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The Internet and its Consequences for Child
Sexual Abuse Victims

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ABSTRACT

The internet is a new but sweeping aspect of our daily lives. With the newest generation of children and adolescents being the first to have access to the internet throughout the entire duration of their lives, it is critical to study potential outcomes that result from internet use. Within the population of children, it is crucial to examine how vulnerable populations such as victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) are impacted by the internet. To do this we examined how high levels of pornography consumption and high levels of social media use increased the odds for risky sexual activity, online sexual solicitations, meeting a stranger offline, and being cyberbullied. We then compared this with CSA as a predictor of these outcomes. We found that high levels of pornography and social media use were associated with some risky outcomes, but CSA was a stronger predictor of these outcomes. The finding suggests that the internet is associated with harmful outcomes, but CSA is more of a risk factor, therefore both need to be addressed when ensuring the safety of children.

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Introduction

One of the most notable changes in human society in the past 20 years is the invention and widespread use of the internet. There is much discourse on whether the internet has been an overall positive or negative addition to our daily lives. Current adolescents are the first generation that have had access to the internet over the entire course of their lifespan. Studies investigating the impact of the internet on the general wellbeing of adolescents have observed that the internet does not have a significant impact on general wellbeing (Orben, 2020). However, when specific aspects of the internet are isolated and examined, it becomes clear that the internet has a dangerous impact on youth (Noll, 2022). In particular, the internet is potentially harmful for vulnerable populations. One population that is at an increased risk for the internet's dangers is victims of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) (Noll, 2022). One can examine how the internet impacts children and adolescents by looking at two popular facets of the internet, pornography consumption and social media use.

Pornography

The nature of the internet has increased the availability of sexually explicit materials, specifically pornography. In 2022 1,300 adolescents between the ages of 13-17 were surveyed on their online pornography consumption habits (Common Sense Media, 2022). The survey was designed to be a representative sample of the United States in terms of participants gender identity, race, and region. Seventy-three percent of teens reported that they had consumed online pornography. More specifically, 54% of participants reported that they first watched pornography at age 13 or younger, 15% reported their first exposure at age 11 or younger. Of the

group that had watched pornography less than half (44%) reported that they intentionally sought out pornography, and 58% reported that they viewed pornography accidentally. Of the group that only consumed pornography accidentally, 63% reported viewing pornography within the past week. This may indicate that accidental exposure to online pornography is a frequent occurrence for many adolescents. Of teens who intentionally seek out pornography the most common way to access the materials is through online pornography specific websites (44%). The survey suggested that 38% of teens watch pornography via social media, with teens specifically watching pornography on YouTube (34%), subscription-based websites (16%), and livestreaming websites (18%) (Common Sense Media, 2022) The internet has provided unprecedented access to pornography. This access has real life consequences on adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviors (Noll, 2022).

The internet has allowed an abundance of pornography to be produced and consumed. More than half of adolescents are watching pornography regardless of their purposeful intentions. Given the frequency of pornography exposure among adolescents, it is important to understand what messages pornography is sending to adolescent viewers. Previous research indicated that many pornographic media's depictions of sex promote violent and risky behaviors (Randall & Langlais 2020). Specifically, 55% of adolescents report that they consumed pornography that depicted rape. Only 33% reported viewing pornography in which participants asked for consent (Common Sense Media, 2022) and 45% reported that pornography gives them helpful information about sex. Twenty-seven percent reported that pornography depicts the way that most people have sex. If adolescents are watching violent pornography and ingraining that information as real, they are more likely to engage in violent risky sex themselves (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007).

To further examine the relationship between watching pornography and risky sexual outcomes, researchers conducted a study examining sexual behaviors of children who were exposed to sexually explicit material before age 14 (Lin et al., 2020). Exposure to sexually explicit materials predicted earlier onset of sexual activity, unsafe sex, and multiple sexual partners. Pornography also promotes violent sexual behaviors. Research analyzing mainstream pornography sites found that 12% of video titles describe activities that constitute sexual violence (Vera-Gray et al., 2021). Additionally, of the 50 most popular pornography videos on pornography websites 88% depicted physical violence and 49% depicted verbal aggression. When violence is depicted in pornography, it is almost always a male perpetrator and a female victim (Bridges, 2010). The violent nature of pornography combined with the easy accessibility for adolescents creates a capacity for dangerous implications.

The unique developmental period of adolescents makes pornography exposure during adolescence especially harmful. Sexual socialization is the process in which adolescents learn and ingrain information about expectations for sex (L'Engle, & Jackson, 2008). Ideally children and adolescents are sexually socialized through their parents, peers, or formal teaching like sex education. This allows them to learn about the risk for sexually transmitted infections, relationship violence, the risk of pregnancy, and consent (Randall & Langlais 2020). Due to the nature of the internet, sexual socialization is now occurring more frequently in the media, specifically through pornography (L'Engle, & Jackson, 2008).

