

Testimony of  
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Written Testimony to Congress

Senator Brownback and other distinguished Members of Congress, my name is Pamela Paul and I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing on the effects of pornography on the American family. I don't think I ever imagined I would be testifying in front of Congress - and talking about pornography of all things. But after writing a story for Time magazine about pornography's effects on users in January 2004, I was compelled by the seriousness of what I uncovered to devote more time to writing a book on the subject. That book, *PORNIFIED: How Pornography is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships and Our Families* was published in September of this year. In addition to writing this book, I am a contributor to Time magazine, where I cover social trends and issues affecting women, families and children. I have written for a variety of other publications including The Economist, where I was a correspondent for five years, Psychology Today and The New York Times Book Review. I was formerly a senior editor at American Demographics magazine, where I analyzed social, demographic and media trends, and wrote a column on public opinion polling. And my first book, *The Starter Marriage and the Future of Matrimony*, an examination of marital and divorce trends among today's marrying generation, was published in 2002.

As I hope will be understandable, I'm going to refrain from using much of the graphic detail in this testimony that I documented in my book. This will necessarily not give a full picture of the damage that pornography does to men, women and children, but I hope to give a general idea, and those who wish to get a more complete - and disturbing - picture can refer to my book, which I am submitting along with my testimony.

First, an explanation of how I got started on this subject. For most of my life, I gave little thought to pornography. It was not something I considered relevant to me, nor did I consider it to be a particularly pressing issue facing this country. Pornography had played a negligible role in my own life and, I assumed, had little effect on the lives of those important to me. But on assignment to write about pornography for Time magazine, my eyes were blown wide open. During the weeks spent researching my article, I spoke with dozens of men and women about how profoundly pornography had affected their lives. I talked to male pornography users, female pornography fans and girlfriends of pornography fans, sex addicts and their wives, child psychologists and couples therapists.

Much of what I heard during these interviews was not just news; it was revelatory. There was a story about pornography that had not yet been told, a story many Americans, male and female,

don't realize is unfolding - in front of their eyes, inside their minds, on their family computer - at this very moment. In researching my book, I sought answers to some simple questions: Who uses pornography and why? What do men see in it? Are more women indulging? How does pornography affect people? Will looking at online pornography at age nine affect boys and girls when they reach sexual maturity? What is the impact of a pornified culture on relationships and on society as a whole?

To find out the private stories that people suspect but never hear; experience, but never talk about, I interviewed more than 100 people (approximately 80 percent male), all heterosexual, about the role pornography plays in their lives. While the scope of such qualitative research can never claim to be fully representative of all Americans, the people interviewed were expressly chosen to provide a broad spectrum. They ranged in age from 21 to 59; most were in their 20s and 30s. The men and women interviewed were diverse - ethnically, geographically, socio-economically. They were from a variety of backgrounds and religions, educations and occupations. No "profile" of the pornography user emerged because pornography cuts across all swathes of society.

In addition, I commissioned the first nationally representative poll, conducted by Harris Interactive, to deal primarily with pornography. Unlike other polls referred to in this book, many of which were online polls, this poll actually reflects what the whole spectrum of Americans think; the poll is weighted demographically and geographically to represent the actual ethnic, age, and socioeconomic composition of America. It's the first poll to ask many important questions such as, Does pornography improve the sex lives of those who look at it? Is using pornography cheating? Do you believe all men look at pornography? and How does pornography affect the children who view it?

We can lament what's happened to our pornified culture - in which the values, aesthetics and standards of pornography have trickled down into mainstream music, television and movies - but what's truly worrisome is how pornography has affected the lives of individuals. Despite the claim that porn is harmless entertainment, the use of pornography has serious, negative effects.

Countless men described 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.

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?'"

Of course, many mothers - and fathers (even those who use porn themselves) - are particularly disturbed by the idea that their children will look at pornography. Make no mistake: Experts today say there is no way parents can prevent their children from looking at pornography at a young age - as young as two- to six-years-old, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. Even if a parent uses a filtering program, children can likely outmaneuver the software, or see porn at their local library or a friend's house. And early exposure to pornography seems to be influencing the dating antics of pre-teens and teenagers, as well as in more serious and disturbing behavior.

In researching my book, I focused on four areas in which pornography has major repercussions on peoples' lives. First of all, and perhaps most obvious, pornography has a negative impact on the men who use it. But it also has a major impact on women, and on relationships between men and women. And perhaps most frightening of all, especially moving forward, pornography is having a serious impact on children - and at younger ages than ever before.

### Pornography's Effects on Men

When opponents of pornography talk about the ways in which pornography affects people, they often talk about how pornography hurts women. But this leaves out an important point: Pornography is also harmful to the men who use it. 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. 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 time 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." 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.

### Pornography's Effects on Women

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. Nielsen NetRatings has found the figures to be somewhat lower, with 10 million women visiting adult content Web sites in December 2003. 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.

### Pornography's Effects on Relationships

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."

