

# Age of first exposure to pornography shapes men's attitudes toward women: study

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The age at which a boy is first exposed to pornography is significantly associated with certain sexist attitudes later in life, but not necessarily in the way people might think, according to research presented at the 125th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

"The goal of our study was to examine how age of first exposure to

[pornography](#), and the nature of said first exposure, predicts conformity to two masculine norms: playboy - or sexually promiscuous behavior - and seeking power over women," said Alyssa Bischmann, a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, who presented the research.

Bischmann and her colleagues surveyed 330 undergraduate men, age 17 to 54 years old, at a large Midwestern university. Participants were 85 percent white and primarily heterosexual (93 percent). They were asked about their first exposure to pornography - specifically, what age they were when it happened and whether it was intentional, accidental or forced. Participants then were asked to respond to a series of 46 questions designed to measure the two masculine norms.

Among the group, the average age of first exposure was 13.37 years of age with the youngest exposure as early as 5 and the latest older than 26. More men indicated their first exposure was accidental (43.5 percent) than intentional (33.4 percent) or forced (17.2 percent). Six percent did not indicate the nature of the exposure.

While the researchers did find a significant association between age of first exposure and adherence to the two masculine norms, the association was different for each.

"We found that the younger a man was when he first viewed pornography, the more likely he was to want power over women," Bischmann said. "The older a man was when he first viewed pornography, the more likely he would want to engage in playboy behavior."

This finding was surprising, according to co-author Chrissy Richardson, MA, also from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, because the researchers had expected both norms to be higher with a lower first age

of exposure.

"The most interesting finding from this study was that older age at first exposure predicted greater adherence to the playboy masculine norms. That finding has sparked many more questions and potential research ideas because it was so unexpected based on what we know about gender role socialization and [media exposure](#)," said Richardson.

Bischmann suspects that the findings may be related to unexamined variables, such as the participants' religiosity, sexual performance anxiety, negative sexual experiences or whether the first exposure experience was positive or negative. More research needs to be done, she said.

It also did not matter how the participants were exposed, as the researchers found no significant association between the nature of the exposure and attitudes.

"We were surprised that the type of [exposure](#) did not affect whether someone wanted power over women or to engage in playboy behaviors. We had expected that intentional, accidental or forced experiences would have differing outcomes," said Bischmann.

The findings provide further evidence that pornography viewing has a real impact on heterosexual men, especially with regard to their views about sex roles, according to Richardson. Knowing more about the relationship between men's pornography use and beliefs about women might assist sexual assault prevention efforts, especially among young boys who may have been exposed to pornography at an early age. This information could also inform the treatment of various emotional and social issues experienced by young heterosexual men who view pornography, she said.

**More information:** Session 1163: "Age and Experience of First Exposure to Pornography: Relations to Masculine Norms," Poster Session, Thursday, Aug. 3, 11-11:50 a.m. EDT, Halls D and E, Level 2, Walter E. Washington Convention Center, 801 Mount Vernon Pl., N.W., Washington, D.C.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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