One may consider the increase of available pornography for sexual socialization as a positive thing for adolescents. For adolescents who cannot talk about sex with their parents or peers, pornography provides an accessible way to learn about sex. However, the violent and dangerous behaviors depicted in pornography diminish the potential benefits of watching

pornography. Pornography may likely normalize unsafe sexual behaviors for adolescents who are frequently viewing unsafe violent depictions of sex and analyzing that information as real (L'Engle, & Jackson, 2008).

This has particularly negative consequences for young women. Studies have demonstrated that pornography is associated with viewing women as sexual objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Sexual objectification of women can be defined as the idea of women as an object men can use for sexual gratification rather than a person with their own feelings and desires. Research has found that watching pornography is associated with the sexual objectification of women for both men and women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). This has negative implications for both gender identities. Men who watch pornography learn to view women as sexual objects are more likely to engage in violent sexual behavior and ignore the needs of their female partner (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007) Men may become violent with women that they are intimate with and view women in their everyday life as sex objects. Pornography teaches men to reduce a women's value down to how she can please him sexually. On the other hand, women who watch pornography learn to view themselves as sexual objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). They become complicit to violent behavior because they are attempting to please a man. Porn teaches young women that sex is their only purpose (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007).

Pornography has dangerous real-life implications. For example, watching pornography is associated risky sexual behaviors that may lead to sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy (Noll 2013). Further, watching pornography impacts the way adolescents conceptualize sex and view themselves (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). The internet has accelerated the way that children and adolescents are exposed to pornography and exposes most adolescents

to pornography even if they do not seek it out (Common Sense Media, 2022). Thus, most teens on the internet are forming dangerous sexual scripts that will impact their sexual development and lead to dangerous outcomes.

Social Media

Another development of the internet that is critical to explore is social media. Social media is still a relatively new phenomenon. In 2004, MySpace became the most popular social media site with one million users. In 2019, there were 3.5 billion people using social media (Pew Research Center, 2022). One in three people in the world are using social media and two out of three internet users are on social media (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Each age group or developmental cohort has their own preference for social media sites. Adolescents have a distinct way of utilizing the internet to use social media and are unique in the amount of time they spend on social media.

The Pew Research center collected data on 1,316 teenagers to examine how often and how they use the internet and social media. Ninety-seven percent of teens are on the internet (Pew Research Center, 2022). Since 2014, there has been a 22% increase in teens who report having access to a smartphone. In 2014, the number of teens who reported that they are online almost constantly was 24%, now 46% of teens report that they are online almost constantly. However, it is important to note that in this survey, there were no clear parameters for what “almost constantly” means and therefore it may be different for each teen. While these teens are online, they are frequently visiting the same platforms. The top five platforms for teenagers are YouTube (95%), Tik Tok (67%), Instagram (62%), Snapchat (59%), and Facebook (32%) (Pew Research Center, 2022). Gender differences exist with different types of social media. Boys report using Twitter, Twitch and Redit most frequently (Pew Research Center, 2022). In contrast,

girls report using Tik Tok, Instagram, and Snapchat most frequently (Pew Research Center, 2022). Thirty-five percent of teens report that they are on social media almost constantly and 36% report that they feel they spend too much time on social media (Pew Research Center, 2022) It is also important to consider world events and their potential impact on social media habits for adolescents. In 2020, the world went under lockdown to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. During this time, teens spent most of their time in their homes and used the internet to complete schoolwork, remain entertained, and connect with friends. As a result, teens may be more likely to be more engaged with social media than prior to Coronavirus pandemic. Given how many teens are using the internet to access social media and the frequency of which it is used, it is critical to examine the potential impacts of social media on adolescent development.

Like pornography, social media can also dangerously contribute to sexual socialization. The most common social media sites like YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok were not created for sexual purposes, but many adolescents have utilized them to view and produce sexual content (Strasburger, 2012; Common Sense Media, 2022; Maas et al., 2019). One behavior that many adolescents partake in is “sexting”, sending and receiving nude photos (Strasburger, 2012). Additionally, social media is used for cybersex, role-playing, creating a sexualized profile, posting sexualized photos, and sending and receiving sexual solicitation (Maas et al., 2019). Adolescents frequently share sexualized photos of themselves. One study found that one in five adolescents used a sexualized photo of themselves as their profile picture on social media (Mascheroni et al., 2015). This behavior expresses that the adolescent is engaging or wanting to engage in sexual behavior (Randall & Langlais 2020).

Social media has also allowed bullying to take new and more extreme forms. Cyberbullying is understood as an aggressive intentional act towards a specific individual carried

out by someone else or a group in which the victim cannot defend themselves (Moreno, 2014). Cyberbullying is different than in-person bullying for several reasons. First the victim may not know who the bully is, the internet allows the bully to remain anonymous. Cyberbullying can reach the victim anywhere so long as they have access to the internet. This differs from in-person bullying where the victim typically encounters their bully at a well-known place like school, or extracurricular activities. Lastly, cyberbullying may be public for anyone on the internet to see, adding further levels of humiliation and motivating others to join in on the bullying. Cyberbullying is associated with higher levels of mental health issues, lower self-esteem and suicidal ideation (van Geel et al., 2014). The internet intensifies the ability to target and victimize others.

