

Activity: 9-10.14.2

Key Messages

- Pornography does not depict body forms (including genitalia) or sexual acts in a realistic way and this can influence gendered expectations around sexual pleasure and performance.
- Pornography often communicates messages of male aggression and female sexual subservience. This is not conducive to healthy, positive relationships.

Activity Details

Victorian Curriculum

Health & PE Investigate how empathy and ethical decision-making contribute to respectful relationships
VCHPEP146

Capabilities VCECU021

Time 30 minutes

Levels 9 & 10

Equipment • *The porn industry: things to consider* Teacher reference sheet

The porn industry

Purpose

Students will critically reflect on how pornography and the depiction of women and sexual norms could impact on sexual pleasure and performance.

Students will explore what pornography is and how it can be used in our society.

Students will identify the role of good communication and positive feelings in achieving mutual sexual pleasure.

Teaching notes

It is difficult to teach about the negative influence of porn on society without using some graphic language. The teaching pages (on page 308) offer a diverse selection of quotes from the book *Pornland*, and newspaper and journal articles. It is up to teachers to select the quotes most suitable to their students and school. Be sensitive to the needs and maturity level of your students.

Procedure

1. Inform the class that you will be dealing with the sensitive topic of the porn industry and the way it depicts sex, men and women. Some students may be embarrassed or disturbed by the quotes and examples read out in class.
2. Read out some of the quotes.

Discussion

Have a class discussion, using the following questions as a starting point:

- What kind of language is used to describe the women in porn?
- What effect would this language have on the men who look at porn?
- Why would this work in favour of the porn industry?
- What effect might this have on men who watch porn?
- What effect might this have on women who watch porn?
- What impact could it have on someone's sexuality?

Information sourced from:

Dines, G 2010, *Pornland: how porn has hijacked our sexuality*, Beacon Press, Boston.

Vogel, L 2011, *Public health advocates push for safer sex in pornographic film industry*, Canadian Medical Association Journal, vol. 183, no. 5, pp. E261-262.

Crabbe, M and Corlett, D 2010, *Eroticising inequality: technology, pornography and young people*, DVRCV Quarterly, edition 3, pp. 1-6.

Tarrant, S 2010, *Pornography 101: why college kids need porn literacy training*, Alternet, <www.alternet.org/authors/11613>

Stark, J 2010, *Women worried by genital "abnormality"*, The Age, December 12, <www.theage.com.au>

The porn industry: things to consider—teacher notes

The following facts and quotes about porn are sourced from a number of books and newspaper and journal articles. Many of them are opinions of people rather than informed research. They are useful as discussion starters with students. Choose only the information and quotes that are suitable for your students and school.

A snapshot of the porn industry

The big business of porn

- Estimated to be worth around \$96 billion worldwide in 2006
- \$13 billion in America
- over 13,000 films released every year
- 420 million porn pages on the Internet
- 4.2 million porn websites
- 68 million search engine requests for porn daily (Dines, 2010, p. 47).

This makes pornography a larger industry than US basketball, football and baseball combined. (Crabbe and Corlett, 2010, p. 1).

The men in porn

- Are soulless, unfeeling, amoral
- They feel entitled to use women in any way they want
- They demonstrate no empathy, respect or love for the women they have sex with
- They control the pace, timing and the sex act, in order to demonstrate the control they have over women
- Their hands never caress or fondle, rather they hold down or force. (Dines, 2010, p. xxiv-xxv).

The women in porn

- Are always ready for sex
- The word 'no' is absent from their vocab regardless of how humiliating or degrading the suggested act is
- They very rarely expect to feel 'satisfied'
- Satisfaction comes from satisfying the man
- They never worry about STIs or pregnancy
- Their bodies seem never to be damaged by the aggressive sex
- They are immune to being called all manner of nasty names. (Dines, 2010, p. xxiv-xxvi).

Porn and violence

Veteran porn actor and producer Bill Margold quoted in Pornland

"I'd like to really show what I believe the men want to see: violence against women. I firmly believe that we serve a purpose by showing that... because they get even with the women they can't have." (Dines, 2010, p. xxvi).

"Imagine what would happen if suddenly we saw a slew of dramas and sitcoms on television where, say, blacks or Jews were repeatedly referred to in a racist or anti-Semitic way, where they got their hair pulled, faces slapped, and choked by white men pushing foreign objects into their mouths... By wrapping the violence in a sexual cloak, porn renders it invisible, and those of us who protest the violence are consequently seen as anti-sex, not anti-violence." (Dines, 2010, p. 88).

"The desire to see women utterly degraded and powerless explains in part why anal sex has become so popular in porn." (Dines, 2010, p. 69).

Eroticising inequality: technology, pornography and young people

Anthony Hardwood, an LA-based male porn actor:

"Describing the gonzo scene for which he, another man and a woman won the porn equivalent of an Academy Award, Hardwood said that it was not like sex, it was like 'crazy', that you wouldn't think that they were human, and that the girl was 'very tough, because she took everything'." (Crabbe and Corlett, 2010, p. 2).

"Mainstream pornography communicates messages of male aggression and female sexual subservience. Often, it eroticises the degradation of women and male brutality." (Crabbe and Corlett, 2010, p. 3).

Pornography both shapes and reflects assumptions about straight masculinity, female sexuality, expectations of beauty and how women are treated, particularly women of colour. Porn has the potential to affect the sexual pleasure and safety of all.” (Tarrant, 2010).

