

**Pornography's Harms Continue to Stretch across the Culture:
It's Not Just Hard Core Porn; and It's Not Just Men**

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It has rightly been called "the largest unsupervised, unregulated medical experiment in human history"—the explosion of pornography across the culture.

My colleagues have focused rightly on the harms of hard-core porn and its impact on male consumers and female victims. These are powerful problems that deserve your serious and sustained attention. The problems with porn, however, are even more expansive. For the harms of pornography on children and young adults reach beyond the issues of hard core porn—and the problems of chronic, harmful porn usage are not limited merely to males.

- **"Soft Core" porn is especially insidious:** Researcher Norman Doidge in his work *The Brain that Changes Itself* has concluded that "soft core pornography's influence is now most profound, because, now that it is no longer hidden, it influences young people" deeply (2007, p. 103).
- **Additionally, the proliferation of hard-core porn and permission-giving:** As my colleagues have amply demonstrated, vile hard core porn—often violent and always degrading—is widely available. This very fact creates psychological ease of access to softer forms of porn, among children most especially: children are prone to give themselves permission to see softer porn in light of hard-core porn's rampant availability.
- **Soft-core porn is harmful--some of the evidence:**
 - a) Eileen Zurbriggen and E.M. Morgan find in the journal *Sex Roles* (2006, 54) that "sexual animosity correlates highly with porn consumption." And sexual animosity is a precondition in many sexual assaults and therefore increases society's risk exposure to sexual violence.
 - b) Philip Zimbardo and Nikita Coulombe report that a study of 325 adolescent boys finds "frequent use of online porn lowered academic performance" (*Man, Interrupted*, 2016, p. 29).

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- **Female Porn Usage is Increasing Dramatically:**

- a) The National Family Structures Survey of the University of Michigan in 2012 found that 4% of younger females consume porn once a day, which in the words of researcher Dr. Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas, is “not so stark a difference” with younger male daily usage. Moreover, Regnerus cautions, “social desirability is..likely a factor, and we should expect [female] use to be more pronounced” than indicated in surveys. Additionally, 21% of younger females consume porn more than once a month. (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/10/young-women-and-porn-what-does-the-data-say/>.) The usage has almost certainly only increased in the intervening years.

- **Porn Harms Young Women, Too:**

- a) Depression and Self Esteem: Professors Carroll, Willoughby, Nelson and Padilla-Walker find in 2014 that “females who engage in more pornography use were more likely to have negative mental health, especially in terms of less self-worth and depressive symptoms.” (*Journal of Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 2014, 16(9).)
- b) Addiction Potential: Drs. Laier, Pekal, and Brand find that “the results of the study of porn addiction [in women] are in line with those reported for heterosexual males in previous studies” (*Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 2014, 17(8).)
- c) Earlier Age of First Intercourse: High use of pornography is “uniquely associated with...lower age at first intercourse,” risking the undoing of years of public health advocacy to reduce teen pregnancy. (E.M. Morgan, *Journal of Sex Research*, 2011 48(6).)
- c) Acceptance of the “Rape Myth”: women who consume porn are at a higher risk of believing, falsely, that most sexual assault is asked for and not coerced, putting them at a higher risk of tolerating, and potentially being victimized by, unacceptable male behaviors. (Breanne Fahs, *Performing Sex*, 2011, p. 192.)
- d) Taking a Complex Look at Female Sexual Victimization: Alixandra Burks in her detailed study “An Examination of Pornography Use as a Predictor of Female Sexual Coercion” (2017) finds that young women’s “endorsing pornography use was significantly related to their engaging in verbal coercion” of their male partners. This in turn increases their risk of being victims of physical coercion at the hands of their partners, as verbal abuse by women is known to escalate into physical abuse by men. This, of course, is not the only cause of male coercion of female partners, but it is a real and important contributing factor. Further, this is not at all to blame the victim; it is to take a serious look at a serious problem.

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Biography

Joseph Prud'homme is the Burton Family Chair in Religion, Politics, and Culture and Associate Professor of Political Science and Affiliated Faculty member in Religious Studies. Professor Prud'homme is the founding Director of the Institute for Religion, Politics, and Culture at Washington College. He received his doctorate from Princeton University, where he studied in the Interdepartmental Program in Political Philosophy, with additional specialization in constitutional law and religious studies. He was awarded a Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied at the Harvard Law School and served as a member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. He has also held a Visiting Fellowship at the University of Oxford.

Professor Prud'homme works in the areas of political philosophy, legal theory, intellectual history and religious studies. He has published numerous works in these fields, including the books *Religion and Politics in America from the Colonial Period to the Civil War*; *Curriculum and the Culture Wars: Debating the Bible's Place in Public Schools* (with Melissa Deckman of Washington College); *State Religious Education and the State of Religious Life* (with Liam Gearon of the University of Oxford); the chapter on Religion and Education for the *Palgrave Handbook on Religion and the State*; and numerous peer-reviewed articles.

He regularly teaches introductory courses in political theory; upper level courses in political thought; upper level courses in constitutional law and legal philosophy; and courses in Western religious traditions. Through the Institute for Religion, Politics, and Culture he is the series editor of the international peer-reviewed book series, *Washington College Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture*. He also co-directs the Washington College Presidential Fellows track, "The Great Questions."

He earned two bachelors degrees with three majors and a minor at Texas A&M University, where he graduated *magna cum laude* and with an honors certificate. His undergraduate thesis ("Kant's Moral Argument for the Existence of God") was awarded the Texas A&M Thesis Prize.

He directs a partnership between Washington College's Institute for Religion, Politics, and the University of Oxford and regularly takes students to Prague and Vienna and on study tours of the monstrous death camps in Auschwitz.


He is a frequent guest lecturer nationally and internationally.

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