

BETTER TOGETHER

2018 ATSA Conference | Friday October 19 | 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

F-32

Talking to Adolescents About Pornography: An Evidence-Informed Approach to Teaching ‘Pornography Literacy’ (Part 1)

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Research suggests that virtually all U.S. youth have seen sexually explicit media (i.e., pornography) once or more by the time that they are 18 years old. A substantial percentage of teenagers seek out pornography intentionally because it is developmentally normative to be curious about sex. Whether viewing pornography is helpful or harmful to youth likely depends on a number of factors, including what they view, in what context, for what reason, their individual personality and psychological profile, and their environmental context. Regardless of the impact on any one individual, it can still be useful to teach youth how to deconstruct sexual media and empower them to make choices about what they want to view, how they want to view it, and to cultivate self-knowledge about why they want to view it. Teaching this type of pornography media literacy is very rewarding—as our team knows from firsthand experience and as was recently reported in The New York Times magazine (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>). In 2016 we created a 10-session pornography literacy curriculum for Boston-area youth enrolled in afterschool programs (unaffiliated with the local school system). Based on our qualitative and quantitative research with youth about their use of pornography and dating experiences, and years of expertise directing the Start Strong healthy relationships program at the Boston Public Health Commission, our program steers clear of promoting either an “anti-pornography” or “pro-pornography” agenda. Our goal is to adhere as closely to what is known as possible, to admit when research findings on topics are mixed, and to be transparent about what is not yet understood or contentious. In this session we will provide an overview of the empirical research in which we grounded our curriculum, present quantitative results of pre- and post-tests completed by youth who participated in pilot tests of the program, and describe a selection of program lessons, activities and youths’ reactions to them.

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Learning Goals:

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to...

- Summarize the research literature in which the pornography literacy curriculum is grounded.
- Discuss the results of the one-group pre-post design evaluation of the pilot test
- Describe three or four activities that are conducted with youth to increase their pornography literacy.

Dr. Emily F. Rothman is a Professor of Community Health Sciences at the Boston University School of Public Health. Her primary research expertise is on the development and testing of interventions to prevent violence. She has been awarded funding by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and worked on U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded research projects. Since 2001 she has focused on evaluating interventions to prevent adolescent and young adult dating violence, and on studying the contribution of alcohol and marijuana use to dating violence perpetration. A secondary research interest is the development of measurement tools to assess dating violence and related outcomes. She recently evaluated a program for commercially sexually exploited youth and so has an emerging interest in human trafficking prevention. She is a trained facilitator of counseling groups for men who perpetrate partner violence and is in the process of developing counseling interventions for college youth who perpetrate sexual assault as well as healthy relationships classes for youth on the autism spectrum.

Jess Alder is the Program Director of the Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationship Initiative at the Boston Public Health Commission. She holds her Masters in Public Administration from Suffolk University. For 4 years Jess was an educator, advocate, and consultant for rape crisis centers in Denver, CO and Boston, MA. She has been working in the field of teen dating violence for the past 6 years in Boston, MA and has two decades of experience working with young people as an educator, coach, and mentor. Jess has conducted local and national workshops on healthy relationships, healthy break ups, media literacy, and crisis intervention.

Nicole Daley is the Director of Evaluation and Engagement at the One Love Foundation. She has over 9 years of experience working in the field of teen dating violence prevention. She served as Program Director of the Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships Initiative at the Boston Public Health Commission for over 5 years before joining One Love. Her expertise is in the field of teen dating violence prevention, healthy relationship promotion, program and partnership development. She led a team that has developed innovative curricula for teens and adults on healthy relationships, teen dating violence, media literacy, healthy breakups, and pornography literacy. She has a passion for supporting young people in being change agents in addressing teen dating violence. Her work has been featured in the Boston Globe and The New York Times. She holds a BA from Wesleyan University and an MPH from Boston University School of Public Health.