

Religion shown to steer adolescents away from pornography

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A new study authored by University of Calgary researchers in the *Journal of Adolescence* examines the pornography viewing habits of adolescents and observes the way in which religious attendance significantly tempers such actions.

The study, conducted between 2003 and 2008, which surveys [adolescents](#) on their pornography usage into young adulthood (between the ages of 13 to 24) shows that pornography consumption increases sharply with age, especially among males (although there is some increase with females too). However, these age-based increases in pornography viewing are decidedly lesser among those who attend religious services.

"We were able determine that there is a barrier effect at play wherein religious social control encourages adolescents to view less pornography over time," says Kyler Rasmussen, lead author of the study and a PhD student in the University of Calgary's Department of Psychology. "This increase in pornography consumption as adolescents get older isn't as drastic among those who attend religious services. We can see that religious attendance is a factor in shaping the trajectories of pornography viewing in adolescents."

Rasmussen adds: "Some might see it as a vindication of the role of religion, in that it can shape the behavior of [young adolescents](#) in a positive way."

The data collected for this project was obtained from the National Study of Youth and Religion, a research project spearheaded by sociology professors at the University of Notre Dame and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290 English and Spanish speaking teenagers and their parents, it was designed to investigate the influence of religion and spirituality on American youth.

Rasmussen came across this publically available data and was drawn to the one question in the survey, which, to his knowledge, had never been properly explored, focusing on the pornography viewing habits of adolescents. At the time Rasmussen was taking a course on social statistics with Alex Bierman, associate professor in the Department of Sociology and he asked Bierman to be his co-author on the study, applying the methodology of social statistics to the available data on adolescent porn usage.

A study of pornography consumption among adolescents is one of crucial importance, says Bierman, because this age bracket represents a critical time in a person's social and sexual development. While educated opinions may vary on the potentially harmful effects of pornography consumption among adults, with adolescents certain red flags must be raised.

"At this stage in life, when individuals are learning about sexuality and sexual relationships, do we want them learning these things from a source that has been known to often reinforce detrimental and misogynistic stereotypes?" asks Bierman. "That may not be healthy."

"Therefore, trying to understand the influences that shape porn usage and its trajectory with age is an important question for our society."

So what is it about attending [religious services](#) that would help steer

adolescents away from viewing pornography? "People in religious communities learn that there are expected patterns of behavior," says Bierman. "It may be the notion of a divine significant other who watches over them and there may also be a social support component. When you become integrated within a moral community where pornography is used less often and is, in fact, discouraged, this may shape and deter pornography usage. There's a kind of social control function at play."

Bierman notes that the data collected for this study was gathered between 2003 and 2008 and since that time pornography has only become more prevalent in our society of social media and smart phones. "There's more free access to pornography online than ever before," he says. "We probably underestimate the extent to which pornography is available to adolescents."

While the research would seem to be a testament to the positive influence of religion on adolescents, Rasmussen feels that the study's ramifications might reach beyond that. "I think it's important to try and figure out what it is about religiosity that steers these adolescents away from pornography," he says. "Let's see if we can figure that out and apply it outside of a religious context. Clearly there are people who aren't religious who still don't want their children watching [pornography](#) and being influenced by it. So if we can take those aspects of religion that are working and apply them in a family setting or a secular setting, that might be really worthwhile."

Provided by University of Calgary

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