

Pornography is sexualizing nation's children, say speakers

By Abbey Jaroma

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON - Pornography is sexualizing the innocence of the nation's young children, causing a race to adulthood before the end of childhood.

Young girls are being bombarded with photo-shopped images and are buying into unrealistic expectations set before them at an age meant for skinned knees and the Disney Channel.

Those were some of the concerns raised at a Capitol Hill symposium July 14 where experts in the field of pornography research spoke about the significant negative effects the production and viewing of pornography has had on children.

"Our entire culture is getting our girls porn ready," said Gail Dines, a professor of sociology and women's studies at Wheelock College in Boston. "It hypersexualizes them at a young age."

According to Dr. Sharon Cooper, the CEO of Development and Forensic Pediatrics, children learn from what they see, and Cordelia Anderson, founder of Sensibilities Prevention Services, believes that "pornography is teaching young girls to be products."

"Our children are going from Dr. Seuss to porn," said Anderson.

Dines also discussed pornography's effects on males.

"We are bringing up a generation of boys," she said, and Internet porn "reels boys in by saying, 'You want to be a man? Well this is your initiation.'"

She claimed that it is virtually impossible to find boys in the U.S. who do not view porn and she said she refuses to believe males are born with a natural attraction to

porn. Instead, this is a product of the culture, she said.

“We have developed a culture that is perpetrating (this) against our children,” she said.

A study conducted by the Internet Watch Foundation March 10, called “Emerging Patterns and Trends Report No. 1: Youth-Produced Sexual Content,” found an increasing trend younger children distributing of sexually explicit content by using laptop webcams.

It found that 17.5 percent of the content depicted children ages 15 years or younger; 93.1 percent of the content depicting children ages 15 or younger featured girls.

Internet porn is teaching our children that this is normal, that it doesn’t hurt anybody and that everyone is doing, according to Mary Anne Laden, from the University of Pennsylvania.

“Porn changes the way that children view others of the opposite sex,” said Ernie Allen, former president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

He said that one-third of all 10-year-olds are accessing pornographic content on the Internet; 53 percent of all 12- to 15-year-old boys are accessing online porn and as are 28 percent of 12- to 15-year- old girls.

The American Psychological Association produced a study in 2007 titled “Web Pornography’s Effect on Children” that had three key findings:

- The more often young people view online porn, the greater the likelihood they will have a recreational attitude toward sex and to view it as a purely physical function.
- There is a link between the explicitness of sexual media seen by younger viewers and their view of women as sexual “play things.”
- There is a relationship between porn use and feelings; in other words it isn’t necessary to have affection for people to have sex with them.

“The main job of parents is to teach their children how to be adults. We know

children do what they see, and what they see others getting rewarded for. First they watch their parents. Then they watch their friends. Then they watch the world, and the media delivers this world to them,” said Laden.

Sex education in schools does not cover all aspects of the issue, she believes, especially the moral and psychological.

“It is about time we took this culture back from the pornographers,” added Dine.

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