

COMMON GROUND SPEAKER SERIES
Porn Literacy: Sex Ed in the Digital Age
January 30, 2019

The Nueva School, The Harker School, and Woodside Priory hosted attentive audiences for *Changing Bodies, Changing Times: Laying the Groundwork for Healthy Relationships* with Justine Fonte. Ms. Fonte helped parents become confident in approaching sex education through the framework of porn literacy and sex-positivity. She hoped to teach parents how to effectively communicate about core sexuality topics with their young people so they may mature to enjoy fulfilling and safe sexual lives. She delved into the complexity that online pornography and other media images and messaging bring to our beliefs about our bodies and sex.

THE FIJI STUDY Ms. Fonte began her talk by referencing *The Fiji Study* in which researchers asked the question, 'How does body image affect women?' In 1995, 90% of women living on the island of Fiji reported feeling satisfied with their bodies. Three years later, in 1998, only 40% of women still felt that way. What happened to cause a decrease in positive body image? The answer? Fiji changed their satellite and started receiving American television. Just 38 months of exposure to American TV changed Fijian women's views of their bodies.

MEDIA'S IMPACT ON SELF-ESTEEM Media negatively impacts our self-esteem. Teens define their identities by how others view them. Studies show that young people who look at photos of their friends feel worse than they do when looking at pictures of famous people. Moreover, most people do not take into account all the photoshopping that takes place before an image goes to print or gets posted online. We start to normalize the 'after.' This conditioning starts at a very young age as children often play with toys that idealize the 'after' body type.

In addition to unrealistic body shapes, media stresses 'whiteness' as the ideal. The worst outcome of this stigmatization is that oppressed groups spend their resources trying to achieve this ideal. Sales of 'Skin-Whitening' creams increase every year in Asian countries. Over 20 million American women and 10 million American men have eating disorders. Black women are 50% more likely to binge or purge than white women, and Latinx have the highest rates of binge-eating disorder.

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE RECOGNIZE THAT DIFFERENT IS NORMAL Young people get very anxious about their bodies because they do not know what normal genitalia looks like. They do not have a lot of examples after which to model their bodies. If they only look at porn, their insecurities emerge. Parents need to stress that being different is normal. Genitalia is like snowflakes.

THE FACTS ABOUT PORN

- The average age of exposure is 8-11 years;
- Many young people exposed to porn did not actively seek it out;
- Porn pop-ups are aggressive;
- 71% of teen boys and 40% of teen girls admit to having seen porn in the last month;
- 90% of youth are exposed to hardcore porn in their teen years;

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- Pornhub gets 75 million visitors per day and is the 20th most-trafficked website in the United States; and
- The most searched word on porn sites in both 2015 & 2016 is 'step-mom.'

PORN'S IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE The United States is a sex-negative society, and we are making porn our normal. Porn is meant to be an entertainment industry. It is a wildly inaccurate fantasy that does not bring home the ideals of fulfillment, safety, and pleasure. When young people view porn for the first time, they will think that is what sex is and can end up fearing it as an aggressive act. Porn does not look nor sound like intimacy and love. We want our young people to look forward to sex as a special experience. Fonte suggests using this line: *"Learning about sex by watching porn is like learning physics by watching The Transformers."*

HEALTHY MESSAGING: PLEASURABLE, SAFE, FULFILLING Fonte stresses that each parent should message the following: I want my child to have a fulfilling, safe and pleasurable sexual life - not only focused on intercourse. Young people should be striving for - and achieving - fulfilling and safe sexual lives and not settling for anything less. Young people are curious about sex. Fonte stresses the importance of talking about sex now. 'Do you want to wait until there is another #MeToo scandal?', she asks.