Social media also provides perpetrators with an increased access to victims. In a study of 400 eighth graders, 59 participants report having online conversations with someone they knew strictly from the internet (Burgess, 2011). Posting personal information such as their email, phone number, and name of their school was significantly associated with communicating with a stranger online. Gender differences exist in conversing with strangers online. Eighty-seven percent of girls reported that online conversations with strangers resulted in their personal information being given out, this contrasts with 55% of boys saying their personal information was given out. Fifty-four percent of the participants who had conversations with stranger's online report meeting up with a stranger offline (Burgess, 2011). For three of the participants, this meetup ended in sexual assault.

Another study of 2,639 individuals uncovered more information about online sexual offences (Fineklhor et al., 2022). Study participants reported experiencing online child sexual abuse (15.6%), producing sexual images (7.2%), engaging in non-consensual sexting (7.2%), and

being groomed by an adult (5.4%). Further research revealed that 30% of a sample of adolescent women reported meeting up with a stranger offline (Noll et al., 2013). Social media is a unique environment that puts children and adolescents at a unique risk for victimization. It allows perpetrators to learn information about their victims and then access them.

Child Sexual Abuse

While it is critical to examine how the fast-paced development of the internet impacts all children and adolescents, we must examine populations who are at increased risk for adverse outcomes. Specifically, it is crucial to investigate how victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) are utilizing the internet and what impact that may cause. CSA is associated with a host of adverse outcomes such as depression, drug use, suicidal ideation, and risky sexual behaviors (Thornberry et al., 2010). The experience of CSA uniquely disrupts the development of the individual's self and sexual schemas. Because of this unique impact CSA has on victims and the nature of the internet, the consequences of CSA and internet use exacerbate one another. It is critical to investigate how CSA victims are utilizing the internet and what specific outcomes may arise as a result.

Child abuse and social media

Children who have experienced CSA are at a significantly higher risk for peer victimization, including bullying (Hébert, 2016). One reason why this association exists is because CSA and bullying share similar risk factors. Shared risk factors for CSA and bullying include low self-esteem, disability, early or late pubertal timing and isolation (NIH, 2016; CDC 2022). CSA can also result in internalizing symptoms such as anxiety or depression which, in turn, makes the child a target for peer victimization (Yan et al., 2018). Bullying rates are similar

to cyberbullying rates (Hébert, 2016), one can hypothesize that CSA victims are experiencing cyberbullying and facing its consequences at higher rates. The internet inflames CSA victim's risk factors to bullying by providing perpetrators with a new, more constant and anonymous avenue to bully their victims.

As discussed, the internet -specifically social media- has innovated the way perpetrators gain access to their victims and has increased the amount of internet initiated sexual victimization. This puts children who have experienced CSA at a higher risk for revictimization. People who have experienced sexual abuse are significantly more likely to experience revictimization during their adolescence (Noll, 2021). This revictimization could take place online. When perpetrators seek out victims online, the most common first place of meeting is on social media sites (Wolak, 2008). Furthermore, perpetrators seek out victims who have previously been abused; these individuals are increasingly vulnerable. If someone discloses their history of abuse on social media, perpetrators will be more likely to engage and groom that individual. Social media puts CSA victims at an increased risk for experiencing revictimization both on and offline.

CSA and pornography

CSA has a unique and adverse impact on the victim's sexual development. When compared to other forms of child maltreatment, CSA is distinct due to the violating, power imbalance, and disruption of sexual boundaries disruption nature of the abuse (Browne & Finkelhor 1986). CSA disrupts the development of typical sexual schemas. Children experience abuse and develop new, atypical ideas related to sex. This disruption of sexual schemas has several implications for later sexual development. In a study of 77 women who experienced CSA and a comparison group of 89 women, the CSA group was more preoccupied with sex, became

sexually active at younger ages, and were more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors that resulted in early pregnancies (Noll et al., 2003). Another study found that women who experienced CSA had lower sexual self-esteem, poor sexual adjustment, and were more likely to experience sexual assault later in life (Van Bruggen et al., 2006). Given the impact of CSA on the sexual development of victims, one may hypothesize that CSA victims may be more likely to consume pornography and be further impacted by the effects of pornography on sexual development may be worsened. Given CSA is associated with a preoccupation and anxiety related with sex, CSA victims may be more likely to seek out sexually explicit materials. Furthermore, CSA and pornography disrupt the development of sexual schemas. If a CSA victim consumes risky levels of pornography, their schemas will only be disrupted further, resulting in risky sexual behavior.

Current Study

While the internet is still a new part of our world, it has already had problematic implications for the development of children and adolescents. The internet has increased young people's exposure to pornography, which can result in the normalization of risky sexual behaviors. Social media also provides additional ways for adolescents to experience victimization. The negative outcomes associated with the internet are exacerbated by the experience of CSA. CSA disrupts the victim's sexual development and leads to risky sexual behaviors. Additionally, CSA victims face significant challenges with revictimization. It is important to collect and analyze data regarding the internet and CSA of young people because of the potentially dangerous outcomes associated with both.