And where do men get the time? Take your average husband and father. A full-time job often means that he's up at six and out of the house by 7:30. Sometimes he goes to the gym after work, but usually he comes straight home for dinner. He would like an hour with the kids at night, to spend more time with his wife, to get in some reading. But there's always something that needs to get done - the dog to be walked, bills to be paid, a bit of housework perhaps. On weekends, he's running between the kids' soccer game, Home Depot and the occasional round of golf. An extra two or three hours for pornography every week necessarily takes away from something. Of course, it is conceivable that he's all caught up with everything and has time to spare that couldn't be better spent with friends, his wife, his kids, his parents, or himself - reading, improving his tennis game, catching up on paperwork. But for many men, pornography takes away from time and energy that could be better spent on marriage and family.

Already, families, particularly dual income couples, complain about how little time they have for their spouses and family. Imagine the toll that devoting five or so hours a week to pornography takes on family life. Meals that could have been prepared and eaten together, homework that could have been pored over, family movies that could have been watched in each others' company. Imagine the anxiety and tension caused to a mother who knows her husband is online looking at pornography while his son is desperate for daddy's company.

Not surprisingly, researchers have found that prolonged exposure to pornography fosters sentiments against having family. In 2000, psychiatrist Jennifer P. Schneider conducted a study of 91 women and 3 men whose spouses or partners had become involved in cybersex. Among couples with children, 37 percent reported that children lost parental time and attention due to a parent's online sexual activities. In the 2004 Elle/MSBNC.com poll, men confessed that online pornography was eating up hours formerly devoted to other things. One in five said pornography took away from time they used to spend working, and another fifth said it took time away from hours they used to devote to their partner or their children. Heavier users (five hours or more online per week) were more likely to experience the crunch: 37 percent said time had been eked away from work and 37 percent admitted it took time previously devoted to family.

That so many men consider pornography a private matter, one hidden or downplayed, necessarily creates distance with their girlfriends and wives. According to Mark Schwartz of the Masters and Johnson Clinic, no matter how you look at it, pornography is always a sign of disconnection; those who seek it out often do so because of boredom or dissatisfaction elsewhere in their lives. In his research he's seen a "whole new epidemic," largely related to the Internet, of people using pornography to disconnect from their wives. "If porn is increasing involvement with your partner - you're getting turned on and then running to be with your wife, that's one thing," he says. "But we're seeing more men and women with an intimacy disorder, having trouble connecting with their spouse."

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. 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."

Still, many women equivocate over how to handle their husband's use, questioning themselves and their feelings. "Dear Abby," writes one woman from Kentucky. "My husband has run up telephone bills amounting to \$15,000. His credit cards are maxed out on '900' numbers. When I leave the house, he immediately puts our daughters in their rooms and goes online to porn sites or to talk to women. He is taking much-needed money from me and our children to get his kicks. I have begged him to stop, but the problem is getting worse. Should I stick to my word and leave him if he doesn't quit?"

Sadly and perhaps not surprisingly, women tend to blame themselves when their partners stray into pornography. "Dear Dr. Ruth," writes another woman. "I've been married for two years now (second husband). My husband seems to be very interested in sex, i.e., Internet pics, magazines, Watching Playboy, tele-companions; however, I'm not getting any! For the past 15 months, I can count the times we've had sex on two hands. We've talked some about it, but I feel that at this point I'm begging. Is it me? I love my husband with all my heart. We are raising two teenagers. Sometimes it seems like we're a great team at being parents, but not at being a couple. What should I do? I am seriously concerned with this problem and need some help."

Meanwhile, women beat themselves up over "driving" their partners to porn. Perhaps it was her fault; she wasn't a good enough wife or sexy enough lover. The women married to pornography users echo each other's pain: A 38-year-old mother of two from a Chicago suburb says her husband's pornography made her feel inadequate. Her husband seemed to demand perfection and she felt like a constant disappointment. She didn't wear the right clothes. She didn't look right when she wore them. She never performed in bed the way he wanted her to. "I began to feel physically like I was not a sexual being," she recalls. "I knew I could never measure up, so I couldn't compete." She tried watching pornography with her husband. "If you can't beat them, join them," she figured. "But I also had this sense I was reaching new lows," she says. "I was compromising my own feelings and beliefs." A teacher from Dallas says when she found out her husband was using pornography behind her back, she felt sick and angry. "Those women are so unreal," she says helplessly. "They're so different from the normal average person. I didn't measure up at all." She wondered if it was because she was a bit overweight. "Maybe that's what drove him to this," she worried. But then again, even if she were her perfect weight, she would never look like them. She figured she may as well just give up.

### Pornography's Effects on Children

It does seem like pornography's infiltration into our lives has become inevitable. Learning to like pornography online is fast becoming the new norm in this country. According to the Pornified/

Harris poll, 71 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds agreed with the statement, "I have seen more pornography online than I have seen offline (in magazines, movie theatres, TV)" - twice the number of Baby Boomers. More than half admit it's hard for them to go online without seeing pornography.

This moment of contact takes place at an increasingly young age. 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. 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.

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?" 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.)

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. 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. 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. 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. 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, Democrats and Republicans - 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.