


The Sex Educator

9

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A MAGAZINE FOR INTERVENERS AND EDUCATORS
WHO ARE OFFERING SEX-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL AGE

A production of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec
in collaboration with the Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel-Jeunes

A photograph of two young men with brown hair, one wearing a yellow t-shirt and the other a brown and orange striped shirt, looking intently at a laptop screen. The man in the yellow shirt is smiling slightly. The laptop is a silver model from the early 2000s.

Pornography on the Internet and the consequences for youth: **HOW DO WE INTERVENE?**

BY GENEVIÈVE GAGNON

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Québec 



“As a result of being awash in a world of genitalia, 14-year-olds believe that anything is possible, that everything is desirable, that everything is acceptable.” [translation] (Robert, 2005)

“Young people have astonishing sexual experiences at increasingly younger ages, and the hypersexual society in which they live trivialises the issue.” [translation] (Duquet, 2005)

“Boys and girls often learn about sexuality while sitting at their computers.”

[translation] (Wolf, 2005)

The SexEducator

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Adolescent sexuality is a growing concern, particularly in regard to the sexualised images encountered. Although this phenomenon is not new, it has grown considerably with the advent of the Internet and the mounting presence of a pornography industry that is ready to cross all lines (St-Germain, 2002). Why should we have interventions for young people on this subject? In theory, access to pornography is prohibited for minors; but since its distribution is legal (Gavi, 2002) and it is easily accessed on the Internet, the issue of cyberpornography cannot be ignored. In addition, as educators, you can help young people develop a critical eye towards this question.

This issue of the magazine looks at Internet pornography and the possible consequences for adolescents exposed to it. Pedagogical activities to conduct with secondary 3 and 4 students is also proposed.

INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

Due to its omnipresence in public debate, pornography has become a societal backdrop (St-Germain, 2002; Wolf, 2003). Today with the Internet, the entire world population, including young people, have direct access to pornography. A wide variety of pornographic material (photographs and video) is accessible on Internet sites, chat rooms, instant messaging sites, etc. The material shows very explicit sex acts of all kinds, including some that are hard to imagine (Freeman-Longo, 2000).

Internet pornography is generally uncensored (Dionne, 2005), and images of bestiality, sexual violence and sadomasochistic practices abound in cyberspace (St-Germain, 2002). Greenfield (2004) hypothesises that Internet pornography can foster the development of sexual violence and certain sexual attitudes, as well as influence young people's moral values and sexual activities. Their exposure to Internet pornography is most often inadvertent (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2003); it is frequently when youth surf the Internet, open an e-mail, or download music files, for example, that they suddenly find themselves looking at a pornographic site (Greenfield, 2004; Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2003).

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BUT REALLY, WHAT DOES PORNOGRAPHY REPRESENT?

For a number of researchers, pornography refers to material showing explicit sexual activities that degrade and dehumanise women (Check and Guloien, 1989; Crooks and Baur, 2002; Desaulniers, 2001; Zillman and Bryant, 1989). Indeed, pornography represents sexuality only in terms of the genitals, without considering the body or the person as a whole, with a goal to erotically stimulate its consumers; even violence and children can be used to reach this goal (Desaulniers, 2001).

How is pornography different from eroticism? The term “pornography” comes from the Greek *porne*, which means “prostitution” or “female captive”, while eroticism comes from *eros*, which signifies “passionate love” (Steinem, 1998). Although erotic material can depict explicit representations of the genitals, it distinguishes itself from pornography in its depictions of sexuality that display mutuality, respect, affection, and a balance of power (Crooks and Baur, 2002). Conversely, a production (text, drawing, painting, photograph, film or show) is considered pornographic when it intends to cause sexual arousal, and is deemed abusive or degrading due to explicit or implicit use of force, physical or psychological violence, degradation or unequal balance of power (Crooks and Baur, 2002).

