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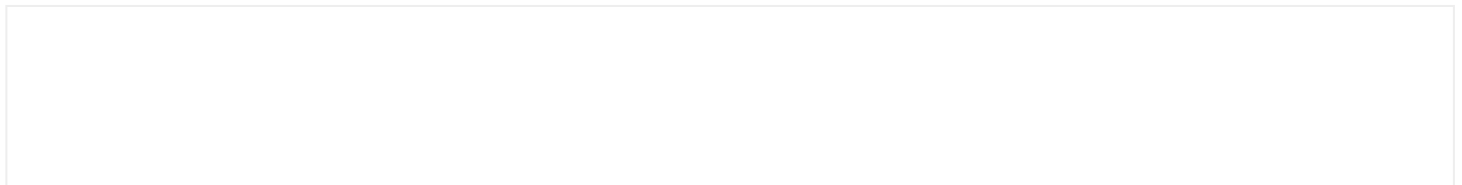
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Prevalence of Porn

By [Robert Weiss LCSW, CSAT-S](#)

~ 7 min read

Americans Gone Wild

There seems to be a lot of media fear-mongering about online porn, citing a wide range of statistics on usage. To listen to some, you'd think that everyone and his grandmother is online 24/7 engaging in digitally driven self-pleasure. Interestingly, both the porn industry and anti-porn activists have a tendency to cite the most inflated numbers they can find to make their particular point. The sex industry does this so they can charge more for advertisements, while anti-porn types do this to point out our moral flaws and the all-pervasive nature of this supposed problem. That said, there are some relatively reliable statistics on porn usage. Recent studies show the following:



- 12 percent of all Internet websites are pornographic.
- 25 percent of all online search engine requests are related to sex. That's about 68 million requests per day.
- 35 percent of all Internet downloads are pornographic.
- 40 million Americans are regular visitors (in their own estimation) to porn sites.
- 70 percent of men aged 18 to 24 visit a porn site at least once per month.
- The average age of first exposure to Internet porn is 11.
- The largest consumer group of Internet porn is men aged 35 to 49.
- One-third of all Internet porn users are female.
- The most popular day of the week for watching porn is Sunday.
- The most popular day of the year for watching porn is Thanksgiving.[\[i\]](#)

These statistics may or may not be alarming, depending on your point of view. If you are a 16-year-old boy in the throes of adolescence, this might sound just fine and *Thank you Internet!* But if you are the parent of that very same young man, maybe it's not so great. And if you are a 35-year-old married father of three who's [compulsively masturbating](#) nightly to online porn instead of sleeping, making love to your wife, or getting ready for work the next day, also not so great.

Regardless of where you stand on the issue, it is clear that digital technology has greatly increased both the anonymous accessibility and the affordability of pornography. And because of this more people than ever – of both genders and all ages – are being exposed to it, both willingly and inadvertently.

The Gender Gap

Historically, men have utilized pornography far more often than women. One 2006 study of 10,000 randomly sampled people aged 18 to 49 found that 82 percent of those surveyed had looked at pornographic magazines, 84 percent had viewed pornographic films, and 34 percent had viewed porn on the Internet.[\[ii\]](#) (Keep in

mind, this study was conducted in 2006 – a lifetime ago in Internet years.) Unsurprisingly, the most significant variable for predicting who had used porn was gender. And the gender difference was most pronounced on the Internet, with 63 percent of the men but only 13.6 percent of women stating they had viewed porn online.

Perhaps this “gender gap” was caused by the nature of the available pornography. It is well-known that men are more visually stimulated and women are more aroused by relationships. In other words, men are more likely to be turned on by an endless, constantly changing stream of sexual body parts, and women are more likely to become aroused by the presence (or at least the perceived presence) of emotional intimacy. Knowing this, pornographers have in recent years propagated an entirely new genre of relationship-driven erotica designed to appeal to women. And the tactic is clearly working. In 2003, 14 percent of all Internet porn users were women.^[iii] Only a decade later, almost one-third of all Internet porn users are female.^[iv]

The most notably successful example of this new relationship-driven erotica, sometimes called “[Mommy Porn](#),” is British writer E.L. James’ *Fifty Shades of Grey* (and its two sequels, *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed*). This best-selling trilogy traces the rocky relationship of beautiful young Anastasia Steele and super-sexy but emotionally troubled billionaire Christian Grey. In many ways the *Fifty Shades* books fit solidly into the rather lengthy romance novel tradition of a naïve young virgin being seduced by an otherworldly bad boy, and then somehow managing to change that bad boy into a devoted husband or lover. The difference here, of course, is that in traditional romance novels the sex scenes fade to black well before the proverbial money shot, while *Fifty Shades* tracks the BDSM-infused action all the way to its multi-orgasmic conclusion.