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT SEX Young people should feel empowered that in the right situation, not only do THEY want to have sex - THEIR SEXUAL PARTNER wants to have sex with THEM!! Fonte wants young people to believe that anything else should be considered a blow to their self-esteem. The hook-up culture makes young people feel like they have to do things solely for sexual conquest. She tells her students: *'You're not going to feel all that you are supposed to feel under the influence. In fact, you might not even remember it! Is that what you want? That is not a pleasurable, fulfilling sex life.'* Fonte finds that young people these days can barely make eye contact. They are unable to verbalize what they want. They feel awkward and claim that they don't want to 'ruin the moment.' Fonte stresses that they need to look at the long-term effects of early sexual experiences.

PROS OF PORN

- Exploration of Self - one generation ago, you were limited to still photos in a magazine - you were not able to see a visual that captures the desire you feel.
- A diversity of real identities and experiences. Porn allows for creativity. If you can imagine it - there is likely porn of it.

CONS OF PORN

- Skewed Body Image
 - The #1 HS Graduation gift in Orange County, CA is breast implants. The year 2016 had a 39% surgical increase over 2015. A new type of surgery that has emerged is vaginal rejuvenation surgery - meant to 'help your labia look young again.'
- Absence of Protection

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- In porn, rarely is there a discussion about protection as it is viewed as unsexy. This example transfers into real life. The movies, Juno and Knocked Up seemed radical when they discussed protection. Fortunately, Gen Z sees a lot more exposure to protection in the media. However, it is still minimal.
- The absence of an Emotional Component
 - The porn industry is there to entertain - not to educate.
 - Reality is seen as boring.
 - Viewers are not taught how to navigate rejection.
- Porn is Addictive
 - Pornography has profound effects on the brain - watching porn can become addictive - both compulsiveness and withdrawal can occur.
 - Dopamine is released when we accomplish something. Dopamine alters and forms the brain cells. The more addictive a drug is, the more dopamine is released. Every orgasm releases more dopamine, so pornography plays right into this feedback loop. You start not only to desire it - your brain begins to require it.
 - However, porn addiction and alterations in brain chemistry do not have to be permanent. The brain is a 'use it or lose it' organ. Fortunately, the neuro-plastic system of the brain can be used to acquire healthier habits.
- Absence of Consent
 - Fonte believes that an explicit and enthusiastic YES needs to be the new threshold of consent. No means No is not enough. You must hear an enthusiastic yes!
 - Without the enthusiastic 'yes,' sex does not fulfill the safety nor pleasurable aspects of our goal.
 - Consent under the influence is not a thing.
 - It is important to remember that No isn't necessarily a No forever.
- Skewed perception of Pleasure
 - A non-fun fun fact - only 30% of women have orgasms after intercourse. In pornography, it looks like 130%. That is not normal.
 - In real experiences, you feel like there is something wrong with you if you can't achieve orgasm that way.
- Reinforcement of Power Structures
 - Porn allows men to see women in a misogynistic way.
 - A lot of the free porn depicts women of color as objects which allows them to be dehumanized.

BETTER SEXUAL EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

When it comes to addressing sex ed in schools, Fonte believes that the curriculum should be comprehensive and sex-positive providing pedagogy that is pleasure-based.

- 7th graders should get different information than 12th graders.
- By the end of 8th grade, students should be able to describe the potential impacts of power differences such as age, status or position within relationships.
- Explore the misleading messages that porn sends - like bigger is better - or the duration of sex - and depicting women as objects.

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- If you find something on the internet that makes you feel uncomfortable - talk to an adult that you trust.

PARENT TAKE-AWAYS

- Changing 'the talk' to an on-going conversation. Plan for not one single 100-minute talk but rather 100 'one-minute' talks;
- Explore porn's intent as entertainment and not education;
- Disrupt the gender scripts normalized in porn;
- Help your young people understand and verbalize their values, boundaries, desires;
- Empower young people with the facts; and
- Remind them of the intention of sex - intimacy and connection rather than power and conquest.

MS. FONTE'S FAVORITE RESOURCES

- www.plannedparenthood.com
- givethetalk.com
- amaze.org
- Sexy Baby documentary (2012) - great to watch with young people over age 12
- Real Sex v. Porn Sex search on YouTube - (using media curriculum allows for teachable moments by depersonalizing the issue).

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