The Régie du cinéma, a government agency whose mandate is to oversee and control the exhibition of cinematographic works in Québec, uses the expression “sexploitation film” to designate certain audiovisual pornographic productions. A pornographic production is labelled as such when it interferes with public order and encourages or supports sexual violence through exploitation of minors and attacks on persons, or when it is dehumanising or degrading to individuals (Régie du cinéma, 2003). Productions that contain scenes of explicit sexual activity but do not meet the above criteria are classified “18 and over”, and can come with additional disclaimers such as “eroticism” or “explicit sexuality”.

WHAT MESSAGES DOES PORNOGRAPHY CONVEY?

Crooks and Baur (2002) summarise pornography as follows: “an emphasis on genitals, impersonal sexual acts, an unequal balance of power, and varying degrees of aggression. [...] Pornography often stresses male performance and conquest rather than pleasure. [...] The standard “plot” of heterosexual X-rated films involves women who are portrayed as sexual playthings, eager to accommodate every sexual urge of men.” (p. 581, 582). Women must be submissive and be responsive to any stimulation from men. Robert says that pornography is restrictive and mechanical because it shows men and women with insatiable sexual appetites (2005). “Pornographic material exposes—crudely, occasionally attractively and aesthetically—mechanical acts, genital performance, a fitting together of anatomical parts and, inevitably, the ‘spermatic’ stamp of power,” [translation] states the sexologist (p. 37). The messages it sends about men are that they should have many sex partners (Marsiglio, 1988), a high frequency of sexual relations that vary greatly (Mac An Ghail, 1994), and get all women to succumb to their advances, while showing no emotions, affection or commitment (Marsiglio, 1988).

The messages conveyed in pornography are not necessarily representative of the reality of adults, and even less of that of adolescents.

“The Internet has [...] developed into a \$2-billion-a-year sex-selling business. About 100,000 Web sites sell some kind of sex, and 200 sex-related Web sites are added every day” (Crooks and Baur, 2002, p. 580)

It communicates a false image of sexuality (St-Germain, 2002). There is no embarrassment, no discomfort, no taboos or blockages in these films (St-Germain, 2002). Intimacy, love and respect—qualities that are ideally part of a loving relationship—are absent in pornography (Dionne, 2005).

But why does pornography become a model for many people, despite the fact that it is far from being realistic?

“If you associate orgasm with your wife, a kiss, a scent, a body, that is what, over time, will turn you on; if you open your focus to an endless stream of ever-more-transgressive images of cybersex slaves, that is what it will

take to turn you on” (Wolf, 2003). The impact of pornography seems to be reinforced by its association with orgasm, and porn consumers get to a point where they need pornographic scenarios to reach orgasm. But according to Robert (2005), what makes pornography so effective and reassuring are that the images provide a frame of reference, an expected and predictable outcome. Pornography can be reassuring to adolescents who are looking for answers regarding sexuality. It is very useful for some boys (Allen, 2004) since it gives them the opportunity to acquire specific and explicit information on female sexuality (Measor, 2004). Pornography, especially that found on the Internet, gives them access to an extensive source of visual information without having to ask their friends or adults they know questions they might consider embarrassing.

To others, they can then appear to be experienced (important during adolescence), whether they have ever had sexual relations or not. Internet pornography supplies answers and images that would otherwise perhaps be less easy to access; but then again, it amplifies, exaggerates and sometimes distorts the nature of sexual relations.



EXPOSURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET

In 2001, as part of the *Young Canadians in a Wired World* study initiated in 2000, the Media Awareness Network¹ conducted a survey of 5 682 Canadian primary and secondary school students on how they use the Internet (Environics Group Research, 2001). According to this survey, 52% of young people polled had inadvertently accessed a pornographic site at least once in their lifetime. Most of the time, they gained access to these sites by searching for something else on the Web and misspelling an address. Over 70% of them had told either a friend (45%), their parents (20%), a teacher (4%) or another family member (3%). Adolescents who were most likely not to have disclosed it to anyone were boys in secondary school and boys who used the Internet at home. Young people also involuntarily access pornographic material through e-mail. Indeed, 53% of young people in secondary school admitted they had received pornographic junk mail in their e-mail or instant messaging accounts. Of these adolescents, 19% told their parents, but 13- to 17-year-olds were more likely not to have mentioned the incident to their parents. Still according to the survey, 26% of young people had voluntarily visited a pornographic Web site, and they had done so more than five times. Boys aged 13 and 14 include pornographic sites on their list of favourites, which is troublesome.