The current study aims to gain more information on how internet behaviors are associated with adverse outcomes. In particular, this study will examine how pornography consumption

predicts sexual activity and receiving online sexual solicitations. Additionally, this study examines how social media use predicts being a victim of cyberbullying and meeting up with strangers offline. The current study also aims to understand how CSA is associated with these same outcomes. It is predicted that high levels of pornography consumption are a significant predictor of sexual activity and receiving online sexual solicitations. It is also predicted that although Pornography consumption will be a significant predictor, CSA will be a more statistically significant predictor of these outcomes. Similarly, it is predicted that high levels of social media use will be a significant predictor of being cyberbullied and meeting a stranger offline, but CSA will be a more statistically significant predictor.

Methods

The current study analyzes data from the TechnoTeens study. The aims of the TechnoTeens study were to gain insight into how CSA victims and their comparison group were utilizing the internet and examine subsequent risky behaviors. The study aimed to assess differences between patterns of behavior of the CSA group and whether the CSA group was more likely to experience internet-initiated victimization (Noll, 2022).

Subjects

The sample consisted of 460 females between the ages of 12 and 15. Of the participants, 156 had experienced CSA. These participants were recruited through child welfare agencies. Each of the girls has a substantiated report of CSA within the first year of the study. The remaining participants were also screened for past reports of substantiated abuse to ensure that the control group had not experienced child abuse. The control group was recruited to be a match for age, race, socioeconomic status. Within this control group, the participants were split into two groups to attempt to rule about all extraneous variables. The first group was a demographically

matched comparison group ($n = 156$). This group was matched for race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The second group was a census matched comparison group ($n = 148$). This group was matched for race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in the area of the country that the study took place. The control groups help eliminate confounding variables and allow for more specific results.

Method

The TechnoTeens study utilized a longitudinal design. During the first stage of the study each participant was given a laptop. The laptop provided unrestricted, unlimited access to the internet. Their URL activity was tracked for four weeks. Researchers went through the participants' URL history and categorized it into the following categories: entertainment, social media, gaming, pornography, education. Many participants spent time on entertainment sites like YouTube and Netflix, researchers followed the URL link to examine the exact video participants were watching to determine if the media was explicit. The key stroke patterns of the participants were also analyzed to ensure that the internet use was not from another member of the household. Additionally, keystroke activity assisted with determining an active session. URL activity was only tracked when a participant was actively engaging with the site, if a participant walked away from their computer, their activity would not be logged.

The second component of data collection was an interview with participants across multiple time points. The researchers led the participants in a semi structured conversation guided by the Comprehensive Trauma Interview (CTI). This is a validated tool used for gaining information about traumatic experiences for children and adolescents (Shenk et al., 2016). The interviewers collected information on whether the children experienced internet-initiated trauma and then gained more details on the occurrence of the victimization. For the purpose of this

study, the outcomes at time two of the study were used for analysis. Time two occurred two years after the participants were given the laptop.

Independent variables-

The current study examines three independent variables: pornography consumption, social media use, and CSA. The data provided information on how many minutes per day participants were engaging with specific websites. To turn the data from raw numbers into a variable for analysis, the minutes were recoded into categorical variables. To be categorized as a high-risk user of *social media*, the participant must fall into the upper quartile of minutes spent on social media ($n = 118$). To be categorized into high-risk *pornography consumption*, participants must watch any amount of pornography ($n = 128$). The CSA variable remained unchanged from the original point of collection. If participants had a substantiated report of CSA, they were in the abuse group ($n = 156$).

Outcomes-

To examine how high-risk pornography consumption and CSA were related with risky outcomes, two outcomes (sexual activity and sexual solicitation online) were selected. *Sexual activity* was measured in the semi structured interview by asking questions from the Sexual Attitudes and Activities Questionnaire (Noll et al., 2003) Participants were grouped labeled 1 ($n = 365$) if they were sexually active and 0 ($n = 95$) if they were not. *Sexual solicitation online* was measured by the responses to the question "Have you experienced sexual advances that went too far or were upsetting to you through a social networking site, chat room, text message or instant message?" (Noll, 2022). Participants who received an online sexual solicitation were labeled with a 1 ($n = 54$) and those who did not were labeled with a 0 ($n = 387$). These variables were selected to examine the relationship between pornography use, CSA, and risky outcomes because

they represent abnormal harmful sexual behaviors that may develop as a result of watching high levels or pornography or experiencing CSA.

