

It's time we talked: Pornography, young people and sexuality today

Parents: What do young people need to know about porn?

Pornography is not reality.

One of the most important things for young people to know about porn is that it is not reality.

The people in porn are real people who are actually doing what you see. But they're acting. They're performing for the viewer.

Lots of what is portrayed in porn is not only make-believe – it communicates dangerous messages.

Porn bodies are not normal.

The bodies of porn performers – like those of models and sports stars – do not reflect how most people look.

The men in porn almost always have very large penises. The women are usually young and thin. They may have very large breasts and their genitals look small and even.

Sometimes porn performers have had surgery to make their bodies look like that. In reality, people come in all shapes and sizes – and they grow body hair.

Porn sex is not safe sex.

Porn often shows people doing all sorts of unsafe things, such as anal sex followed by oral sex, or ejaculation in mouths and eyes.

Often porn shows multiple partners having unprotected sex. Only 10 per cent of scenes show condom use.

Porn performers often catch sexually transmissible infections. Some performers experience long-term damage to their bodies.

Porn misrepresents pleasure.

Porn focuses on particular types and ways of doing sex which are not reflective of what most people – particularly women – like or want in real life.

Porn performers are paid to act like they're enjoying what they're doing, even if it is uncomfortable, painful or humiliating.

Sex is not just for men to enjoy.

The vast majority of porn consumers are male, so porn focuses on men getting what they want. The women in porn are there to please the men – and they're often treated terribly in the process.

But sex is not just about male pleasure. Sex should feel good – emotionally and physically – for both partners.

Women are not sex objects.

Women's sexuality is used to sell all sorts of things – from cars to ice-creams and phone plans. Porn takes it one step further. Porn says that women are objects for men's sexual pleasure.

But women are not objects to be owned and used. Like men, women are human beings with feelings, thoughts, hopes, fears, desires and all sorts of abilities.

Violence and humiliation are not sexy.

Porn often shows men being aggressive and in control and women happily being dominated.

Eighty-eight per cent of scenes in the most popular porn show physical aggression. Ninety-four per cent of aggression is directed at female performers. Porn eroticises violence.

But violence and humiliation are not sexy. Nor is it just fantasy. In reality, huge numbers of women all around the world experience violence from their partners.

Porn reinforces stereotypes.

Porn commonly portrays – and reinforces – racial and gender stereotypes.

Stereotypes occur when a group of people is defined by simplistic, limited and unfair assumptions.

Stereotyping is unfair. It reinforces prejudices and creates the conditions for other injustices.

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Gay and lesbian porn is also limiting.

Some people assume that gay and lesbian porn is liberating and free from the problems – such as sexism and aggression – so common in heterosexual porn.

But gay and lesbian porn communicates many of the same messages – about bodies, sexual health, pleasure, performance and consent – as heterosexual porn.

Often it also communicates the same messages about gender, power and aggression – where a more masculine performer acts aggressively towards a more feminine performer, representing the men and women, respectively, in straight porn.

The most common porn showing women having sex with women is material made for male heterosexual consumers. This porn often misleadingly suggests that women have sex with women for men's pleasure but they would prefer to have sex with men.

Consent is crucial to good sex.

If you watch porn, you might get the impression that everyone wants to have sex all the time. But they don't.

Working out if you and your partner both want to have sex can be difficult – but it is really important. Having sex without the other person's free agreement is never okay.

Learn to communicate well and check in with your partner with questions such as 'Would you like to...?' 'Are you sure?'

Sex is not a performance.

In porn, people perform sex for the viewer. They pout, talk and moan at the camera in positions designed to *look* good (rather than *feel* good!).

In real life, sex is not for a spectator – and it shouldn't be something you just do for your partner. For most people, sex is about the whole experience, not just how it looks.

Porn can shape sexual tastes.

Just as we can acquire a taste for a particular food or drink – even one that we initially find unpleasant – we also can develop sexual tastes.

When someone uses porn – particularly when they use it regularly for sexual stimulation – they learn to associate what they see with arousal and pleasure.

But much of what is shown in porn does not reflect what many people actually enjoy. Often it is unsafe, aggressive and degrading.

Porn is not a good place to have your sexual tastes shaped.

Sex can have meaning.

Porn communicates that sex doesn't require relationship or affection – it's just something people do with anyone.

But for most people, sex is something they do only with someone they care about or love. Sex can be a way of feeling close to someone, expressing love and enjoying each other.

Sex can be so much better than what you see in porn.

Sex can be fantastic, but it can also be awful – and everything in between.

If you want to be a good lover, don't learn about sex from porn – or have your sexual tastes shaped by porn. You can do so much better than learn from porn.

The keys to good sex are communication, consent and respect.
