

SEX BEFORE KISSING: 15-YEAR-OLD GIRLS DEALING WITH PORN ADDICTED BOYS

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“[I want] better education regarding sex for both boys and girls [and] information about pornography, and the way it influences harmful sexual practices.”

These are the words of Lucy, aged 15, one of 600 young Australian women and girls who took part in a just-released survey commissioned by Plan Australia and Our Watch. The survey, conducted by Ipsos, gathered responses from the girls and young women aged 15-19 in all states and territories.

In the survey report, entitled Don't send me that pic, participants reported that online sexual abuse and harassment were becoming a normal part of their everyday interactions. And while the behavior seemed so common, more than 80% said it was unacceptable for boyfriends to request naked images.

Sexual bullying and harassment are part of daily life for many girls growing up as a part of this digital generation. Young girls are speaking out more and more about how these practices have links with pornography—because it's directly affecting them.

Pornography is molding and conditioning the sexual behaviors and attitudes of boys, and girls are being left without the resources to deal with these porn-saturated boys.

If there are still any questions about whether porn has an impact on young people's sexual attitudes and behaviors, perhaps it's time to listen to young people themselves. Girls and young women describe boys pressuring them to provide acts inspired by the porn they consume routinely. Girls tell of being expected to put up with things they don't enjoy.

Some see sex only in terms of performance, where what counts most is the boy enjoying it. I asked a 15-year-old about her first sexual experience. She replied: “I think my body looked OK. He seemed to enjoy it.” Many girls seem cut off from their own sense of pleasure or intimacy. The main marker of a “good” sexual encounter is only if he enjoyed it. Girls and young women are under a lot of pressure to give boys and men what they want, to become a real life embodiment of what the boys have watched in porn, adopting exaggerated roles and behaviors and providing their bodies as mere sex aids. Growing up in today's porn culture, girls quickly learn that they are service stations for male gratification and pleasure. When asked, “How do you know a guy likes you?,” an 8th grade girl replied: “He still wants to talk to you after you [give him oral sex].” A male high school student said to a girl: “If you [give me oral sex] I'll give you a kiss.” Girls are expected to provide sex acts for tokens of affection, and are coached through it by porn-taught boys. A 15-year-old girl said she didn't enjoy sex at all, but that getting it out of the way quickly was the only way her boyfriend would stop pressuring her and watch a movie.

7th grade girls are increasingly seeking help on what to do about requests for naked images. Receiving texts like “send me a picture of your [boobs]” is an almost daily occurrence for many young girls. The girl asks: “How do I say no without hurting his feelings?”

As the Plan Australia/Our Watch report found, girls are tired of being pressured for images they don't want to send, but they seem resigned to send them anyways because of how normal the practice has become. Boys then typically use the images as a form of currency, to swap and share with their friends. Often times boys will use the revealing pics to humiliate girls publicly if there is a bad break up.

7th grade girls are asking questions about bondage and S&M. Many of them have seen 50 Shades of Grey, and wonder if a boy wants to hit me, tie me up and stalk me, does that mean he loves me? Girls are tolerating demeaning and disrespectful behaviors, and thereby internalizing pornography's messages about their submissive role.

Girls describe being groped in the school yard, and being routinely sexually harassed at school or on the school bus on the way home. They are saying that boys act like they are entitled to girls' bodies, like girls are only there to pleasure them. It is partially true what defenders of porn often say, porn does provide

sex education—but not in the way they think. It teaches middle school boys that women and girls are there for his pleasure and that they are always up for sex. To them, no just means persuade me. Girls describe being ranked at school on their bodies, and are sometimes compared to the bodies of porn stars. They know they can't compete, but that doesn't stop them from thinking that they have to. Requests for genital surgery have tripled in a little over a decade among young women aged 15-24. Girls who don't undergo porn-inspired waxing are often considered ugly, dirty, or gross by boys, as well as by other girls. Some girls suffer physical injury from porn-inspired sexual acts, including anal sex. The director of a domestic violence centre on the Gold Coast wrote to Collective Shout about the increase in porn-related injuries to girls aged 14 and up, from acts including torture:

"In the past few years we have had a huge increase in intimate partner rape of women from 14 to 80+. The biggest common denominator is consumption of porn by the offender. With offenders not able to differentiate between fantasy and reality, believing women are 'up for it' 24/7, ascribing to the myth that 'no means yes and yes means anal,' oblivious to injuries caused and never ever considering consent. We have seen a huge increase in deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, torture, drugging, filming and sharing footage without consent."

The Australian Psychological Society estimates that adolescent boys are responsible for around 20% of rapes of adult women and between 30% and 50% of all reported sexual assaults of children. Just last week, Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs argued that online pornography is turning children into copycat sexual predators, acting out on other children what they are seeing in porn. A 2012 review of research on "The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents" found that adolescent consumption of internet porn was linked to attitudinal changes, including acceptance of male dominance and female submission as the primary sexual paradigm, with women viewed as "sexual playthings eager to fulfill male sexual desires." The authors found that "adolescents who are intentionally exposed to violent sexually explicit material were six times more likely to be sexually aggressive than those who were not exposed."

The proliferation and globalization of hypersexualized imagery and pornographic themes makes healthy sexual exploration almost impossible. Sexual conquest and domination are untempered by the bounds of respect, intimacy and authentic human connection. Young people are not learning about intimacy, friendship and love, but about cruelty and humiliation. As a recent study found:

"Online mainstream pornography overwhelmingly centered on acts of violence and degradation toward women, the sexual behaviors exemplified in pornography skew away from intimacy and tenderness and typify patriarchal constructions of masculinity and femininity."

It is intimacy and tenderness that so many girls and young women say they are looking for. But how will young women find these sensual, slow-burn experiences in men indoctrinated by pornography? Psychologist Philip Zimbardo says of young men: "They don't know the language of face to face contact ... Constant arousal, change, novelty excitement makes them out of sync with slow developing relationships – relationships which build slowly."

Most importantly, it's young people themselves demanding change. Josie, 18, is quoted in the Plan Australia/Our Watch report:

"We need some sort of crack down on the violent pornography that is currently accessible to boys and men. This violent pornography should be illegal to make or view in Australia as we clearly have a problem with violence and boys are watching a lot of pornography which can be very violent ... This is influencing men's attitude towards women and what they think is acceptable. Violent pornography is infiltrating Australian relationships."

Girls like Lucy and Josie deserve our response. It is wrong to leave sexual formation in the hands of the global sex industry. We need to do more to help young people stand up against warped notions of sexuality conveyed in pornography.

Fight the New Drug is all about pro-love and pro-healthy sexuality. That is why we are anti-porn. Porn is full of ideals and beliefs that are completely opposite of what real relationships, real sex, and real love are like. Healthy relationships are built on equality, honesty, respect, and love. But in porn, it's the reverse; interactions are based on domination, disrespect, abuse, violence, and detachment. Our generation is the

first to deal with the issue of pornography to this intensity and scale. And, as we've seen with today's society, if we don't take a stand, the problem is only going to get worse and worse. By being informed and understanding porn's harmful effects, we can make a much needed change to our perceptions about love, sex, and relationships.

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