To examine how high-risk social media use and CSA were related to risky outcomes, two outcomes (stranger offline and cyberbullying) were selected. *Stranger offline* was measured in the semi structured interview by asking participants "Have you met someone in person that you first met online, where the off-line meeting turned out to be a bad experience?" (Noll, 2022). Participants who had met a stranger offline were labeled with a 1 ($n = 44$) and those who did not were labeled with a 0 ($n = 397$). *Cyberbullying* was measured in the semi structured interview asking the participants "Were there times when you have been bullied, harassed or threatened by someone online?" (Noll, 2022). Participants who had been cyberbullied were labeled with a 1 ($n = 107$), those who had not were labeled with a 0 ($n = 336$). These variables were selected to examine the relationship between social media use, CSA, and risky outcomes because these outcomes may occur as a consequence of high levels of social media use or experiencing CSA.

Statistical Procedures-

Binary logistic regression models were conducted to explore the study aims. For each regression model, it was important to first run the regression with the risky internet behavior (high levels of pornography consumption, and high levels of social media use) before incorporating CSA into the equation. By splitting the models up in this way, it allows for a more specific extrapolation of the results. It is hypothesized that risky internet behaviors are significant predictors of adverse outcomes, so before abuse is factored in the relationship of risky internet behaviors and adverse outcomes must be examined. Due to the categorical nature of the variables of interest in this study, binary regressions were utilized to examine the odds ratio. After testing for an existing relationship between risky behaviors and selected outcomes, additional binary

logistic regressions were run to examine how CSA is related to selected outcomes and if it changes the relationships of high-risk internet behaviors and selected outcomes.

In total, eight binary logistic regressions were conducted. The first examined high risk pornography consumption's relationship with sexual activity, the second added CSA to the equation. Next the relationship between high-risk pornography and online sexual solicitations were examined, and an additional regression was conducted with CSA. The fourth regression examined high risk social media's relationship with meeting a stranger offline, and an additional regression was conducted with CSA. Lastly the relationship between high-risk social media use and the experience of cyberbullying was examined and an additional regression with CSA was conducted. All regression adjusted for demographic covariates (e.g., participants mother's education level and if the participant was a minority)

Results

High Risk Pornography Consumption, CSA, & Odds for Risky Sexual Behavior

High risk pornography consumption was not associated with a significant increase in odds for risky sexual activity (Table 1). To examine if the experience of CSA has an impact after accounting for pornography, a second binary logistic regression was conducted. While high risk pornography remained an insignificant predictor of risky sexual activity, child sexual abuse was significantly associated with an increase in odds for risky sexual behavior (OR = 1.973, 95% CI [1.110, 3.505]) (Table 2).

Table 1.

High Risk Pornography as a Predictor of Risky Sexual Behaviors

Sexual Activity						
					95% CL	
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HR Porn	0.061	0.263	0.816	1.063	0.635	1.781
Education	-0.222	0.099	0.024*	0.801	0.660	0.971
Minority	0.041	0.236	0.862	1.042	0.656	1.656

Notes. * $p < 0.05$. Risky Sexual behavior is defined as self-reported sexual activity at time two of the study. High risk porn use refers to the group of participants who spent any minutes watching pornography. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

Table 2.

High Risk Pornography and CSA as a Predictor of Risky Sexual Behaviors.

Sexual Activity						
					95% CL	
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSA	0.679	0.293	0.021*	1.973	1.110	3.505
HR Porn	0.013	0.266	0.960	1.013	0.602	1.706
Education	-0.146	0.105	0.165	0.864	0.704	1.062
Minority	-0.051	0.241	0.831	0.950	0.593	1.522

Notes. * $p < 0.05$. Risky Sexual behavior is defined as self-reported sexual activity at time two of the study. High risk porn use refers to the group of participants who spent any minutes watching pornography. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

High-Risk Pornography Consumption, CSA, & Online Sexual Solicitations

High risk pornography usage was significantly associated with increased odds of receiving an online sexual solicitation (OR = 1.910, 95% CI [1.056, 3.455]) (Table 3). To examine if CSA has an impact on online sexual solicitation after accounting for high-risk pornography an additional binary logistic regression was conducted. CSA was significantly associated with increased odds of receiving online sexual solicitations (OR = 1.96, 95% CI [1.042, 3.685]). Additionally, high risk pornography consumption remained a significant predictor in the increase of odds of receiving an online sexual solicitation after accounting for CSA (OR = 1.823, 95% CI [1.003, 3.311]) (Table 4).

Table 3.

High Risk Pornography as a Predictor of Online Sexual Solicitations

	Online Sexual Solicitation					
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	95% CL	
Lower Bound					Upper Bound	
HR Porn	0.647	0.302	0.032*	1.910	1.056	3.455
Education	0.040	0.123	0.748	1.040	0.817	1.325
Minority	0.210	0.305	0.492	1.233	0.678	2.242

Note. $*p < 0.05$. Online sexual solicitation is defined as self-reported recipient of a sexual advance online at time two of the study. High risk porn use refers to the group of participants who spent any minutes watching pornography. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

Table 4.

High Risk Pornography and CSA as a Predictor of Online Sexual Solicitations.

