

Youth and Pornography in Ghana: An Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

Technology has caused more harm than good in Ghana to some extent. This is in view of the falling standards in moral foundations of children and youth in Ghana. In the recent years, youngsters are exposed to pornographic materials easily since internet and online materials are freely available in the name of freedom of speech. Pornography remains a socio-ethical topic not only in Ghana but also in many countries. This paper joins the discourse to examine the impact of pornographic consumption in Ghana from the ethical perspectives of Christianity. The findings revealed that the consumption of pornographic materials by the youth in Ghana has negative impact on their attitude, behavior and moral foundation.

Keywords: Christian ethics, Ghana, pornography, youth

INTRODUCTION

Pornographic materials are widespread and they are in diverse forms. In most cases, they may be found in advertisements, fashion, movies, music, and magazines, as well as on television, videos games, smart phones, mobile devices, web sites, and now online photo-sharing services (The Watchtower, 2013: 3; Flood, 2009: 131). Various views and debates still continue on the topic of pornography (Boss, 1999: 626). The term pornography is also defined as the subject of violence and offensive treatment towards the opposite sex during a sexual act. The word 'pornography' comes from Greek (*porno* meaning "prostitution" or "female captives"). The U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography (1986) defines pornography as the category of material featuring actual or unmistakably immolated or threatened violence presented in sexually explicit fashion with predominant focus on the sexually explicit violence (Boss, 1999: 626; MacKinnon, 2011: 122).

Flood (2009: 131-132) uses the term pornography to some degree in a neutral

way rather than negatively referring to representations that are necessarily offensive, obscene or harmful. According to Vertefeuille (1988), pornographic materials come in varying degrees of explicitness and perversion, from nudity to sexual violence and degradation. Pornography has plummeted so low in its portrayal of sex that there is virtually no sexual act, which has not been committed on man or beast (Vertefeuille, 1988: 102). There are many reasons for the production of pornographic materials and they include economic, political, social, emotional and sexual gratification (McSweeney, 1985: 148). However, many professional consultants that deal with victims of pornography have established that there is already enough evidence to indict pornography as a public health menace (Scott, 1986: 116).

In the past, people were shy to speak about pornography in public since the subject matter is exclusive to some adults in society. Later, it evolved to the bed rooms of adults. In some instances, couples locked

themselves in their bedroom to watch pornographic content after which they kept the compact discs away from the sight of their children” (A personal communication with Opanyin Kwesi Kumah on April 20th 2014).

So one may ask, is it the same scenario today? Largely, there is reason to believe that pornography is ubiquitous. Then why would the children and youth develop keen interest in the consumption of pornographic materials. Could it be the rise of technology, freedom, societal pressure, loneliness, divorce and single parenting? Does the consumption of pornographic materials by the youth have any negative repercussions on their moral development?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ethics is a branch of philosophy called moral philosophy (MacKinnon, 2011: 3). According to Fagothey (1959), ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos* (meaning custom). It is often used to mean a man's character. The Latin word for custom is *mos*; its plural, *mores*, is the equivalent of the Greek “*ethos*”. From *mores*, we derive the words *moral* and *morality* which means the rightness or wrongness of human acts. In the book *Ethics: Discovering right and wrong*, Pojman and Fieser (2012: 2) define ethics as that branch of philosophy on how one must live, with good ideas, and with concepts such as “right” and “wrong”. Christian ethics, like ethics or moral philosophy is concerned primarily with human conduct. It deals with what is morally right and wrong for a Christian. Its context includes all human created values and norms based on God's revelation and their consequences for Christ-like living (Kunhiyop, 2008; Fagothey, 1959; Geisler, 1989). The moral teachings proposed in sacred scripture occupy a central place in

Christian morality or ethics, which underscores how people should behave and live (Regan, 1971: 3-5; Peschke, 1996; Geisler, 1989). Christian ethics has several distinguishing characteristics. The first characteristic of Christian ethics is that it is based on God's gospel. Secondly, Christian ethics is absolute, which is in connection with God's unchanging moral character (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17). In this regard, there is reason to posit that moral obligations flowing from this nature are absolute, binding and deontological (Geisler, 1989: 22-25).

