Surveying students on pornography use and involving them in planning critical learning interventions

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The purpose of this study was to gain insight into pornography engagement patterns among Irish university students. A total of 1,934 students from the National University of Ireland, Galway completed an anonymous online survey. The majority of participants were female (51%), 47% were male, 1% identified as gender queer or non-binary, 0.5% as transgender and the remaining 0.4% identified as ‘other’. The majority (78%) were 18-25 years of age, identified as heterosexual (85%) and Irish (80%).

How often do you watch porn?

Male students are 4x more likely to watch porn a few times a week than females. In fact, females and transgender people are most likely to never watch porn!

What is the age you first saw porn* (accidentally or on purpose)?

Over 53% of boys first saw porn between the ages of 10-13, compared to just over 23% of girls the same age!

*Porn is defined as video footage, including movies or video clips of people having sex or engaging in other sexual behaviours that is designed to sexually arouse the viewer.
Why do you watch porn?

**For Masturbation?**
Just over 60% of students use porn for masturbation regularly. 15% of students never use it.

**For Information?**
49.4% of students wouldn’t refer to porn for information about sex, with only 2.5% of students referencing it ‘a great deal’.

**Out of Curiosity?**
25% of students watch porn 'somewhat' out of curiosity, while 23% of students would ‘not at all’ be curious to watch.

**With a Partner for Arousal?**
Less than 5% of students watch porn regularly with their partner for arousal, compared to 74% of students who wouldn’t at all.

Attitudes toward porn

**Relationship Impact?**
21% said that they have used porn with their partner for new sexual ideas.

**Is Porn Realistic?**
Men and women agree porn is not realistic: 84% of men & 91% of women disagree with the idea that porn portrays sex in a realistic way.

**Fun to watch?**
Two thirds of men believe porn is fun and exciting to watch, compared to 37% of women.

What % say they have been influenced by watching porn?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Genderqueer/Non-Binary</th>
<th>Trans Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with a partner about sex</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to initiate sexual contact</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How people behave during sex</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The roles of men and women during sex</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate verbally during sex</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate non-verbally during sex</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents

1065 | 1004 | 19 | 9

*Question posed: How much have you learned about the following from watching porn? Response options were on a 5 point scale: Responses 'Some-A Lot-Everything' were grouped.
Qualitative Research
The qualitative data here sought to explore students attitudes and beliefs about porn.

Group discussion with students showed an awareness that some scenarios reflect sexual assault:

“In some porn it might not be like rape but it might be like cajoling or pressuring, there’s one like teacher-student, like oh you do something bad, you have to do this, but like it wouldn’t be as kind of obvious that it was like sexual assault.”

The negative impact of watching porn scenes where ‘no’ is ignored

“It’s the fake ‘no’ that can throw off some kids because they don’t understand. They weren’t thinking ‘oh this is acting, this is part of the script’...so you’re kind of taught from a young age that the chase is part of it and ‘no’ is up for debate.”

Many discussed how porn can help in exploring sexual interests and identity:

“That you know it’s a safe enough place to explore your fantasies or you know your sexual orientation or your interests, whatever.”

“For a lot of gay people anyway it’s used very much as a common tool for people to ch, to figure out their sexual orientation, because at that age it is confusing, so I suppose, porn is a go-to medium for people to find out what they’re reacting to sexually.”

Students provided suggestions for breaking myths promoted through porn:

“You could present like myth and fact, and like short YouTube videos or a Snapchat that you could follow. And be like ‘myth’ about penis size, or something like that, and then ‘fact’: ‘most penises are this size’ or most sexual interactions will last this long on average.”
These findings came from a series of participatory workshops with 54 university students. The illustration was produced by participants who presented recommendations on what could be done to promote critical awareness of pornography.

**Inner Circle:**
What are the most important topics to be covered in porn education?

- Writing things about porn individually and discussing with the group
- Workshops
- Chinese Whispers
- Role Plays
- Body Language
- How to say ‘no’
- Online material on real sex and comparing it to porn
- Demonstrations: - Physicality - Condoms

**Outer Circle:**
What is the best way to engage young people on these topics?

- How to accept ‘no’
- Open discussion with peers in safe environment
- Consent
- It’s Not Reality
- Sets unrealistic expectations
- There’s an industry behind it
- Analysing structure of video production
- Behind the Scenes Outtakes
- Documentaries
- Behind the Scenes
- Day in the Life Documentaries

**Central Topics:**
- It's healthy and okay to watch the porn you want
- Communication is key
- Porn isn't education

No specific page number is provided.
Thank you to all our participants!

Research conducted at the School of Psychology, National University of Ireland, Galway

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*We had a small number of non-binary and transgender students, our findings may not be representative of other students of this demographic

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