Online Sexual Solicitation						
95% CL						
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSA	0.673	0.322	0.037*	1.960	1.042	3.685
HR Porn	0.600	0.305	0.49*	1.823	1.003	3.311
Education	0.127	0.130	0.326	1.136	0.881	1.464
Minority	0.121	0.309	0.696	1.128	0.616	2.068

Note. $*p < 0.05$. Online sexual solicitation is defined as self-reported recipient of a sexual advance online at time two of the study. High risk porn use refers to the group of participants who spent any minutes watching pornography. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

High-Risk Social Media Use, CSA, & Meeting a Stranger Online

High risk social media use was significantly associated with increased odds of meeting a stranger offline (OR = 2.219, 95% CI [1.115, 4.416]) (Table 5). To examine if CSA is associated with meeting a stranger offline or if the association impacts the association of social media, an

additional binary logistic regression was conducted. CSA was significantly associated with increased odds of meeting a stranger offline (OR = 2.75, 95% CI [1.383, 5.483]). After accounting for CSA, high risk social media consumption was also significantly associated with increased odds of meeting a stranger offline (OR=. 2.118 CI[1.060, 4.230]) (Table 6).

Table 5.

High Risk Social Media as it Relates to Meeting a Stranger Offline

	Meeting a Stranger Offline					
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	95% CL	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HR social media	0.797	0.351	0.023*	2.219	1.115	4.416
Education	0.030	0.141	0.834	1.030	0.782	1.357
Minority	0.697	0.363	0.055	2.009	0.987	4.089

Note. * $p < 0.05$. Meeting a stranger offline is defined as self-reported meeting up with a stranger in person after meeting them online at time two of the study. High social media use refers to the group of participants who were in the upper quartile for social media use. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

Table 6.

High Risk Social Media and CSA as a Predictor of Meeting a Stranger Offline

Meeting Stranger Offline	
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	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	95% CL	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSA	1.013	0.351	0.004**	2.754	1.383	5.483
HR Social Media	0.750	0.353	0.034*	2.118	1.060	4.230
Education	0.606	0.365	0.096	1.834	0.897	3.746
Minority	0.163	0.148	0.270	1.177	0.881	1.573

Note. * $p < 0.05$. Meeting a stranger offline is defined as self-reported meeting up with a stranger in person after meeting them online at time two of the study. High social media use refers to the group of participants who were in the upper quartile for social media use. Education represents the education level of the participant's parents.

High-Risk Social Media Use, CSA, & Cyberbullying

High risk social media use was not associated with an increase in odds for experiencing cyberbullying (Table 7). To examine if CSA is associated with experiencing cyberbullying or if the association impacts the association of social media, an additional binary logistic regression was conducted. CSA was significantly associated with increased odds of meeting a stranger offline (OR = 1.974, 95% CI [1.383, 3.714]) (Table 8). High risk social media consumption remains a non-significant predictor of the odds for experiencing cyberbullying.

Table 7.

High Risk Social Media as a Predictor of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullied						
95% CL						
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
HR social media	0.578	0.333	0.082	1.782	0.929	3.421
Education	0.094	0.128	0.464	1.098	0.855	1.412
Minority	0.191	0.307	0.534	1.210	0.633	2.207

Note. $*p < 0.05$. Cyberbullied is defined as self-reported experience of online bullying. High social media use refers to the group of participants who were in the upper quartile for social media use.

Table 8.

High Risk Social Media and CSA as a Predictor of Cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying						
95% CL						
	B	SE	Sig	Exp(B)	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
CSA	0.680	0.322	0.035*	1.974	1.383	3.714
HR Social Media	0.519	0.323	0.120	1.680	1.060	3.233
Education	0.115	0.309	0.709	1.834	1.122	2.055
Minority	0.179	0.134	0.181	1.177	1.196	1.555

Note. $*p < 0.05$. Cyberbullied is defined as self-reported experience of online bullying. High social media use refers to the group of participants who were in the upper quartile for social media use.

Discussion

The current study analyzed data from the TechnoTeens data set to examine internet behaviors of young girls who have and have not experienced CSA and if these behaviors were associated with harmful outcomes. The study used binary logistic regressions to determine if high risk pornography use was associated with an increase in odds for risky sexual activity and receiving online sexual solicitations. Additionally, the study examined if CSA was a significant predictor of these outcomes. The study also used binary logistic regressions to determine if high risk social media use was associated with an increase in odds for meeting strangers offline and experiencing cyberbullying. Additionally, the study examined if CSA was a significant predictor of these outcomes. Given the literature on pornography and social media as well as the literature on how CSA disrupts social and sexual development, it was predicted that high risk pornography and high-risk social media consumption would significantly predict their designated outcomes, but CSA would be a more significant predictor of these outcomes.

When examining high risk pornography and CSA as predictors for risky sexual behaviors and online sexual solicitations, the data revealed a number of significant results. High risk pornography alone did not significantly predict risky sexual activity. However, CSA did significantly predict an increase in odds for risky sexual activity. High risk pornography consumption significantly predicted an increase in odds for receiving an online sexual solicitation, and remained a significant predictor when CSA was added into the regression. However, CSA was a more significant predictor of receiving an online sexual solicitation. The

first hypothesis that high-risk pornography would significantly predict an increase in odds of risky sexual activity and online sexual solicitation was partially supported because high risk pornography only significantly predicted an increase in odds for receiving an online sexual solicitation. The second part of the hypothesis that CSA would be a stronger predictor of both outcomes was supported.