More recently, in 2005, the Media Awareness Network conducted another survey, again as part of its *Young Canadians in a Wired World* study. The survey included over 5 200 students from grade 4 primary to secondary 5 (Erin Research, 2005). When asked about exposure to pornographic material on the Internet during the 2004-2005 academic year, 19% of secondary school students stated they had had unintentionally accessed these sites, and 16% had done so intentionally. Boys were three times more likely to intentionally visit these sites on one or several occasions; students in Québec (45%) were more likely to do so than students in the rest of Canada.

"I was looking at Simpsons pics and saw porn."

(Boy, secondary 1, Québec) (Erin Research, 2005)

"Porn pop-ups appeared on the screen and my mother saw them. She thought I was looking at pornographic stuff."

[translation] (Girl, secondary 1, Québec)

(Erin Research, 2005)

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE REACT TO PORNOGRAPHY?

There have been few scientific studies on the possible effects of pornography on adolescents. One such study, conducted in the United States among 150 youth aged 10 to 17 years (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2003), revealed that 25% of young people who use the Internet regularly had one or more unwanted exposures to sexual pictures while online in the past year. In response to questions about their emotional responses to being involuntarily exposed to pornographic material, 24% of these youth said they were very or extremely upset by the exposure, and 21% said they were very or extremely embarrassed. Also, 19% had experienced at least one symptom of stress that lasted more than a day. They reported feeling irritable, having a hard time sleeping, losing interest in things they usually care about, feeling they had to stay away from the Internet, and having recurring thoughts about what they had seen.

Another American study conducted among college students showed that young people's emotional and physical reactions, the first time they were exposed to pornography, differed according to age (Greenfield, 2004). When asked to recall their responses, some of the students mentioned disgust (24%), shock or surprise (23.6%), embarrassment (21.4%), anger (18.4%), fear (11.2%), and sadness (9.2%). Others reported interest, amusement, and happiness or pleasure (proportions for the latter were not specified). Young people who were under 12 the first time they were exposed to pornography more commonly reported feeling embarrassment, afraid of being caught, guilt and confusion than teens who were 13 or older when first exposed (Greenfield, 2004).

We notice that young people have different reactions to pornography. They can feel disgust or fear, but they can also be curious or intrigued by it. What is sure, however, is that they are not always conscious of the effects pornography can have on them and on their sexuality (St-Germain, 2002).

1. The Media Awareness Network is an organisation dedicated to media and Internet education. It aims to provide adults (educators and parents) information and tools to help young people develop informed and critical understanding of the nature of the media. Its Web site includes an extensive resource catalogue and a wide variety of reference documents on questions related to the media, and proposes many pedagogical activities, including 300 in-class activities, that fall within the framework of the education reform.

THE EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY ON YOUTH AND THEIR SEXUAL RELATIONS

Again, few studies have been conducted on the effects of pornography on young people. We admit that it is difficult to appreciate the true significance of pornography among youth since several factors can come into play. Nonetheless, some researchers agree on the fact that it entails a number of dangers (Dagenais, 2005; Des Déserts, 2002; Richard-Bessette, 1995; St-Germain, 2002; Wolf, 2003). Exposure to pornographic images, which can occur unexpectedly at home, in the street, through advertising, whether wanted or provoked, can be a veritable ordeal for young maturing individuals (Bonnet, 2003). Adolescents create an imaginary picture of sexuality based on their own sexual experiences and outside stimuli; pornography can interfere negatively in this process (St-Germain, 2002). Pornography inscribes essentially genital and unrealistic representations of sexuality on the minds of adolescents (Des Déserts, 2002). These representations can lead them to think that they have to do it all—oral, vaginal and anal relations—and that they owe it to their partner, even if they don't really feel like doing it (Dagenais, 2005).

