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Pornography and education: a comprehensive approach to a global problem

Interview with Raúl Marcos Estrada



The development of digital technology has resulted in a massive expansion of pornography unprecedented in human history. What are the consequences of this expansion?

People have never watched so much porn before. Nowadays, the supply of pornography is unlimited and free, something that has never happened before, and it is available 24 hours a day, with only one condition: an internet connection. At the beginning of this expansion of porn, when the Internet was linked to a fixed computer, families with good parental controls on the computer could prevent their children from being exposed to pornographic material. However, since digital technology has allowed you to carry the Internet in your pocket, avoiding this exposure is almost impossible.

This is one of the main problems posed by pornography today; it even reaches people who are not looking for it. There is involuntary exposure to pornographic materials, and even children who don't have a cell phone can view pornographic material on their friends' cell phones.

People start watching porn at a very early age (ranging from 7 to 12 on average), i.e. in many cases, before their erotic dimension has had a chance to develop. This means that they cannot even compare what they see with their erotic life, which has not yet developed, and many children approach pornography out of curiosity and with the intention of "learning". We must bear in mind that for all those who do not receive quality sex education, porn has become the instruction book, with the danger that this entails.

What effects can consuming porn from such an early age have on the psycho-sexual and erotic development of people?

The truth is that if we search for this issue on the Internet, we find many articles and a lot of news that talk about how people who consume porn are more unfaithful in their relationships and even that excessive pornography can cause ejaculation control difficulties or erection problems. Some claim that pornography can be addictive and become a serious health problem.

I believe many of these assertions are not true (or at least they should be qualified), and I believe they have to do with a sensationalist approach to the issue. However, I do not believe that consuming porn from such an early age is harmless. Pornography is building a collective erotic imaginary in which violent attitudes are normalised, as opposed to a devaluation of tenderness or romanticism, which have no place in this porno-erotic model.

On the other hand, pornography portrays a hegemonic type of masculinity based on force, on taking the initiative, with men setting the rules, and a complacent femininity that places women as mere multi-penetrable bodies, always at the disposal of male pleasure: men who desire, in the role of active subjects, and women who are desirable, but without the capacity to desire, in a passive role. All this runs counter to the goal we have set ourselves as a society of seeking to achieve equality between the sexes.

And another effect that pornography can have is that it generates a lot of anxiety among many girls and boys, who believe that they are not going to live up to the standards that pornography is setting. Therefore, I think it is contributing to making people more insecure when it comes to having shared erotic relationships, as they often put aside what they want to do and start doing what they think they should do; like playing a role of sorts as to what relationships between people are supposed to be.

As a society, are we addressing this issue adequately?

Nowadays, we are talking much more about pornography than a few years ago, both in the classroom and other educational spaces, an example of which is this course itself. However, I do not believe that we are dealing with it in a comprehensive way. Many more educational counterbalances are needed, and those that exist do not reach everyone. In the Save the Children's 2020 report on teenage pornography use, 48% of respondents validated porn as a source of learning, and 30% acknowledged that porn had been their only source of information on erotic issues. This may lead us to reflect on what we are talking about when we provide sex education. Perhaps we place too much emphasis on risk prevention and leave aside issues such as desire, pleasure or eroticism in general. The result is that the questions young people may have about these issues are being resolved through pornography.

To address this issue, we need to provide comprehensive sex education, which is not only based on prevention but also helps to develop the erotic dimension of all people.