From the Christian ethical perspectives, pornography opposes God and his creation. Christian anthropology views the person as being created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27). The person is the crown of God's creation. She/he is unique and distinctly accountable to God. On the contrary, pornography projects the person as a biological urge totally unaccountable to anyone but himself. From the biblical view point, God designed sexual intercourse as an act of love and bond between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation. However, pornography to a large extent rejects sexual and human distinctions hence, promoting homosexuality, bestiality, and oral and anal intercourse (Vertefeuille, 1988: 107). Christians in general believe in sexual intercourse to take place with one's partner in the context of marriage. Pornography however, rejects marriage and promotes sexual activity between varieties of partners. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994: 2354) notes, pornography consists in removing real or stimulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. The message of pornography makes people believe that partners expects each other to be unfaithful and promiscuous and it may lead

to making children as liabilities (Vertefeuille, 1988: 108).

Pornography considered from the Christian point of view is a tool that opposes women. Most pornography humiliates and degrades women. They are often the victims of rape, beatings, and torture-induced sex objects to be used and abused by men. This has led some people to note that pornography is the theory and rape is the practice (Boss, 1999: 627). Catharine Mackinnon (1985) moves the pornography debate from a freedom-of-speech issue to one based on the social construction of sexuality and discrimination against women. Pornography from the Christian point of view reduces sex to an animal level, removing love from it. It replaces true love with violence, physical power and dominance. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts, pornography does grave injury to dignity of its participant (actors, vendors and the audience) since each becomes an object of pleasure (Boss, 1999: 627).

Statistics show that the youngsters are the leading consumers (Flood and Hamilton, 2013). It is on records that in every second, nearly thirty thousand persons view pornographic web sites. An average of more than two million pornographic movies is rented in the United States of America alone daily. The global pornography industry generates an estimated one hundred billion US Dollars annually (The Watchtower, 2013: 5; MacKinnon, 2011: 122-123).

METHODS

Study area

The Republic of Ghana (are 239,460 km²) lies along the Gulf of Guinea in the West African coast. It has a total land area of 239,460 square kilometres. To the east of Ghana lies the Republic of Togo, beyond which are Benin and Nigeria. On the west is Ivory Coast and on the north is Burkina Faso. According to the year 2010 *Population and Housing Census* in Ghana, Ghana has a population of 24,658,823 people with 71.2% Christians, 17.6% Muslims, 5.2% traditional African religion and 5.3% non-religious.

Methods

This study used questionnaire surveys to collect data. Simple random and purposive sampling methods were used to select respondents to answer the questionnaire surveys (Osuala, 2005: 114-115; Mutch, 2005). The study used a sample size of 200 respondents and all of them were from Ghana. Out of the total, 100 university students, 60 senior high school students and 40 junior high school students became part of the study. The total sample included 110 males and 90 females.

RESULTS

Majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21-25 years, representing 45%. The Christians and Muslims numbered 160 and 40 representing 80% and 20%, respectively. The respondents belonged to three major ethnic groups of Ghana. The Akan people of Ghana outnumbered the other ethnic groups. The Akan represented 65% totalling 130 respondents, the Ga/Damgme 20% totalling 40 respondents, and 30 Ewe representing 15% of the total respondents. (Table I)

Table I: Bio-data of Respondents

Bio-data	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	110	55
Female	90	45
<i>Age Range</i>		
12-17	20	10
18-21	70	35
21-25	90	45
26-29	20	10
<i>University students and levels</i>		
100	18	9
200	22	11
300	25	12.5
400	35	17.5
<i>Senior High School Form</i>		
1	15	7.5
2	20	10
3	30	15
<i>Junior High School Form</i>		
1	10	5
2	10	5
3	15	7.5
<i>Religion</i>		
Christianity	160	80
Islam	40	20
ATR	0	0
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Akan	130	65
Ewe	30	15
Ga/Dangme	40	20

Table II shows the responses in connection with the research objectives. Out of the 200 respondents, 194 representing 97% had used pornographic materials before whereas only 3% had never used pornographic materials. They used pornographic materials daily, weekly, monthly and once in a while. A total of 194, 180, 120 and 158 respondents simultaneously ticked that they had accessed pornographic materials from internet sources, smart phones, magazines and compact discs, respectively. A total of 180 representing 90% pointed out that the usage

of pornographic materials as addictive whereas only 10% stated that the usage as non-addictive.

