crimes (Burton et al., 2010). In line with these findings, for youth who were deemed "at risk", the viewing of pornography increased the likelihood of engaging in coercive sexual behaviour, sexually aggressive language, and sex with animals (Owens et al., 2012). Moreover, repeated exposure to pornography was found to desensitise youth to the material viewed and to lead to distorted views of what are "acceptable" behaviours in relationships (Prescott & Shuler, 2011).

In attempting to understand the rationale for why children and youth may react to pornographic exposure in ways described above, Skau (2007) suggested several different factors may be at play:

- Children might lack the context for understanding explicit sex and may experience feelings of confusion, embarrassment and fear.
- Children are reluctant to seek adult support to make sense of pornography and this, coupled with the child's emotional response, may lead to pornography having a disproportionate influence in a child's life.
- Children and youth lack alternative pictorial representations of sex and life experiences, which further reinforces the legitimacy and power of pornographic images as acceptable and everyday "loving" sexual practice.

Skau's (2007) reasoning for youth's reaction to pornography provides a template for potentially understanding how youth who sexually harm may believe that what they have seen in pornography might be a legitimate way to express love and emotional closeness. A small amount of research has tended to focus more on whether exposure to pornography in adolescence either has some "causal" relationship to sexually abusive behaviours, or whether exposure has some qualitative effect on the nature of sexually abusive behaviours (i.e., more/less severe abuse, more/less gratuitous or functional violence). For example:

- Aebi, Plattner, Ernest, Kaszynski and Bessler (2014) compared juveniles convicted of child pornography viewing with those who viewed adult pornography, and those who committed contact offenses against peers or adults. They found that those youth who viewed child pornography showed fewer previous and subsequent offending than hands-on offenders (both peer and adult). They concluded that juvenile child pornography offenders required specific, focused interventions targeting dysfunctional internet usage and sexually deviant arousal.
- Ybarra, Mitchell, Hamburger, Diener-West and Leaf (2011) undertook a longitudinal study of potential links between exposure to X-rated material and sexually aggressive behaviours amongst youth aged 10–15 years. They found that intentional exposure to violent X-rated material over time predicted a six-fold increase in the odds of self-reported sexually aggressive behaviour.
- Peter and Valkenburg (2011) compared the use of sexually explicit Internet material and its antecedents by adults and adolescents, finding similar frequency and patterns of use by adults and adolescents. They found that lower life satisfaction scores were correlated to increased usage of sexually explicit internet material for both groups.

While these studies add to our understanding of the impact of pornography on sexual behaviours, attitudes and

beliefs, in regard to sexually aggressive behaviours and sexual offending behaviours, the issue of how pornography is integrated into risk assessment and what its impact may be upon risk of recidivism is not addressed.

Prescott and Schuler (2011), however, do directly address this issue and suggest three key questions professionals should ask during assessment: (1) should the professional be concerned about an adolescent continuing to view pornography (noting that willingness to view pornography is not the same as a willingness to sexually abuse)?, (2) is the adolescent breaking rules or laws in order to access pornography?, and (3) what is the payoff of pornography use for this adolescent over and above immediate sexual gratification? Other researchers (for example; Braun-Corville & Rojas, 2009; Burton et al., 2010; Mancini, Reckdenwald, & Beaugard, 2012) have questioned whether exposure to pornography in early adolescence provides a "template" for sexual actions, and also whether youth who view pornography prior to engaging in sexual abuse commit more serious acts, at faster progression in severity than previous theory has suggested (i.e., more serious sexual abuse occurs during the first episode or soon after).

Understanding what links exist between the use of pornography and later or concurrent sexually abusive behaviour may be especially important in risk assessment, as well as in decision-making regarding the intensity of treatment, the duration of treatment and also the type of treatment provided. As an example, for some youth accessing on-line pornography, a part of the treatment may be related to safe internet usage as well as more traditional sexually abusive behaviour treatment.

Pornography: An Instructional Manual

Is it possible that childhood access to pornography may have a detrimental impact upon sexual development and contribute to either the development of sexually abusive behaviours, or at least the severity of sexually abusive behaviours when they occur, through the piquing of a young person's interest to engage in sexual activity; and also enhancing their ability to engage successfully in serious sexual acts? Furthermore, might desensitisation be an issue where large quantities of hard core porn have been viewed although, again, this is only one risk factor amongst the many known? One thing seems clear: pornography provides a "how to" manual, showing every possible angle of what goes where and who can do what to whom, as well as providing sexual stimulation and shaping patterns of sexual arousal. When coupled with other risk factors present in the young person's life, pairing the "how to" with the sexual stimulation provided by pornography both equips and primes youth to undertake more advanced sexual practices earlier than they otherwise might or earlier than those who have not accessed pornography, simply because they have just that – a template for what to do, based on the graphic nature of pornography.