Robert (2005) considers that pornography has absolutely enormous consequences on teens since they are at a very impressionable age, in pursuit of masculine and feminine ideals, and need to assert themselves, to conform and to “perform” to be accepted. Boys and girls feel the need to “equip themselves” because they are convinced they are worthless if they are not “sex masters”. By focusing on sexual performance, young people risk becoming anxious (St-Germain, 2005). Pornography feeds their imaginations and anxieties at a time of life that is already destabilizing for them (Des Déserts, 2002). This is why they may come to believe that everything is possible, acceptable and desirable (Desaulniers, 2001; Robert, 2005). Adolescents can come to the conclusion that the sexual practices and behaviours presented on the Internet are the norm (St-Germain, 2005), for example, that they have to be ready (or pretend to be ready) to make love in a threesome, and that girls have to let boys ejaculate in their faces (Wolf, 2003).

Dionne (2005) remarks that according to some studies, being attracted to pornography at a young age can lead youth to have sexual relations at an early age and cause them to question their sexual identities. Some can ask themselves if the person they are agrees with what society and other people require or expect of them. Pornography can also bring young people to internalize certain stereotypes of male and female roles related to sexuality (it is always up to men to propose

having sexual relations, and women must be submissive). Girls can also take the initiative in matters of sex (Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondreau, 1996) by being enticing and provocative (Duquet, 1997) because they believe this pleases boys. Such myths will have repercussions on the current and future sexual lives of young people, and on their perceptions of intimate and sexual relationships (Dionne, 2005). Adolescents also run the risk of conforming to the messages conveyed in pornographic material, such as performance, perfection and gender inequality, which is expressed by male domination over women, for example, or by the importance for women to satisfy all men's desires (Dionne, 2005). In addition to wanting to try with their partners the types of sexuality presented in pornography (Fisher and Barak, 2001), young people risk adopting deviant or compulsive behaviours if they come to associate eroticism with violence and degradation of the other (St-Germain, 2002).

Pornography portrays risk-free sexuality where no one contracts sexually transmitted infections (Rioux Soucy, 2005). Pornographic films and images stage scenes where participants have unprotected sexual relations, which certainly does not encourage adolescents who watch them to adopt safe sexual behaviours.

SPECIFIC CONSEQUENCES FOR GIRLS

Young girls exposed to pornography have the impression they don't measure up. They ask themselves how they can possibly compete with a “cybervision of perfection” (Wolf, 2003). Some adolescent girls are extremely anxious about their bodies, to a degree that can sometimes verge on obsession: they think they are too fat, their thighs are too big and their breasts too small, or that they have too much body hair. (Robert, 2005). They quickly learn to take care of their bodies and appearance (Robert, 2005). They are urged to stay thin, wear makeup, and dress in a way that highlights their shapes (Richard-Bessette, 1995). Many girls asked themselves how they can become “blow-job pros”, or find their G-spot (Robert, 2005). They think that if they do not offer what porn does, they cannot expect to hold a guy (Wolf, 2003). Instead of having to fend off the advances of young men, young women are asking themselves how to get, let alone hold, their attention (Wolf, 2003). “Many girls feel they exist only through the gaze of the other, the male gaze” [translation], states Robert (2005, p. 127).



SPECIFIC CONSEQUENCES FOR BOYS

Boys who are exposed to pornography have the impression they do not know how to be with a real woman (Wolf, 2003). Many boys do not feel they can measure up since they are unable to arouse as much pleasure and enthusiasm in their partner as they see in pornography, where the girl reacts positively to any male sexual stimulation (Crooks and Baur, 2002). Boys can also feel undermined by the sexual arrogance of girls their age. Indeed, girls can sometimes appear to be sexually active and experienced, which causes boys to feel inferior (Fortin, 2002). The dominant heterosexual discourse teaches boys that they need to have confidence in themselves and in their sexuality, that they should be emotionally detached from sexuality and that they should have a strong sexual appetite (Allen, 2003). Boys adhere to the stereotypical view of masculine sexuality by valuing the fact of being experienced and having a variety of and frequent sexual relations (Samson and Otis, 1996), or by describing themselves as being obsessed with sex and detached from their emotions (Allen, 2003). According to a study by Bouchard and St-Amand (1998), over 50% of boys were certain that their sexual desires were uncontrollable, and 20% thought that it was up to them to propose having sexual relations.

