

The elephant on the screen.

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In 1969, after a long period of censorship – and prosecutions – of everything that was considered obscene (that is, capable of perverting minds and threatening good morals) by Western societies, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the “President’s Commission on Obscenity and Pornography”, a group of experts tasked with determining the effects, if any, of the consumption of pornography on the population, particularly the young. The general conclusion was that the available evidence did not sustain the thesis, taken for granted for centuries, that the consumption of obscene material leads to antisocial tendencies (*Lockhart & Wagman, 1970*). Despite the findings, or lack of them, this event marked a milestone and a clear conclusion: common sense is not enough.

In the following decades, a mass of cross-sectional, retrospective and experimental studies – with questionable conclusions – and broad ideological debates in the arena of feminist movements consolidated pornography as a subject worthy of discussion. It was addressed not only on a personal, social and legal level, but also an academic one. In parallel, during the 1990s, *Kutchinsky's (1991)* research on the medium and long-term effects – particularly on crime – that had been produced by legislative changes in first world countries (United States, Denmark, Sweden and West Germany) and *Diamond and Uchiyama (1999)* in Japan reinforced this interest.

And Latin America? Silence. Almost fifty years of social and technological transformations later, an influx of new questions and challenges, and we still have little or nothing to contribute to the academic debate. In the case of Chile, there is an absolute paucity of studies that address the phenomenon of pornography use in the population in an academic and rigorous manner. Side references to the consumption of pornography in some studies (*Macintyre, Montero & Sagbakken, 2015*), in which the role it plays as an “educator” agent in adolescents is precisely reinforced, are all that there is.

By contrast, in more informal contexts the phenomenon has received renewed attention. In the media, for example in the television program “El Informante” (September 21, 2017), in some passing discussions in newspapers and in some religious congregations, there is space for discussion and shared opinions about pornography. More recently, in marches following the wave of femicides in our country, it has been possible to observe several slogans that revive the claim of a causal link between sexual violence and pornography consumption.

Yet which aspects of pornography consumption have been the



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subject of academic research? Many aspects have been studied in various disciplines; however, there are two issues of particular interest to professionals in the health area. First, the addiction paradigm (which has also attracted a degree of controversy, *(Law, Prause & Finn, 2014)* that has led to an attempt to incorporate it into the list of disorders to be considered in the latest version of the DSM *(Love et al., 2015)*. Second, its role as a psychosocial model, influencing the population in their attitudes and sexual behaviors. A general review of recent findings is beyond the scope of this letter, but nonetheless I would like to highlight two recent studies that illustrate the relevance of this topic. In any case, it must be emphasized that almost all studies are carried out in cultural contexts significantly different from ours - making any generalization somewhat hasty.

First, a nine-year longitudinal study of Taiwanese students *(Cheng, Ma & Missari, 2014)*, which found that visiting pornographic sites increased the probability of onset of sexual activity in adolescence by 53.3%, an effect that was concentrated particularly in young women and adolescents. Furthermore, a large effect was observed on probability of sexual activity prior to first romantic relationship in young girls, possibly indicating a more instrumental view of sexuality.

Second, the 6-year longitudinal study of young Americans by *Ybarra and Thompson (2017)*, which found that exposure to pornography – particularly violent pornography – was associated with at least four times the probability of carrying out acts of sexual violence (a general category that includes sexual harassment), coercive sex and rape.

Why should these types of findings matter? In a country where sexual and mental health play leading roles in public policies, particularly in reducing teen pregnancy rates and HIV transmission and preventing gender violence and violence in pololeo, the study of the national reality not only opens the way to the identification of hidden risk factors, but also reinforces the urgency of renewing sex education methods for young people and critically addressing apparently uncontested sex educators. An example of intervention in the area would be in media literacy practices *(Vandenbosch & Van Osten, 2017)*.

In short, it is time for national professionals and academics to confront the elephant on the screen.

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