All of this, however, does not logically lead to a statement that pornography use in particular lays a path to sexually abusive behaviour. However, it does seem to make logical sense that pornography consumption will likely impact upon and influence the development of sexual scripts, sexual behaviours, sexual interests, and sexual beliefs in young people, even if not as a clear or direct risk factor for sexually abusive behaviours or sexual recidivism, other than at the individual level, in which pornography consumption becomes a risk factor for that particular youth. Given that we know the rates of consumption of pornography in the general community, both for adults and for adolescents, it seems that the majority of people who view pornography do not go on to sexually harm others. Indeed, although links between sexual violence, aggressive sexual practices, and pornography consumption have been more clearly explored and potentially linked in adult samples (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000), no such links have yet been established in adolescent populations and the role of pornography in juvenile sexually abusive behaviour remains unclear in adolescent and early adult samples.

However, in this article we suggest that for those adolescents and children who *do* engage in problem sexual and sexually abusive behaviours, there is a likelihood that those who have progressed rapidly to more serious sexual behaviours (for instance, penetrative sexual acts during their first or second acts of sexually abusive behaviour) are those young people who have viewed pornography, because they have been provided with graphic sexual knowledge by the pornography they have viewed. To risk evaluators and treatment providers, these youth may appear at higher levels of risk for recidivism than may actually be the case (anecdotally, professionals seem to associate higher recidivism risk with more serious sexual behaviours). They may also appear to have more entrenched sexually abusive behaviours (the assumption may be that more severe sexual behaviours means a greater duration of sexually abusive behaviour), and to possess less empathy for others. Thus, the role of pornography and its relationship to the sexually troubled behaviour may not be clear to or understood by the evaluator. A greater level of risk and troubled thinking may be assumed than may actually be the case, in which it is pornography that drives the behaviour rather than more pathological or more entrenched levels of sexually troubled behaviour.

Case Examples: A Service Provider's Experience

How do the issues discussed up to this point in this article impact the “real” world of assessment and treatment of sexually abusive behaviours? Case examples may assist in providing some understanding of the impact that pornography may have on youth who have been found to have engaged in sexually abusive behaviours. The following two examples, with the subsequent descriptions of assessment

and treatment, are taken from the work of the Australian Childhood Foundation, a large, well-established service in the outer Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria.

In recent times, the service has seen a number of adolescent boys referred who have engaged in serious incidents of sexually abusive behaviour. It is apparent that many of these young people did not have a prior history of engaging in sexually abusive behaviour or an obvious trauma history. These types of presentations mark a significant change from the typical groups of adolescent boys previously seen at the service, where there was generally a “trackable” progression in the severity of sexually abusive behaviours, with each incident increasing in severity and sexual sophistication.

Case Example: “Jack”

Jack, age 13, was referred to the service after engaging in sexually abusive behaviour, involving vaginal penetration of his 7-year-old female cousin. From all reports, this was the first known incident of sexually abusive behaviour. Jack comes from an intact, caring family with no history of abuse or neglect. Jack had been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. In line with this diagnosis, he had experienced difficulties with peer relationships, including being bullied, and reported problems in self-regulation. Jack reported that, prior to engaging in the abusive behaviour, he had been spending a great deal of time watching pornography on his laptop. Jack's family was highly religious and did not approve of any pre-marital sexual activity, including masturbation. Subsequently, Jack was unable to have any conversations with his parents about what he was viewing as he believed this would lead to their disapproval and serious repercussions. Jack reported having no peer-aged friends of either sex to provide counter experiences or information on sexuality and sexual matters. Pornography was his prime source of sexual, romantic, and relational information, at a time when his curiosity in all matters sexual was developing.