When examining high risk social media and CSA as predictors of meeting strangers offline the data revealed several significant results. High risk social media use was a significant predictor of increased odds of meeting a stranger offline and remained a significant predictor when CSA was added into the regression. However, CSA was a larger significant predictor of increased odds for meeting a stranger offline. High risk social media use was not a significant predictor for experiencing cyberbullying. CSA was a significant predictor for the increase in odds of experiencing cyberbullying. The first hypothesis that high-risk social media would significantly predict an increase in odds for meeting a stranger offline and being cyberbullied was partially supported because high risk social media only significantly predicted an increase in odds for meeting a stranger offline. The second hypothesis that CSA would be a more significant predictor of the two outcomes was supported.

These results support much of what the existing literature reveals about pornography and social media. Pornography and social media are associated with harmful outcomes (e.g., early pregnancy, meeting a stranger offline, cyberbullying, negative sexual schemas) (Noll, 2013; Burgess, 2011; Maas et al., 2019). While pornography and social media use are associated with these adverse outcomes, CSA in the current study appeared to be more strongly associated with adverse outcomes (e.g., meeting a stranger offline, being cyberbullied). These results can be applied to help understand the dangerous impact pornography, social media, and CSA have on an

individual beyond the scope of the study. With the nature of social media is changing. One can look at one of the fastest growing platforms, Tik Tok. Tik Tok is a social media platform where users create and watch short video content. Tik Tok rose to fame quickly, from its creation in 2016 to the present day 58% report using Tik Tok every day and 16% reporting that they are on the app almost constantly (Pew Research Center, 2022). The app is most common amongst teenage girls. However, some of the readily accessible content on Tik Tok is dangerous and presents an intersection of risky social media use and pornography.

Tik Tok creates an intersection of risky social media use and pornography because of the app's purpose. Unlike Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, where the purpose is to connect and share content with peers, Tik Tok promotes creating content to gain as many views as possible. To gain views, many young people, especially young girls, have turned to creating hypersexualized content. One study examined the twelve most followed Tik Tok content creators in Spain and 10 out of 12 of these content creators presented hypersexualized behaviors on their Tik Tok accounts (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2022). One can also examine this by looking at the most followed person on the app. The most followed person on Tik Tok is an 18-year-old girl, who currently has 150 million followers (Tik Tok, 2023). While this user is an adult now, they became the most followed person on Tik Tok at age 15. This user rose to fame by posting videos of herself dancing, which are popular amongst young girls. However, many of the popular dances promote hypersexualized body movements. This is one of several examples of Tik Tok content that encourages young girls to create sexually explicit content of themselves and share it for views to gain popularity. This popular social media site potentially exacerbates the negative outcomes from both high-risk social media use and pornography consumption.

Tik Tok has particularly dangerous implications for CSA survivors. While the app encourages users to hypersexualize themselves, it also encourages users to share personal details, which is particularly concerning for CSA survivors. The tag “sexual abuse survivor” has 117.5 million views, and the tag “CSA survivor” has 453.6 million views (Tik Tok, 2023). This high social media viewership for these tags may encourage young individuals to disclose information on a traumatic experience for potential external support, views, and/or popularity. This provides dangerous implications for survivors who create content surrounding their CSA experience. This disclosure puts victims at risk for revictimization, which is supported by past observations that perpetrators are more likely to seek out individuals who have already been victimized (Noll, 2022). Tik Tok provides a plethora of information to these perpetrators to seek out victims to prepare against.

The current study design presents many strengths. One notable strength was the selection of the sample. When selecting the CSA group, all of the participants had a substantiated case of CSA within the past year. This is beneficial to the study because information on the type and severity of abuse is standardized by the child welfare system. Participants were not asked to provide retrospective data on whether they experienced CSA, therefore increasing the reliability of the data. Furthermore, there were two matched control groups for this study. Both the demographically matched control group and the census matched control group were screened for cases in child welfare to ensure no one from these groups had experienced CSA. Furthermore, the presence of two differently matched control groups increased the reliability of the study results.

The study’s methods were another notable strength of the study. When examining the literature, there were few observational studies of both internet behaviors and CSA (Noll, 2022).

This study collected a plethora of observational data. When data relies on self-report rather than observation, it is likely that participants will not report all their behaviors truthfully. This is particularly the case for a study that examines pornography and social media use. Thus, it is crucial to collect observational data. Additionally, this study collected data longitudinally. This allows researchers to examine what implications internet behaviors and CSA might have over the course of time. The observational modality of data collection and the longitudinal design allow researchers to gain a better understanding of how young people are using the internet and the long-term implications.

