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CYBERPSYCHOLOGY AND PORNOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Cyberpsychology is a construct that examines the ways in which the internet is providing the backdrop for our communication patterns, interactions, and even our identities. Studies conducted in this field so far have concerned themselves with constructs such as emotional functioning, behavioural responses, gaming, virtual reality, personality variables, perceptual processes, online behaviour and personality, and artificial intelligence. While the virtual world provides us with wonderful opportunities and information, there are numerous risks involved. Some of these risks include online gambling, pornography, and threats to the

identity and safety and wellbeing of the individual.

Common types of stress in the digital age include always needing to be available, connection overload and a fear of missing out which in turns leads to increased usage. One of the more pressing concerns in the digital age is the displaced pathway from traditional victimisation to cyber-bullying that is perpetuated by anonymity. Children especially, are vulnerable in this digital age, specifically to the use of pornography and its effects. The internet allows for the global impact of pornography to be disseminated via a Quadruple-A Engine, being Availability, Accessibility, Affordability and Anonymity. MRI

results have shown that the brain activity of those with a pornography addiction is comparable to substance dependence.

CHILDREN'S PORNOGRAPHY USES AND ITS EFFECTS

ADHD has been linked to a multitude of issues and even violent with romantic partners. Evidence in relationships by impacting partners of those diagnosed with relational implications mentioned above, it's easy to see why effective management of adult ADHD is a necessity. Management that is both combination and holistic has been found to be most effective. A starting point would be to exclude any possible organic causes.

Following this, medications such as stimulant (methylphenidate or dexamphetamine being the first line), non-stimulants like atomoxetine (for those who struggle with stimulants), antidepressants like bupropion, and other medications targeting the co-occurring disorders are indicated. Psychotherapy as an adjunct is also indicated. Types of suggested therapeutic approaches providing the tools to assist those with ADHD to organise their environments, enhance their social interactions and awareness, optimise time management, monitor and regulate sensory stimulation, and develop stress-management techniques.

Unfortunately, pornography continues to be the main source of sex education for many children and lends itself to permissiveness around topics like casual sex and sex with multiple partners. Because of the way in which pornography sends toxic messaging about sexuality to children, they learn distorted lessons and internalise these toxic messages surrounding sex and sexuality. In fact, children who use pornography are more likely to engage in unhealthy and damaging sexual behaviours. Studies show that girls who are 16 who used pornography were twice as likely to be sexually active at this age than girls who did not. Youngsters who engage with pornography engage in riskier sexual acts, such as having multiple sex partners, failure to use contraception, and using substances during sex. Alarming, they are also more likely to abuse their siblings sexually. They also internalise the belief that violence is a normal part of sex, even generalising this to beliefs around rape and sexual exploitation.

Pornography use in children has even been implicated in social deficits, such as a decline in social bonding, social interaction, and social integration in different contexts of the child's life. Gender stereotypes, too, are affected, with children coming to believe that the value of being a girl lies in sexually pleasing men, and even the belief that violent sexual

encounters are pleasurable for the girl. Intimate relationships in those who use pornography are negatively impacted, with gender-based violence seeing an increase based on the messages conveyed in pornography consumed.

HOW DO CHILDREN START WATCHING PORNOGRAPHY?

The pornography industry is a profitable one and concerns itself with making money at all costs. With this comes increased accessibility, and children being shown pornography by other people as a form of sexual grooming. Additionally, children may be unintentionally exposed to pornography via unsolicited messages, mistaken searches on search engines, pop-up images, advertisements, and more. Some children are exposed to pornography through unintentional web searches, or by using another person's device which contains pornographic material on it. Older siblings and other school children can also pique a child's interest in pornography. Children may engage with each other to source pornography, specifically when they have limited access to the internet. Group chats can also lead to exposure, when someone in the group shares pornographic content. Additionally, video games which overemphasise sexuality have posed a great threat to exposure to pornography in young people.

HOW CHILDREN REACT TO PORNOGRAPHY

Not all children react the same way to pornography, with some choosing to ignore it, and others passing the content along. Most children don't seek help or support from the adults in their lives on this issue. This leads to them becoming secretive and isolating themselves, as they view pornography use as shameful and a secret. Some children are open about pornography and share it among others or begin to act out sexually. Because pornography has special addictive qualities that are not shared by other activities or substances, it's considered both an "upper" and a "downer". Thus children use pornography when

bored to feel stimulated and when anxious or agitated as a means of self-soothing. Pornography has a short delivery pathway, with brain stimulation from consuming it being almost instantaneous, unlike with other substances.

The main problem with children viewing pornography under the age of 12 years is that they tend to develop problematic sexualised behaviours, as they're exposed to sexual knowledge beyond their developmental capacity. There is a continuum of sexual behaviours, ranging from typical, which is developmentally appropriate, to inappropriate, which may be contextually inappropriate, to problematic, which generally lacks consent and is contextually inappropriate, to the other end of the spectrum being harmful, which involves victimisation and violence towards others.

Children in the modern digital age are falling further along the most harmful side of the spectrum, with 30% believing that girls do not have a right to say no to sex, 50% believing that forcing sex on someone you know is not defined as rape, and 26% believing that girls enjoy being raped. Because sexuality is a sensitive developmental process, caregivers often under or overreact to children's experimentation or sexual acting out.

Children don't automatically understand the boundaries of sexual content – they need to be taught this. There are clear boundaries regarding what is developmentally appropriate concerning childhood sexual behaviour, with a fixation on sexual behaviour and pornography being highly problematic. It's therefore important for us to be aware of the potential risks of digital pornography on children, and to act in accordance with the developmentally appropriate bounds, ensuring our children are safe from harm – both within themselves and from a perspective of harming others. Keeping children safe in the digital age is of paramount importance to circumvent harmful sexual behaviours.

References available on request. 