Case Example: “David”

David was aged 14 years when he was charged with the serious penetrative sexual assault of a 15 year old female school peer. Several months prior to the sexual assault, complaints had been made by two female peers at his school that David had been persistently asking them to engage in sexual acts with him. The acts he was requesting included oral and anal sex, as well as some fetish-style acts which greatly concerned his school principal. After the assault, David reported viewing pornography since age 9, and it became known that at age 12, he had received treatment for his aggressive and impulsive behaviours towards younger children and peers. Additionally, David experienced difficulties in his family and peer relationships. He was diagnosed with executive functioning and sensory integration difficulties. While David had experienced a number of problems regarding aggressive and impulsive behaviour, the sexual assault was his first

known hands-on episode of sexually abusive behaviour. It also emerged that he had been using sexually explicit language with adults as well as peers, David lived with his mother and younger brother, and had no contact with his biological father. Dealing with David's challenging behaviour over a number of years had exhausted the family's level of empathy and thus their ability to effectively support him. David's poor social skills and fragile sense of self resulted in his experiencing high levels of anxiety which he attempted to mask – or perhaps manage – by engaging in aggressive behaviours, ongoing pornography consumption and more recent sexually abusive behaviours.

Assessments: How Was David and Jack's Use of Pornography Assessed and What Impact Did It Have on Risk and Needs Assessment?

During the assessment phases for both David and Jack, it was important to understand the context of their pornography use, as well as what potential meaning pornography held for them, particularly regarding what role pornography played in the subsequent development of their sexually abusive behaviours (Prescott & Schuler, 2011). In the first instance, it was clear that Jack's viewing of pornography had occurred for a shorter period of time than David's, and it was hypothesised that pornography served to develop Jack's natural curiosity regarding sexuality and relationships. David, however, had begun viewing pornography at age 9 (see Skau, 2007, regarding the impact of early versus later viewing) after accidentally stumbling upon it on the Internet. He reportedly continued to view pornography as a means of dealing with his anxiety. For Jack, it seemed that the sensory stimulation he received from viewing pornography further reinforced his viewing behaviour.

Both David and Jack's lack of familial and peer relationships resulted in them being unable to seek assistance or any counter-balancing views in order to make sense of the pornography they were watching. Both boys reportedly experienced perceptual processing difficulties, and this seemed to contribute to them being unable to contextualise the fantasy aspect of pornography – in other words rather than understanding that the porn they were viewing was not an accurate portrayal of real-world sexual and relational interactions, they believed what they were seeing portrayed reality. In support of this hypothesis, David was reported to use a highly sexualised script during his sexual assault, which included explicitly talking to his victim during the assault about his perception of her enjoyment of the acts he perpetrated, similar to a pornography script. It was hypothesised that David and Jack's pornography consumption, coupled with their inherent vulnerabilities, were significant factors in their subsequent engagement in sexually abusive behaviour (see Owens et al., 2012).

During assessment, it became clearer that both David and Jack's pornography use contributed to them develop-

ing attitudes and beliefs that women were always willing to have sex and enjoyed sex whether they resisted or not. The boys' views were further reinforced by a lack of positive relational templates to counter the messages they were receiving from pornography. The assessor concluded that during the sexual assaults, both boys had re-enacted partial scripts from pornography they had viewed, with David targeting young women in similar scenarios to those he had viewed in pornography. Jack's targeting of a younger cousin was not assessed as due to sexual interest in children; rather, he was aware that the prospect of having sex with his peers was highly unlikely. He had got along well with young children and had previously been rewarded by adults for his kindness and patience during his interactions with them. At a family function, Jack had the opportunity to try out in real life a sexual act on his 7-year-old cousin which he had viewed many times in pornographic films. He believed his cousin at the time to be a willing participant.

As this article focuses on assessment issues, treatment issues are not discussed in any detail. Thus, it is suffice to state that a fundamental first step in treatment is to manage risk, create safety, and provide containment to youth who may be feeling out of control. This was the case for both Jack and David. This step included limiting and managing both boys' access to electronic devices, thus stopping them viewing pornography. They were also supervised around contact with children and peers. This reduced the likelihood of further harm, minimised the potential for acting out pornographic imagery and ideas, and helped ensure community safety. In turn, this required a high level of parental commitment, and in families with already fractured relationships the process was at times difficult. With regard to their sexually abusive behaviour, it seems clear that pornography had strongly influenced Jack and David's sexual behaviour, and perhaps even gave them some technical direction in how to engage in sexual abusive behaviours. It may have provided stimulation, technical knowledge, and a set of distorted beliefs that assisted them in overcoming any potential internal boundaries to sexual assault.