While this study is strong in terms of design, it is important to note the areas of possible improvement. The biggest issue being the need for replication over time. This data was collected before 2017, in the short time between when data was collected and now, the internet has evolved. Between the time of data collection and now, more teens are using the internet, and at much higher rates. In this study, teens used computers to access the internet. Recent data reports that the most common way teens utilize the internet in 2022 is cell phones (Common Sense Media, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic initiated a dependency of teens on the internet to attend school, remain entertained, and remain in contact with peers. Additionally, as noted above the qualitative nature of the internet is constantly changing. Social media and pornography platforms gain and lose popularity rapidly, it is critical to understand the nature of the platforms that teens are using. This study provides critical information on how teens utilized the internet at one time period. Future research, however, could replicate this study design to gain insight to changes in the internet and potential implications.

Conclusion

The internet is one of the newest and most influential facets of our society. Now, with more people actively using the internet than ever before, it is critical to research the relationship between internet behaviors and harmful outcomes, especially for at-risk populations such as CSA survivors. Past research provides information that pornography can disrupt sexual development and lead to risky sexual attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, social media can be the host site of internet-based victimization such as cyberbullying and lead to meeting strangers offline and potential abuse. The impact of social media and pornography is exacerbated by the experience of CSA. CSA disrupts sexual development and leads to other difficulties. The current study's results suggest that while the internet itself can be a predictor of some adverse outcomes, the experience of an additional trauma is a bigger predictor of risky behaviors. Future research should focus on the evolution of the internet, especially pornography and social media use. As more adolescents gain access to the internet it is critical to examine the potential for harmful outcomes, especially vulnerable populations such as CSA survivors.

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Academic Vita

Margalit Roitman

EDUCATION

Pennsylvania State University Schreyer Honors College

expected May 2023

B.S. Major: Human Development & Family Studies

Minor: Child Maltreatment & Advocacy Studies

Minor: Deafness & Hearing Studies

Dean's list: 7/7 semesters to date

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Honors Thesis | Advisor Dr. Jennie Noll | 2022- Present

- The Connection Between Internet Behaviors and Risky Outcomes in Sexually Abused Children
- Completing yearlong research-based project examining internet behaviors of young female child sexual assault victims
- Work with TechnoTeens database
- Conducted regression analyses using SPSS Software
- Conducted odds ratio analysis to determine if child sexual abuse victims were more likely to consume pornography, meet strangers offline, and experience cyberbullying
- Conducted interaction between pornography use and social media use to access for risky offline behaviors in young girls who have and have not experiences sexual abuse

Undergraduate Research Assistant |Advisor Dr. Jennie Noll | 2022- Present

- Assisted with data cleaning and creating definition files for the Female Growth and Development Study

Child Maltreatment Capstone | Advisor Dr. Yo Jackson | 2022- Present

- Investigated data from Preschoolers' Adjustment and Intergenerational Risk project to assess language disorders in trauma exposed mothers and youth
- Developed systematic review to explore the intergenerational transmission of trauma
- Coded and analyzed primary data using DatavU and SALT software
- Analysis of conventions of Black American English to reduce bias in coding of language

PUBLICATIONS

- Expected Co Authorship on a chapter of Dr. Jennie Noll's book

AWARDS

Schreyer Honors College Scholarship (\$5,000/year, 2019- Present)

Jane B Slep Scholarship in Health & Human Development (\$3,500/year, 2020- Present)

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Sign Language Organization | 2019- Present

Penn State University

- President 2021- Present
- THON Fundraising Chair 2021- 2022
- Committed to learning American Sign Language and spreading awareness of Deaf culture at Penn State
- Facilitate weekly meetings for 50 members by developing and administering Deaf culture and ASL lessons and activities, ensuring an ASL interpreter, and overseeing 8 executive board positions

ASL Club Liaison | 2021- Present

State College Area High School

- Mentored 4 ASL club executive board members as a language liaison
- Aided in delivery of ASL and Deaf culture lessons at weekly meetings

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Camper Aid | Keshet | 2021- 2022

Chicago, IL

- Supported 4 campers between the ages of 3-15 with diverse needs by adapting activities and meeting sensory and emotional needs throughout a 7-week camp over 2 summers

Assistant Teacher | The Goddard School | 2022- Present

State College, PA

- Direct learning and play with children ages 6 weeks to 6 years to ensure their safety and social emotional learning
- Primary caregiving, documentation to maintain compliance
- Worked with teachers to develop lesson plans, adapt classroom for students with specific needs, facilitate enjoyable developmentally appropriate activities
- Assisted with administrative tasks to ensure school function and organization

Volunteer | For Good Troupe | 2020- Present

State College, PA

- Assisted musical theater group of 25 children and adults with Down Syndrome by enthusiastically participating in activities and teaching songs translated into ASL

Volunteer | Harmony | 2021- Present

Penn State University

- One-on-one support, adaptation of musical theater activities to be accessible for a Deaf six year old student
- Collaborated with ASL Professors to translate songs from English to ASL to promote accessibility and inclusion

ACTIVITIES

Volé Penn State Dance Company| 2019 - Present

- Dance choreography and performance
- Ballet instructor
- THON fundraising