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Intentional exposure to pornography and the perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior among adolescents: A new area of child maltreatment research

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* Thank you for your interest in this presentation. Please note that analyses included herein are preliminary. More recent, finalized analyses can be found in: Ybarra, M., Diener-West, M., Markow, D., Leaf, P., Hamburger, M., & Boxer, P. (2008). Linkages between internet and other media violence with seriously violent behavior by youth. *Pediatrics*, 122(5), 929-937, or by contacting ISK for further information.

Acknowledgements

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Background

- The relationship between pornography to deviant sexual behavior has been studied in adults (Malamuth et al., 2000; Fukui & Westmore, 1994; Kutichinsky, 1991; Linz et al., 1984; Donnerstein & Linz, 1986; Demare et al., 1988) and hotly debated (Malamuth, 1989; Linz et al., 1987) for decades.
- Results are equivocal. Some studies report clear and consistent effects (Malamuth et al., 2000) while others describe null or inconclusive findings (Fukui & Westmore, 1994; Kutichinsky, 1991).

Background

Inconsistencies may in part be explained by the effects of violent pornography (Linz et al., 1984; Donnerstein & Linz, 1986; Demare et al., 1988; Malamuth, Addison, and Koss, 2000).

Associations between frequent pornography use and sexually aggressive behavior appear pronounced for men who consume violent pornography as well as men who are prone to sexual aggression (Malamuth, Addison, and Koss, 2000).

Background

- Little data exist for adolescents
 - Ethical / legal considerations of purposeful exposure
- Sexual aggression in adolescence
 - 5-10% males; 1% females (Borowsky et al., 1997; Maxwell et al., 2003)
- Unclear how / if findings for adults can be applied to youth

The Internet and X-Rated Material

- Estimates indicate that 95% of adolescents are online
- Concern that the Internet will become primary method for viewing x-rated material
 - In the YISS, 7% of youth reported (any) intentional online exposure, 8% reported offline exposure exclusively (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)
 - In YISS2, 13% reported intentional online exposure (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2007)

Research Questions

- What is the 1-year prevalence of intentional exposure to x-rated material?
 - Overall exposure and violent exposure
 - Across a variety of media
- How does exposure to x-rated material (nonviolent & violent) relate to expression of sexual aggression via technology? Face-to-face?

GuwM Methodology

- 1,588 households (one caregiver, one child) were surveyed online
- Conducted between August 24 to September 14, 2006
- Participants recruited from Harris Poll On Line. Data are comparable with RDD telephone surveys when weighting and propensity scores are applied.

Youth Demographic Characteristics

- 48% Female
- Mean age: 12.6 years (Range: 10-15)
- 72% White, 13% Black, 9% Mixed, 7% Other
- 18% Hispanic
- Median household income: \$50,000-\$74,999
- Median time spent online on a typical day: 31 minutes – 1 hour

Defining Exposure to any X-Rated Material

In the last 12 months have you:

- Watched an X-rated **movie** at a friend's house, your house, or in the theatre where the main topic was sex?
- Looked at an X-rated **magazine**, like Playboy, on purpose where you knew that the main topic was sex?"
- Gone to or seen an X-rated or "adult" **website** where the main topic is sex?"

Defining Exposure to **Violent X-Rated** Material

- In the last 12 months have you seen a **movie** that showed...
- In the last 12 months have you ever looked at a **magazine** that showed...
- When you have gone to or seen an **X-rated or adult website**, have you ever seen...

...a person being physically hurt by another person while they were doing something sexual?

Defining Technology-based Sexual Aggression

In the last 12 months, how many times did you:

- Ask someone online to talk about sex
- Ask someone online to share personal sexual information
- Ask someone online to do something sexual

OR

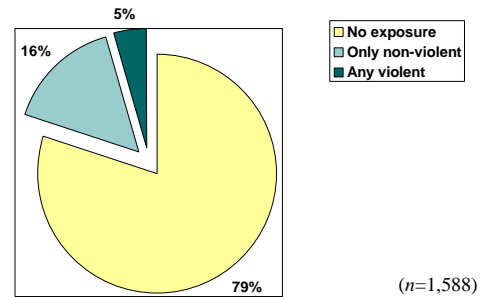
- Send a text message that was sexual in any way
- Send a picture text message that was sexual in any way

When you *knew* the other person didn't want you to.

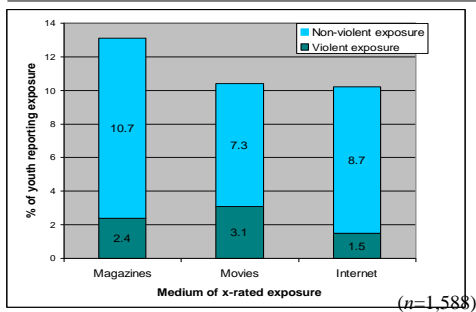
Defining Face-to-face Sexual Aggression

In the last 12 months, how many times have you ever kissed, touched, or done anything sexual with another person when that person did not want to?

