

Chapter 76

The Influence of Pornography on Romantic Relationships of Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have studied emerging adults and pornography extensively, but to date there is no research on how pornography influences how emerging adults approach and act in relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the nature of pornography use among emerging adults, as well as to look at the relationship between pornography use and porn-related relational anxiety among emerging adults. The authors describe existing research on pornography and emerging adults, introduce their own study, and explain the results and implications.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have been drawn to the study of emerging adulthood since Dr. Jeffrey Arnett introduced the term over 15 years ago (Arnett, 2000). Defined as the stage from the late teens through the twenties, emerging adulthood has attracted scholars because today's emerging adults act differently compared to previous generations. Scholars have noted how this cohort differs in attachment patterns (Umemura, Lacinova, & Macek, 2014), sexual behavior (Bersamin, et al., 2014), ideas about marriage (Willoughby & Hall, 2015), technology use (Swanson & Walker, 2015), and religiosity (Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Maynard, 2014). While extensive research has been conducted on multiple aspects of emerging adult life, scholars have paid special attention to the changing romantic relationship and sexuality patterns of this group (Stanley, Rhoades, & Fincham, 2011; Carroll et al., 2007; Willoughby, Hall, & Luczak, 2013; Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006). Our particular study will examine pornography use patterns of emerging adults, as well as how pornography influences attitudes and feelings experienced in emerging adult romantic relationships.

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Similar to the outburst of research on emerging adults, sexuality scholars have increasingly studied the effects of pornography on its consumers. Around the same time Arnett articulated his ideas about a new pre-adulthood phase, the Internet boom took over the western world, increasing pornography's accessibility and use (Young, 2008). Today's emerging adults are some of the most frequent consumers of pornography (Traen, Nilsen, & Stigum, 2006; Stack, Wasserman, & Kern, 2004; Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013; Carroll et al., 2008). Yet scholarship explicitly linking emerging adults and pornography use is still limited and scholars have not addressed how changing trends in romantics among emerging adults are influenced by pornography use. In this chapter, we will look at what connections exist between pornography use and how emerging adults think about and act in romantic relationships. More specifically, our chapter will address the following questions:

1. What is the nature of pornography use (including type, frequency, compulsive behaviors, and gender differences) among emerging adults?
2. What is the relationship between pornography use and pornography-related anxiety in emerging adult romantic relationships?

Emerging Adults and Romantic Relationships

The romantic s of today's emerging adults (mostly Millennials or Gen Z-ers) look significantly different from their predecessors' relationships. Previously, the ages between 18 and 30 were viewed as the period where young people would make major decisions of marriage, occupation, and assume their position as an adult in society (Levinson, 1978). Scholars have also noted that in contrast to generations past, today's young people are delaying those major decisions, and spend their twenties preparing for their futures *individually*. According to Schulman and Connolly (2013), the romantic relationships of today's emerging adults are characterized by postponement of marriage and heavily influenced by individualistic ambitions. Many emerging adults believe it is important to travel extensively or to have an experience of self-discovery before settling down. Others postpone marriage until they have become financially secure. Most emerging adults today also believe that it is important to "test run" their relationships before marriage, and cohabit with their potential partner, adding another step into the path to marriage (Fincham & Cui, 2010).

But emerging adults aren't unique simply because of waiting to tie the knot or postponing the transition to adulthood. Popular culture portrays that while many of our young people in the United States are waiting to marry, they are replacing stable, committed relationships with "friends with benefits" and "harmless hook-ups" (defined as brief, uncommitted sexual encounters involving kissing to intercourse without an understood promise of a continued relationship) (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, Merriweather, 2012). Books like "The Happy Hook Up: A Single Girl's Guide to Casual Sex" (Sherman & Tocantins, 2004) or "The Hookup Handbook: A Single Girl's Guide to Living it Up" (Rozler & Lavinthal, 2010) perpetuate this idea, and reflect Millennials' ideas about how to approach and behave in relationships during this relatively new stage of life. While recent research has suggested that "hook-up culture" might be not as prevalent as supposed (Monto & Carey, 2014), other studies suggest that up to 80% of college students have engaged in a hook-up (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, Merriweather, 2012; Owen, Fincham, Moore, 2011). One study of undergraduate college students showed that both men and women had nearly double the number of hook-ups compared to first dates (Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville, 2010).

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