



If the reader of this article were to be asked what is the percentage of adolescents (between 12 and 18 years old) who regularly watch pornographic content, what percentage would occur to him?

Since 2007 I have been conducting empirical studies about the lifestyles of adolescents and young people: I have interviewed more than 25,000 from all the continents. And I continue to do so. After so many years of empirical work in the area, with the intention of transmitting to the world the voice of so many young people that have told me their stories, I decided to dedicate more time to teaching in universities. Since among the topics I teach I must confront the question of the effects of communication media, I usually ask my students the question that I have just stated.

Both undergraduate and graduate students estimate that 80% of adolescents, in the whole world (much is said about how the internet has globalized customs), regularly view pornographic content. Well, that figure speaks of their perception.

Probably if it were only an occasional comment of my students I would not have bothered to write an article. Aware as I am now about the spreading, including among academics, of a “social alarm” about pornography and other topics (for example, harassment in schools), I think it proper offering two scientific pieces of information (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016; Stanley et al., 2016) and a reflection to play down the alarm, without nevertheless resting importance to the social problem.

In the first place, only in 2016 was there published a comparative international study about the consumption of pornography (Peter and Valkenburg, 2016). This study demonstrates that the prevalence of the phenomenon (the percentage of adolescents who use pornography) varies greatly from country to country and that only 59% of the investigations used casual samples. Nothing tells whether they allow one to have a global vision and generalize the conclusions of the authors. In fact there are studies in which only 87 subjects responded. The greater part of the scientific literature is produced in Western countries, like the United States, where there are some companies that do business with this type of negative content for the development of youth.

Attempting to respond to the initial question, what do the statistics show? There are only two countries with more than 80% consumption among adolescents: the United States and Sweden. Italy? According to a study from 2006, the percentage was 36%.

A study (Stanley et al., 2016) in five European countries confirmed this: adolescents who regularly consume pornography vary between 19% and 30%, with a greater consumption among males (for example in Italy, 44% of males vs. 5% of females).

The consumption of pornography is growing and is a grave problem for the positive development of young people (Eberstadt, Layden, & Witherspoon Institute, 2010). But it is not a problem that affects the majority of adolescents.

Generating a “social alarm” based on unproved data would not only increase (at times with the objective of selling “programs of prevention”) collective ignorance. It would also make one think that the greater part of humanity makes a mistake regularly at the moment of connecting to the Internet.

One of the consequences could be that an exception could be come to be seen as normal. In a society that has a reduced tolerance for error, this could cause people to think that this type of consumption is not so grave, since the majority is doing it.

My reflection: so much insistence about alarming data of consumption could make us think that the majority of young people are addicted to vice, and could diminish our energies for confronting more important problems. In a word, we would miss the forest for the trees. We could be spending our limited energy on programs (many of them for money and generally not evaluated) that only minimize the effects of serious problems, which being more profound are less visible and more difficult to resolve.

In 2016 I published together with colleagues in Colombia and Spain a study on the subject (Rivera, Santos & García, 2016). In the article we showed that the phenomenon had increased (it reaches 39% of Columbian adolescents), and that a consequence of it is the proliferation of dangerous consumption. Nevertheless, after presenting a study of the factors that scientific literature indicates as being associated with this dangerous behavior, we highlighted, based on empirical evidence of a representative sample of more than 9,000 adolescents: (... that the relational lifestyles allow us to explain in part the consumption of pornography: the positive intra-family styles are associated with a reduction in the consumption and the opposite happens with negative intra-family styles. On the other hand, it has been found that the relationship between values and the consumption of pornography is mediated as much by positive intra-family styles as by negative ones .”

The consumption of pornography and other behaviors are a consequence (not exclusive but significant) of scarcities or relational anorexia: **the human interactions in the family**

and in primary groups do not succeed in creating and transmitting relational goods that offer them clear orientations for their decisions. The adolescents of the twenty-first century find themselves alone in making decisions of media content consumption.

To use a metaphor, it is as if instead of feeding their children a healthy diet, the parents gave them one based on fats and sugars. The problem of obesity would be resolved, in part, replacing these foods and alerting the public of their irresponsible decisions. But the best thing would be to motivate and help (concretely) the families to find moments to share well-prepared meals, with artistry and care, that satisfy not only the need for food but spiritual needs as well. Someone who knows by experience what a good steak tastes like does not become enthused over a hamburger and a bag of potato chips. Someone who knows what a good man and a good woman are, because they have seen and felt it in their parents and teachers, does not become enthused before the brutality of pornographic violence.