Juvenile Risk Assessment Tools and Their Assessment of Pornography Use

Whilst there are several risk assessment tools available to assessors engaged in risk assessment of sexually abusive youth, two of the better known and widely used are the *Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism* (ERASOR: Worling & Curwen, 2000) and the *Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol-II* (J-SOAP II: Prentky & Righthand, 2003). Both instruments commenced development prior to 2000, and thus their development began early with respect to the Internet pornography explosion seen over the past fifteen years; and it can be argued that in regard to assessing pornography's impact, both instruments are "products of their time". As such, neither recognises or addresses the impact of pornography on potential risk and recidivism.

However, then, as now, pornography use does not show up in the research literature as a general risk factor for sexually abusive behaviours. This is despite the fact that pornography use may be particularly relevant for any individual youth. Additionally, as this paper has suggested, whilst pornography use might be a factor individually for youth engaging in sexually abusive behaviours, it is more likely that in existing sexually abusive situations, pornography use may result in youth successfully perpetrating more severe penetrative sexual acts in a far quicker time span than had previously been the case.

With regard to where pornography use is recognised in assessment, on both instruments, the risk factors most likely to recognise or assess pornography use involves sexual interest, drive and preoccupation (Item 2 on the ERASOR; item 7 on the J-SOAP-II). Also, excessive pornography use may be an outcome of sexual preoccupation rather than the other way around, in which pornography use drives sexual preoccupation. In other words, sexual preoccupation may be the risk factor, rather than the use of pornography per se. It is simply not possible to identify a uni-directional relationship between pornography use and sexual abuse.

Furthermore, as noted, at this point in time there is no research directly linking the use or consumption of pornography as a risk factor for sexual recidivism in juveniles. Regardless, given that the ERASOR contains 25 items and the J-SOAP-II 28 items, it can be seen that the impact of pornography or sexual preoccupation represents only one item in a larger assessment of risk factors, and alone does not have the power to significantly alter the risk rating in either instrument. In fact, it is legitimate to ask whether any single factor should have an unbalanced (in comparison with other factors) and stronger influence on the overall risk assessment. Perhaps, a more useful way of thinking about how pornography use should influence risk assessment is for the assessor to form an understanding of the progression of the sexual abuse, abusive acts committed, the youth's beliefs about their victim's perceptions of what is occurring and what role pornography had in these areas.

Thus, it is suggested that current risk assessment instruments might not help us to most clearly recognise the impact, if any, of pornography use on the development and progression of juvenile sexually abusive behaviour, or its role in creating sexual scripts, shaping sexual behaviour, or influencing child and adolescent views of what is sexually desirable, acceptable, and appropriate in sexual behaviours and relationships. Perhaps, for risk assessment instrument and processes to be strengthened they must more clearly take into account and recognise the impact of pornography use in youths' developing sexual identities, and particularly troubled youth.

Signs That Pornography is a Problem

Certainly, in regard to assessing the impact of pornography on youths who have previously engaged in sexually abusive

behaviour, and thus on the level of risk they pose to recidivate, signs of problematic exposure to pornography may include:

- Indications that pornography is interfering with day-to-day activities, and emerging patterns that the youth is showing less interest in human face-to-face interaction and spending more time at the computer.
- A tendency for the youth to use the Internet in private and/or block or hide content from others when they approach or use the computer. Along with private use and blocking, parents and caregivers may become aware of the young person becoming almost obsessive regarding deletion of their browsing history.
- Young people's language may change and take on a style that mimics pornographic movie scripts. Suggestions or comments that are indicative of a knowledge of sexual content above age appropriate levels.
- Obsessive or harmful (injurious) sexual activity (including obsessive masturbation) or fetish-like interests of a sexual nature, which developmentally would not be expected until late in adolescence.
- An obsessive or high degree of anxiety, frustration, or anger when the young person is denied access to the Internet, for any reason.

Conclusions and Summary

The provided case studies and our review of the literature suggests that, at the very least, pornography consumption is problematic for some children and adolescents. In regard to the inclusion of pornography exposure as a definable risk domain in checklists such as the ERASOR and the J-SOAP II, it seems clear that the structure of these checklists does not specifically focus on pornography, and even items addressing sexual preoccupation do not carry enough weight to significantly alter resulting risk estimates. Under any circumstances, adding items directly related to pornography is not supported by the current body of research relating to risk assessment. However, even if pornography use was added to risk assessment tools it is unlikely to add more than one factor, and given the relationship between pornography use and sexual preoccupation we may then be scoring the same behaviour or interest twice, and may thus skew the risk assessment. Nevertheless, pornography use *must* be assessed and its impact understood for the assessment to be helpful and of valid assistance in the management of the youth's sexually abusive behaviours.