For a number of boys, pornography is not only an important source of information about sexuality (Allen, 2004; Measor, 2004), but also a source of questions and concerns: “They want to get their girlfriends to love giving blow jobs and worry pathetically about their erectile powers,” [translation], says Robert (2005, p. 126). Pornography causes boys to worry; specialists are also concerned. Indeed, since pornography can result in boys having strong adrenaline rushes, it is feared that some young men become “addicted” and end up never wanting to have “normal” sexual relations (Sauvé, 2006).

The consequences of exposure to pornography will also have repercussions on teenagers’ intimate relationships: feeling pressure, discomfort, self-doubt, confusion as to the place of sexuality in an intimate relationship, and difficulty expressing one’s true desires.

Table 1 summarises the effects of exposure to pornography on teens, along with the particular consequences for girls and boys. It can be used with the proposed pedagogical activities.

TABLE 1 CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY ON TEENS AND ON THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

For young people in general	For girls	For boys
Have an image of sexuality that is unrealistic and based in genitalia (Des Déserts, 2002)	Have the impression they can’t measure up (Wolf, 2003)	Have the impression they don’t know how to be with girls (Wolf, 2003)
Think they have to do everything (e.g. oral, vaginal and anal relations) (Dagenais, 2005)	Have the impression they can never ask for what they want (Wolf, 2003)	Don’t feel they can measure up (Crooks and Baur, 2002)
Feel the need to equip themselves to become “sex masters” (Robert, 2005)	Are obsessively preoccupied with their bodies (Robert, 2005)	Think they have to arouse as much pleasure and enthusiasm in girls as is seen in porn (Crooks and Baur, 2002)
Risk becoming anxious (Des Déserts, 2002; St-Germain, 2005)	Can think they have to offer what porn does to be able to hold a guy (Wolf, 2003)	Are threatened by girls and feel inferior (Fortin, 2002)
Believe that anything is possible, desirable and acceptable (Robert, 2005)	Ask themselves how to get and hold boys’ attention (Wolf, 2003)	Can adhere to the stereotypical view of male sexuality (in terms of frequency of sexual relations, number of partners, etc.) (Samson and Otis, 1996)
Think these behaviours are the norm (St-Germain, 2005)	Are emotionally dependent (Robert, 2005)	Question themselves about sexual relations and feel worried (Robert, 2005)
Show themselves, or appear to be, ready to try anything, (Wolf, 2003)		Can believe their sexual desires are uncontrollable and that it is up to them to propose having sexual relations (Bouchard and St-Amand, 1998)
Have sexual relations at an early age (Dionne, 2005)		Become “addicted” to pornography and get to the point where they don’t want to have “normal” sexual relations (Sauvé, 2006)
Question themselves about their identity (Dionne, 2005)		
Internalise certain myths (Dionne, 2005)		
Conform to the messages conveyed in pornography (Dionne, 2005)		
Want to try out the behaviours they see (Fisher and Barak, 2001; Greenfield, 2004)		
Adopt deviant or compulsive behaviours (St-Germain, 2002)		
Adopt unsafe sexual behaviours		

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS

Duquet (2005) states that teens are having sexual relations at an increasingly earlier age, and that these experiences are sometimes surprising, given the age of the youth and their level of development. The hypersexualised society in which we live trivialises this issue. The sociologist Pacom (2005) asserts that we are catapulting young people into a pornographic society where advertising, broadcast and print media, and music videos exert constant pressure. The fact that advertising and music videos increasingly use stereotypes from pornographic films should not be overlooked (Duquet, 2006). Such images also have powerful consequences on young people since these representations are flooding the public arena; repetition ensures that we cannot prevent adolescents from accessing or being exposed to these images at any time (Bonnet, 2003). Robert (2005) is surprised that children live in a world where pornography permeates even their bedrooms (because of access to the Internet) and that parents do not really raise the subject of sexuality. Once young people have absorbed the messages conveyed and adopted the behaviours suggested by pornography, it is a bit late to try to propose something else, says the sexologist. On the other hand, it is not too late for parents to state their position, negotiate limits, and make their values known and have them respected. As a professional working with young people, you can also play a part in counteracting these messages. But how can you do this, exactly?