Of course, Mommy Porn doesn’t do it for all women. Some females enjoy highly objectified hardcore pornography just as much as men do. These women are perfectly comfortable viewing men (or women) in terms of their body parts, and they are very clear in the idea that when they are online they are looking for purely sexual gratification and not any type of lasting intimate relationship. Studies show that the women who use pornography in this “traditionally male” way are typically younger than those who go for “relational” stories and imagery. According to one researcher, a possible explanation is that the younger generation is more accustomed to the huge quantity of visual stimuli that is now available.^[v]

Porn and Kids

Nowadays kids, especially boys, are being exposed to pornography at much younger ages. As mentioned earlier, the average age of first exposure is currently 11. And accessing porn is incredibly easy. All a curious kid has to do is click a button that says “Yes, I’m 18” and he or she is in. The child doesn’t need to show a driver’s license, doesn’t even need to pay for anything since much of the porn that’s online is free. Frankly, kids don’t even need to go looking for porn to find it. The number of

seemingly innocuous words that yield porn results on Internet search engines is astounding. A single innocent click and wham, there it is.

One 2008 study found that 93 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls were exposed to online pornography during adolescence. Boys were more likely to be exposed at an earlier age, to see more images, to see more extreme images, and to view pornography more often, while girls reported more involuntary exposure.[\[vi\]](#) Another 2008 study found that among university students aged 18 to 26 half of the males and 10 percent of the females viewed porn *at least* once per week.[\[vii\]](#) Once again, these studies were conducted before the current online porn explosion. The percentages are likely higher today.

What Does This Mean?

Frequent porn use is not without consequences. *Cosmopolitan* magazine recently surveyed 68 leading sex and relationship experts. 86 percent said they feel porn has had a negative effect on relationships. 63 percent said they think porn use changes men's expectations of what sex with a real-world partner should be like, and 85 percent said they think porn has had a negative effect on women's self-confidence – primarily because women now feel as if they now must behave like porn stars in the bedroom.[\[viii\]](#) More scientific surveys support the *Cosmo* findings. One study revealed that women whose partners look at pornography frequently (in the woman's estimation) are less happy in their relationships than women partnered with men who either infrequently use porn or don't use it all (to the woman's knowledge).[\[ix\]](#) The same study found that a female partner's self-esteem decreases as her male partner's porn use increases.

And it's not just women who are struggling. Two large-scale studies conducted in Japan – one in 2008, one in 2010 – found that in 2010 36.1 percent of males aged 16-19 had no interest in or an outright aversion to sex with another person. This figure was more than double that of the 2008 survey (17.5 percent). For males aged 20-24 the percentage increase was similar, up from 11.8 percent in 2008 to 21.5 percent in 2010.[\[x\]](#) Notice how this growing disinterest in real-world encounters coincides directly with the onset of the current digital pornography boom, which began in earnest in 2008. Furthermore, many young men who are otherwise in their sexual prime are experiencing sexual dysfunction, either ED (erectile dysfunction) or DE (delayed ejaculation). Simply put, the man who spends 80 or 90 percent of his sexual life masturbating to an endless, constantly changing stream of online porn is, over time, likely to find his real-life partners less and less stimulating. And sexual enhancement drugs won't fix things because they're designed to help sustain an erection, not to induce one. The brain and body need to become aroused of their own accord first. Without that, no dose of erection enhancing drugs will help.[\[xi\]](#) So, essentially, what we are now seeing in some young men is a porn-induced emotional *and physical* disconnect with real-world sex partners.