As such, given the problems of including pornography use as a risk factor in risk instruments, it seems that the impact of pornography consumption remains most accessible and relevant in clinical interview and psychosocial domains of risk assessment. There is a developing literature on both adolescent sexual risk assessment and the impact of pornography on sexual practice, sexual violence, and emerging and

developing sexual identity in childhood and adolescence. This is potentially where pornography use should be more closely examined and considered in terms of its contribution to risk, particularly in regard as to whether its impact results in risk being assessed as higher than it should be. In this case, these areas of risk assessment will also examine issues related to both treatment needs and placement safety, as they relate to pornography use.

Presently, the relationship between pornography consumption and sexually abusive behaviour remains poorly known in the whole. Although for some youth, pornography use may be a risk factor, it is also clear that for most, it is not. Rather, it is a case of many risk factors coming together, one of which may be pornography consumption. This begs the following question: Why are most youth able to view pornography without sexually abusing others, while for others pornography seems to provide high levels of sexual stimulation and a manual on “how to do sex”, as well as lowering inhibitions to engage in sexually abusive behaviour.

Future Directions

The question of “where next?” seems relevant, given the advances in technology and the resultant ease with which anyone, including vulnerable youth, are able to access hard core pornography. Future research directions must enhance our expertise and understanding of what pornography consumption “brings to the table” in terms of assessment, treatment, and management issues for sexually abusive youth.

Being able to manage and control pornography consumption is vital for youth when pornography has been assessed as a factor in prior sexually abusive behaviours. Parents and caregivers have to develop an understanding of pornography’s impact on their children. Assessors and treatment providers are required to formulate practical therapeutic strategies to help parents, caregivers, and youth to form partnerships to assist in the management of potentially sexually abusive situations. Specifically, treatment providers have to be able to accurately and consistently assess the impact of pornography on their individual clients.

To conclude, we suggest that the ease of access to pornography and its hard core nature provide a problematic sexual script for youth. In addition, we think that the impact of the use of pornography, in particular on the severity of the sexual acts engaged in and on how quickly a youth was able to progress to penetrative sexual abuse, has to be considered in the assessment of risk and treatment of youth exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours. Furthermore, we suggest that the relationship between the severity of the sexually assaultive behaviour, and the entrenchment and progression of the behaviour over time, may have been significantly altered through the pornography use and potential re-enactment of viewed pornography, together with its contents and ideology. As such, we may see some youth perpetrating serious

sexually abusive behaviours during their first episode of sexual abuse, yet being assessed at relatively low recidivism risk with a short treatment regime recommended despite the severe behaviour. This occurs because we recognise the influence of pornography use on the behaviour rather than other more entrenched risk factors. Nevertheless, a situation such as this has the potential to be viewed by the community as “being soft” on perpetrators, and may require some justification by those working with youth who sexually harm others.

In summary, it seems clear that for the majority of adults pornography is fantasy and bears little in common with real world sexual activity. Conversely, it also seems clear that a significant cohort of youth may not understand that pornography is *not* fantasy and for whom pornography provides a template for engaging in sexual activity, including what to do and how. Thus, it should be no surprise that some youth engaging in sexually abusive behaviour who have also used pornography engage in quite significant and severe sexual activity, which may include practices such as anal sex, facial ejaculation, slaps, pinching and punching of their partners, and other behaviours that have come straight from the pornography they have watched.

The onslaught of online pornography will not and cannot be stopped given the pornography industry’s explosion over the past 15 to 20 years, most of which is Internet based. If it cannot be stopped, then alternate ways of “porn-proofing” our children have to be sought. Young people have to understand that pornography is to sex what a Bruce Willis (*Die Hard*) action movie is to violence and adventure – complete and utter fantasy. It is up to all of us, parents, teaching staff, risk assessors, therapists, and mentors, to provide youth with sound sexual knowledge and thorough sex education that goes far beyond the mechanics of sexual behaviour and talks about real world relationships and a respectful value system. Further to this, we must attempt to protect our very young children, generally those under 12 years of age, from being exposed to any pornography, while at the same ensuring that our older children can ask the right questions, at the right time, of the right people. Porn is not real sex, even though it resembles some aspects of some sexual acts. Quality sex education must be provided that incorporates not only the mechanics of sexual behaviour and reproduction, but also the relational ethics of loving, respectful sex, and healthy, equal relationships.

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