First, it is not necessary for a young person to have access to pornographic material to start a discussion. However, when educators, youth workers or parents discover that a child has access to such material, they should not panic but rather consider it a timely educational opportunity. That is, they should answer the teen's questions, and provide guidance and contextualisation (Freeman-Longo, 2000). It is important to answer questions as honestly as possible, while being careful not to convey the idea that sexuality is disgusting (St-Germain, 2002). It is also important to remember that during adolescence, the need to explore one's sexuality is normal (Dionne, 2005). Education and information are extremely important elements (Freeman-Longo, 2000) during this period when bodily changes cause young people to question themselves about sexuality in general, as well as about the emotional and sexual awakening they are experiencing and feeling.

Bonnet (2003) asserts that, first and foremost, it is important to help young people discover what is hidden behind these images and scenarios: vendors, producers, financiers, exploited actors, and unscrupulous broadcasters. In this manner, teens will slowly become aware that what is really involved in pornography is mostly commercial in nature.

Moreover, the messages conveyed in pornography concerning roles, norms and stereotypes do not represent reality (St-Germain, 2002), especially not the reality of adolescents. Therefore, young people should be given the opportunity to think about the impact of these messages so they can develop their abilities for critical thinking (ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2003). They will then be in a position to understand the gap between the messages suggested and real experiences, and can then better situate themselves in regard to these messages. Explicit sexual images can stir adolescents' curiosity, but the degrading nature of these representations can also provoke negative emotions such as embarrassment, anger and fear, as was noted earlier. Consequently, it is important to define with young people the sexual behaviours that are socially acceptable and to answer questions they may have on sexuality (Dionne, 2005).

It is also pertinent to use the media for prevention purposes (Freeman-Longo, 2000), and especially the Internet, which can be used to stimulate discussions about pornography. For instance, teens can be asked if they use the Internet and if they or other people their age have ever been inadvertently exposed to pornographic images. Your role as educa-

tor demands that you emphasize aspects of a healthy sexuality (Freeman-Longo, 2000), that is, sexuality based on respect, consideration for others and equality (St-Germain, 2002). For example, you could provide students with the tools they need to take a step back with regard to such "pornographic degeneration" (Pacom, 2005). In an article on sexuality and the Internet published in *Petit Magazine de la formation personnelle et sociale*,² Lacroix (2004) suggests steering young people toward sites that present positive images of sexuality by associating values such as respect, equality and pleasure with sexuality. She also recommends Internet sites of interest to adolescents such as [www.100senssurs.com], [www.sexualityandu.ca], and [www.jcapote.com].

Here are proposals for pedagogical activities related to the Internet and pornography. The activities can be helpful to raise this issue in a group, and can be used as triggers to discuss gender roles, stereotypes and standards conveyed in pornography, and its consequences on young people. The activities are geared more specifically toward teens in secondary 3 and 4, and can be conducted in schools during moral education class.

2. This magazine is available at [www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss_underdocumentation/professionnels de l'éducation](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss_underdocumentation/professionnels_de_l_education).

Pedagogical activities

LINKS WITH THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM³

Subject Area

Moral Education or Religious and Moral Instruction:
To take a reflective position on ethical issues.

Broad Areas of Learning

- *Health and Well-Being:* To ensure that students develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety and sexuality.
- *Media Literacy:* To enable students to exercise critical, ethical and aesthetic judgment with respect to the media and produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights.