Okay, this is starting to sound like one of the media fear-mongering articles I dissed in

the opening paragraph. And I haven't even discussed porn addiction. And I'm not going to, either, since I've covered that topic rather thoroughly in a previous [blog](#). The reality of the situation is that *for most people* the growing prevalence of online pornography is a bit of a yawn. For them, it's either not of interest or it's a pleasurable distraction turned to when something more intimate is not immediately available. In other words, it's no big deal. So while it is true that some people are being negatively affected by online porn, most people are successfully adapting to our rapidly expanding digital universe—porn and all.

Robert Weiss LCSW, CSAT-S is the author of [Cruise Control: Understanding Sex Addiction in Gay Men](#), and co-author with Dr. Jennifer Schneider of both [Untangling the Web: Sex, Porn, and Fantasy Obsession in the Internet Age](#) and the upcoming 2013 release, [Closer Together, Further Apart: The Effect of Technology and the Internet on Sex, Intimacy and Relationships](#), along with numerous peer-reviewed articles and chapters. He is a regular contributor to both [PsychCentral.com](#) and [The Huffington Post](#), writing primarily about the intersection of technology with sex and intimacy. A licensed UCLA MSW graduate and a personal trainee of Dr. Patrick Carnes, Mr. Weiss founded the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles in 1995. Currently he is Senior Vice President of Clinical Development with [Elements Behavioral Health](#). He has served as a media specialist for CNN, The Oprah Winfrey Network, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Today Show, among many others.

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[viii] Deni Kirkova, *Vanilla Sex is OUT, Porn Addiction is IN: Disturbing Survey Reveals How Porn is Damaging Our Relationships*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2264419/Vanilla-sex-OUT-porn-addiction-IN-Disturbing-results-Cosmo-survey-reveal-porn-damaging-relationships.html#ixzz2OfMGpMJ6>, Daily Mail Online (Jan 18, 2013).

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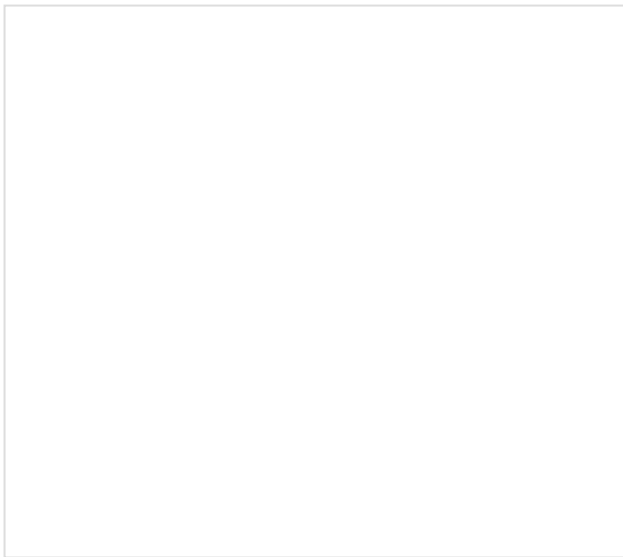
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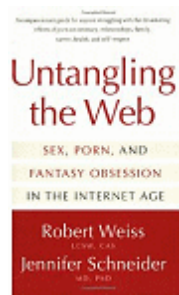
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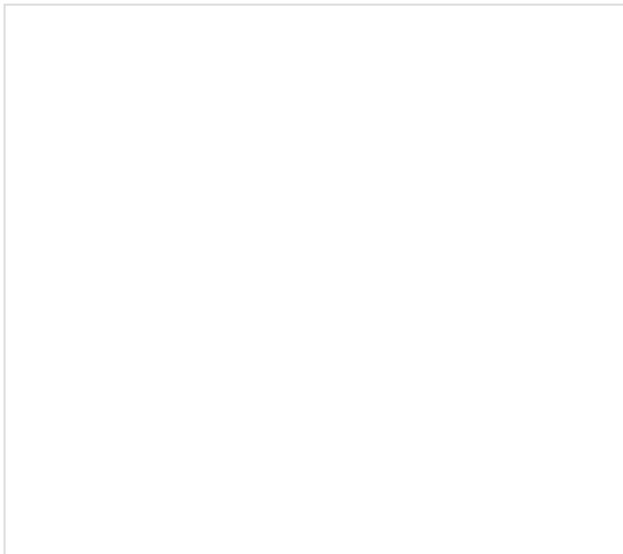
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