Porn and STIs

“According to the California Medical Association, between 2004 and 2008, nearly 2850 cases of sexually transmitted infections were diagnosed among some 2000 adult film performers in Los Angeles County alone. Approximately 70 per cent of those infected were women, a quarter of whom suffered multiple infections.” (Vogel, 2011)

Porn and body image

Women worried by genital ‘abnormality’

“A study of almost 800 women revealed that 75% did not like their partner looking at their genitals during sex because they feared their body parts would be a turn-off. 47% were so concerned by their appearance that they were considering having some form of vaginal ‘rejuvenation’ surgery, such as a labioplasty operation.”

The study of women aged between 18 and 80 revealed that high levels of anxiety about their genital image made it difficult for many to relax in the bedroom.

Half of the group, which had a mean age of 34, worried that their partner would find the look or odour of their genitals “repulsive”, while one in four feared the size or appearance of parts of their vulval region were unattractive or inadequate.

Psychologist and clinical sexologist Frances D’Arcy-Tehan, who is completing her doctorate through the University of Sydney, called on doctors and psychologists to help allay women’s fears by explaining the variations of women’s genitalia and discussing how these body parts can be misrepresented in pornography.

“In my private practice, I had a 16 year-old girl who came in and said her 18 year-old boyfriend said her vagina didn’t look like the images he saw on the internet.

That’s often where the beginnings of anxiety start.” (Stark, 2010)

Attitudes towards women depicted in porn

“The messages that porn disseminates about women can be boiled down to a few essential characteristics; they are always ready for sex and are enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating, or harmful the act is. The word ‘no’ is glaringly absent from porn women’s vocabulary.” (Dines, 2010, p.xxiii).

“In the porn world, women are never concerned about pregnancy, STDs or damage to their bodies and are astonishingly immune to being called cunts, whores, cumdumpsters, sluts, bitches, hot slits, fucktubes, squirty skanks and stupid hoes.” (Dines, 2010, p. xxiv).

“...women of the porn world seem to enjoy having sex with men who express nothing but contempt and hatred for them and often, the greater the insults, the better the orgasm for all involved.” (Dines, 2010, p. xxiv).

“It is a world filled with one-dimensional women who are nothing more than collections of holes.” (Dines, 2010, p.xxiv).

Exposure to pornography

Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia

- Youth in Australia are routinely exposed to sexually explicit images.
- Among 16 and 17 year-olds, three-quarters of boys and one-tenth of girls have ever watched an X-rated movie.
- Three-quarters of 16 and 17 year-olds have been exposed accidentally to pornographic websites
- 38% of boys and 2% of girls have deliberately searched for pornographic websites.
- Internet pornography is a particularly pervasive source of minors’ exposure to pornography, both accidental and deliberate.
- Males are more likely to seek out, and are more frequent consumers of, both X-rated movies and pornographic websites.
- Internet users of any age find it difficult to avoid unplanned encounters with sexually explicit materials. (Flood, 2007)

21st Century pornography: A key site of women's oppression?

Pornography is an important vehicle to transmit gendered behaviours, as it helps shape people's sexuality. For many youngsters porn is the first sex education they receive; it can be very confusing as it is also intensely personal.

- Predominantly women are portrayed as objects for the male gaze and as servants to the household and the broader economy.
- The affordability of digital cameras has opened up a large space for home-made porn videos, shared on the internet, which in itself has revolutionised how porn is being bought and consumed.
- These technologies also make it possible to watch porn now anywhere, anytime – including your mobile phone.
- Pornography has been mainstreamed to such an extent that even *Playboy* and the infamous symbol is now 'normal'; there are pencils and cases, erasers, little purses and socks for young girls with the Playboy symbol
- Market research conducted by internet providers found that the average age a boy first sees porn today is 11 and a study from the University of Alberta found that one third of 13 year-old boys admitted viewing porn.

- A UK survey published by the *Psychologies* magazine found that a third of 14 to 16 year-olds had first seen sexual images online when they were 10 or younger. 81% of those polled looked at porn online at home, while 63% could easily access it on their mobile phones.
- In Australia, it is estimated that 70% of men and 30% of women view pornography online
- Analysis of best-selling porn has revealed that "physical and verbal aggression is present in 90% of mainstream porn scenes".
- To talk about most mainstream porn as "empowerment" is highly misguided. Women still are second-class people. Many are not even the 'object of desire' anymore in porn but simply functional vessels to be used and abused.

(Windisch, 2011)

Information sourced from:

Dines, G. 2010, *Pornland: how porn has hijacked our sexuality*, Beacon Press, Boston.

Flood, M. (2007) 'Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia', *Journal of Sociology*, The Australian Sociological Association, Volume 43: pp. 45–60

Vogel, L. 2011, 'Public health advocates push for safer sex in pornographic film industry,' *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 183, no. 5, pp. E261-262.

Crabbe, M. and Corlett, D. 2010, 'Eroticising inequality: technology, pornography and young people,' *DVRCV Quarterly*, edition 3, pp. 1-6.

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Stark, J. 2010, 'Women worried by genital "abnormality",' *The Age*, December 12, <www.theage.com.au>.

Windisch, M. (2011) '21st Century pornography: A key site of women's oppression?', June. URL (consulted 29 October 2012): <www.thescavenger.net/feminism-a-pop-culture/21st-century-pornography-a-key-site-of-womens-oppression-736.html>.