Cross-Curricular Competencies

- Use information
- Exercise critical judgment
- Cooperate
- Communicate appropriately

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Encourage students to be aware of the messages conveyed in pornography and the consequences of being exposed to them.
- Encourage students to develop critical judgment regarding Internet pornography.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Determine the frequency at which youth are inadvertently exposed to pornographic material and the various reactions this provokes.
- Identify the objectives of porn producers.
- Name the messages conveyed by pornography (sexual roles and stereotypes, social norms) that refer to men, on the one hand, and to women, on the other.
- Distinguish elements in pornography that are realistic from those that are not.
- Clarify the consequences of exposure to pornography.
- Through a debate, challenge the ideas of pornography producers and specialists.
- Find positive messages about sexuality on a Web site.

- Before bringing up the theme of Internet pornography, it is necessary to explain the context the students.

“During the next few classes, we will be focusing on the theme of Internet pornography. Yes, pornography is for adults (aged 18 and over). But we are aware that you can be unintentionally exposed to it, and it is important that you be critical regarding the images and messages they convey.”

- You should also keep in mind that not all young people have been exposed to pornography, that some students in your classes have never seen this type of material. This is why you should be cautious, to ensure that the sensibilities and sense of propriety of secondary 3 and 4 are respected.
- Before beginning the activities, it is advisable to briefly define pornography with students. Ask them what the word “pornography” means to them (you can write their answers on the board), and supplement it with the definition below.

A production (text, drawing, painting, photograph, film or show) is considered pornographic when it intends to cause sexual arousal, and is deemed abusive or degrading due to explicit or implicit use of force, physical or psychological violence, degradation or unequal balance of power (Crooks and Baur, 2002)

- For more details, see the section “But really, what does pornography represent?” on page 3.

3. MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC, *Québec Education Program, Secondary School Education, Cycle 1*, Québec, ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2004, 537 p.
[online] [www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/DGFI/dp/programme_de_formation/seconaire/qepsecfirstcycle.htm]

ACTIVITY 1

DURATION
10 minutes

Introductory survey

1

Ask students to **answer individually on a sheet of paper** the four following questions. Specify that the answers are confidential and that the survey is not descriptive. Therefore, they do not have to write their names on the sheet or describe what they saw.

Do you have access to the Internet at home:

☐ yes

☐ no

Do you have access to the Internet somewhere besides home:

☐ yes

☐ no

Have you ever been INVOLUNTARILY exposed to pornography on the Internet:

☐ yes

☐ no

If yes, were you:

☐ in secondary 4

☐ in grade 6 in elementary school

☐ in secondary 3

☐ in grade 5

☐ in secondary 2

☐ in a grade lower than grade 5

☐ in secondary 1

How did you react?

You are:

☐ a boy

☐ a girl

2

After the survey, the educator will **compile the results** to have an overall picture of the students' experiences with exposure to pornography, and their different reactions. **Suggestion:** the educator can also ask students to compile the results during the maths course and to make tables and graphs to present these results.

Debate on “Internet pornography”

ACTIVITY 2

1

Introduction (5 minutes)

Begin the session by presenting the **ground rules** for providing sex education. See Appendix 1 of the document entitled *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* (ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2003), available at [www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss], under documentation/professionals/education.

- *Be sensitive and respectful of the feelings of others.*
- *Avoid making students feel ridiculous or insulting them after they have asked a question or made a comment that seems outlandish.*
- *You have the right to pass, that is, not to answer a question.*
- *Try to use the proper terms.*
- *Do not personalize questions or situations.*
- *Keep comments made by students confidential.*
- *All questions are welcomed and valid.*
- *Perhaps it would be useful to talk to your parents about the points discussed in class, without exaggerating the content.*
- *Speak for yourself. Use the pronoun “I” to state your opinions and feelings.*
- *If you have a problem with the class, come directly to me.*

Present the results of the survey (if they have been compiled by the students, ask for one or two volunteers to present them in front of the class). Make a connection with studies done on this topic (see the sections “**Exposure of young people to pornographic material on the Internet**”, p. 4, and “**How do young people react to pornography?**”, p. 4).

2

Preparing the debate (20 minutes)

Separate the group into four mixed (boys and girls) teams.