Self-reported exposure to x-rated material



Frequency of Intentional Exposure to X-Rated Material



Perpetration of Technology-based Sexual aggression

3.7% of youth report sexually soliciting or harassing someone else using technology at least once in the last year:

- 3.1% report Internet-based aggression
- 1.5% report text messaging-based aggression

Perpetration of Face-to-face Sexual aggression

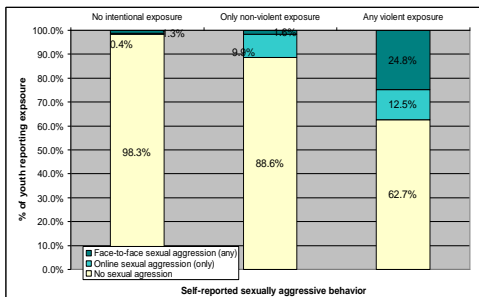
2.4% of youth report sexually aggressive behavior towards someone else in a face-to-face environment in the past 12 months.

50% of these youth (1.2% of all respondents) report BOTH face-to-face and technology-based sexual aggression

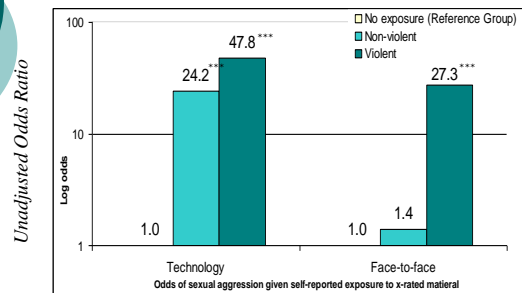
Characteristics of Perpetrators of Sexual Aggression

- Poor emotional bond with caregiver
- Witnessing spousal abuse
- Use of alcohol and other drugs
- Propensity to respond to stimuli with anger
- Relational/physical bullying of others and starting fights
- Target of unwanted sexual harassment themselves
- Having blocking software is protective, knowing how to get around increases risk
- General Internet and text messaging use

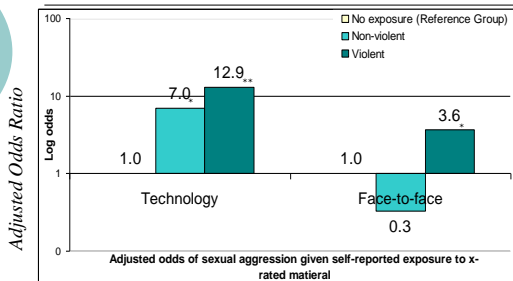
Cross-tabulation of exposure to x-rated material and concurrent reports of sexual aggression



Unadjusted Associations between X-Rated Exposure Sexual Aggression



Adjusted Associations between X-Rated Exposure and Sexual Aggression



Odds are adjusted for demographic characteristics, substance use, caregiver-child relationships, spousal abuse, propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, exposure to peer aggression, Internet usage characteristics

Summary: Exposure

- About one in five youth report intentional exposure to x-rated material
- About one in twenty report intentional exposure to violent x-rated material
- Rates of intentional exposure are similar across movies, magazines, and the Internet

Summary: Non-violent x-rated material

Associations between sexual aggression and **non-violent** x-rated material are mixed:

- Non-violent x-rated material is **not** associated with an increase in the odds of **face-to-face sexual assault**.
- While inconclusive, the findings actually suggest a protective trend against in-person sexual assault for consumers of non-violent x-rated material once other influential factors are taken into account.
- On the other hand, non-violent x-rated material **online** is associated with increased odds of **technology-based sexual harassment / solicitation**.

Summary: Violent x-rated material

Consumption of **violent** x-rated material by adolescents appears to be associated with significantly elevated odds of sexually aggressive behavior.

- Consumption of violent x-rated material **is** associated with a greater likelihood of also reporting **technology-based sexual aggression**.
- Elevated odds of **in-person sexual assault** also are noted for youth who consume violent x-rated material.



Summary: Violent x-rated material

It is possible that exposure to x-rated material contributes to respondents' sexually aggressive behavior.

It is equally possible that consumption of x-rated material is part of a more general manifestation of externalizing behaviors, inclusive of substance use and non-sexually aggressive behaviors.



Limitations of GuwM Data

- Data are cross-sectional. No way to determine directionality of associations
- Frequencies of sexually aggressive behaviors are low, making estimates potentially unstable. Findings point to trends, not population estimates.



Limitations (cont)

- The data do not account for frequency of x-rated material consumption
- Respondents were not directly observed. It is possible that:
 - Children were monitored by their parents
 - Parents completed the youth survey.



Implications

More research is needed (of course..)

These data suggest that intentional exposure to violent material may increase the likelihood of peer-to-peer sexual victimization.



Implications

- Violent x-rated material appears to be a potentially concerning marker for youth functioning.
- Child health professionals should be aware of the possibility that youth are sexual aggressors online, not just targets.



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