Explain that the activity consists in a debate between two groups:

- *the first group is made up of two teams composed of producers of pornographic material on the Internet;*
- *the second is made up of two teams composed of specialists (sexologists, pedagogues, paediatricians) who oppose pornography.*

Assign each team to a group and give them a list of questions that you have written out beforehand on pieces of paper (see below for the list of questions).

Clarify that each team should start by naming a **spokesperson**, and that students should then prepare for the debate by answering the questions they were given.

Give them 15 minutes to **discuss and answer the questions**.

Questions for the producers of pornographic material

- *What are your objectives when you produce pornographic material?*
- *How much money do you make a year doing this type of production?*
- *How do you present men and women in your photos and videos? Do you insist on particular attitudes or behaviours, depending on whether the person is a man or a woman? If yes, what are they?*
- *Do you think that these attitudes and behaviours, and your photos and videos give an accurate representation of men and women's sexuality in general?*
- *Who are the viewers for whom you produce this pornographic material?*
- *Do you think that young people under 18 have access to it?*
- *If yes, what do you think of that?*
- *In your opinion, can being exposed to pornography have consequences for young people? If yes, what are they? If no, why not?*

Questions for the specialists opposed to pornography

- *In your opinion, what are the objectives of people who produce pornographic material (photos and videos)?*
- *What messages (sexual roles and stereotypes, social norms) about men and women does pornography convey?*
- *In your opinion, do these messages represent reality? Why?*
- *In these images, what corresponds to reality and what doesn't?*
- *From what age do you think people should have access to pornography?*
- *Do young people under 18 have access to it?*
- *If yes, what do you think of that?*
- *Can exposure to pornography have consequences for young people? If yes, what are they? If no, why not?*

DURATION
60 minutes

3

The debate (20 minutes)

Proceed question by question.

Give each spokesperson of the two producer teams two minutes to present their answers to the first question, then two minutes to the spokespersons of the two specialist teams.

Start the debate by comparing the answers of the producers and the specialists.

For each question, add to the answers using the information in the sections “Internet pornography”, (p. 2), “But really, what does pornography represent?” (p. 3), and “What messages does pornography convey?” (p. 3).

Repeat these steps for the three other questions.

4

Presentation of the consequences of exposure to Internet pornography for young people

(5 minutes)

Once the exercise is finished, give a short presentation about the consequences of exposure to pornography for adolescents in general, as well as for boys and girls specifically (use Table 1, p. 6).

5

Conclusion of the activity (5 minutes)

Start a discussion with the group using the following questions:

- *What have you learnt from this debate?*
- *Did anything surprise, shock or offend you? If yes, why?*
- *Based on our discussion, why is pornography intended for adults (18 and over)?*
- *In your opinion, why do adults in general (parents, teachers, other people who work with youth) worry about the fact that you might be exposed to such images?*

6

Conclusion of the session (5 minutes)

End the session by reminding students that hidden behind pornography are producers whose main goal is to make a lot of money. Moreover, the messages conveyed about men's and women's sexuality do not represent the reality of human sexuality; rather, the roles played by actors are mostly based on stereotypes. Also emphasise the fact that adolescence is a time during which young people think about sexuality in general, what they are experiencing and how they feel (emotional and sexual awakening, seduction, intimacy, sexual activity, etc.). It is perfectly normal to have questions during adolescence, but young people risk being disappointed if they look exclusively to pornography to understand sexuality. They can fall into a trap because porn does not depict a realistic portrait of sexuality. This is why it is important that young people exercise critical judgment when faced with such images, especially all the more since these images can have consequences on the way they experience intimate relationships. There are a number of sites on the Internet designed specially for young people; the sites can answer their questions and provide pertinent, accurate information that better reflects their realities. Ask teens if they know of any Web sites that consider sexuality in a healthy and respectful manner, that is, based on respect and equality. You can suggest sites such as [jcapote.com], [sexualityandu.ca], [100senssurs.com] [teljeunes.com] (see the article by Lacroix, 2004). Encourage them to visit one of these sites. Young people can then share information they have found when they get together again.⁴

4. This activity could be conducted in a computer class.

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