All respondents indicated that the usage of pornography has effects on their behavior, attitudes and moral foundations. Some effects of the usage were outlined coupled with the means by which socio-moral problem can be addressed. The entire respondents representing 100% pointed out that educating the youth on the negative repercussions of pornography will be an

appropriate approach to solve the issue. They added that proper parental supervision of children including the kind of friends the children associate with, the television programmes, music and the magazines they watch, listen to and read respectively, will

go a long way to help address this socio-ethical problem. The respondents argued that there is a need for the government to legislate a law banning the importation, production and sale of pornographic materials in Ghana.

Table II: Research Questions

Question	Response	Number	Percentage (%)
<i>Have you ever watched X-rated videos, pictures etc. before?</i>	Yes	194	97
	No	6	3
<i>How often would that be?</i>	i. Daily	20	10.3
	ii. Weekly	25	13
	iii. Monthly	35	18
	iv. Once a while	114	58.7
<i>From what source did you watch these X-rated videos or pictures?</i>	i. Internet	194	97
	ii. Smart Phones	180	90
	iii. Magazines	120	60
	iv. Disc	158	79
<i>Do you consider pornographic materials to be addictive?</i>	Yes	180	90
	No	20	10
<i>Do you agree that the consumption of pornographic materials have adverse effects on the Ghanaian youth of today?</i>	Yes	200	100
	No	0	0
<i>How can this socio-moral problem be addressed?</i>	i. Education	200	100
	ii. Legislation against the sale of Pornographic materials	190	95
	iii. Proper parental supervision of children	200	100

<i>The effects of the consumption of pornography on the attitudes, behaviours and moral foundations of the youth.</i>	i. It promotes early engagement in sexual activities	200	100
	ii. It contributes to the heightened level of teenage pregnancy and rape	195	97.5
	iii. It is time consuming	186	93
	iv. It causes and enhances masturbation	150	75
	v. It takes one's attention from work (academic, social or office work)	175	87.5
	vi. It creates the avenue to have a sexual desire for different relationships	120	60
	vii. It affects one's way of thinking towards the opposite sex	195	97.5
	viii. It corrupts one's religious lifestyle	197	98.5
	ix. It contributes to the contraction of STIs (resulting from unprotected sexual intercourse)	200	100

DISCUSSION

All respondents pointed to the fact that pornography promotes early engagement in sexual activities and contributes to the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). This is an indication that pornography is more *actlike* than *thoughtlike* (Boss, 1999: 641). From the findings, there is reason to posit that the consumption of

pornography does a lot of harm to youth (Flood and Hamilton, 2003: x-xi). Since pornography promotes an early engagement in sexual activities and contributing to the contraction of STDs (resulting from unprotected sexual intercourse) among youngsters, there is reason to argue that it is a perversion. Another effect of the

consumption of pornography is the heightened level of rape cases coupled with teenage pregnancy in the Ghanaian society. The issue of teenage pregnancy has become a matter of national concern in Ghana. A report on teenage pregnancy in the Volta region of Ghana shows that 10,000 cases of teenage pregnancies were recorded in 2012 alone from various health facilities, leading such teenagers to drop out of school. A further research finding about this menace was in connection with the youth's access to pornography, poor parental care and peer influence on pre-marital sexual intercourse (Agbewode, 2013). This is a big setback in the crusade for the promotion of girls' education in Ghana.

The paper argues that there is the need for the youth to have a positive thinking of the opposite sex. This will go a long way to enhance their relationship with the opposite sex as they advance in age. However, it came to the fore in our research that pornography does affect one's way of thinking towards the opposite sex. As Vertefeulle (1988: 107) asserts, it seems only logical that the individual who exposes himself to pornography exposes himself to the values it communicates. Impliedly, if the youth in Ghana and the world at large accepts the wrong moral values of pornography such as violence, sexism, sexual aggression and gang rape, then it will oppose the very existence of society itself.

In Ghana, Christian religion dominates the country, followed by Muslims, traditional religions and others. It shows that Ghana is a religious nation and if one should go by the statistics, then we need to be alarmed by the fact that 98.5% of our respondents indicated that the consumption of pornography corrupts one's religious lifestyle. If the youth of Ghana become addicted to pornography, then religion may no longer

have a hold on their moral values and the direction of their existence. Thus pornography may direct the attitudes and behaviours of the youth and consequently become their moral foundation and that will have dire ethical consequences in society.

When pornography is seen as contributing to the heightened level of rape occurrences in Ghana, then it must be seen as having a harmful effect on the youth. Inferring from the findings, 95% of the respondents did indicate that there is a link between pornography and rape. This strongly supports the notion that pornography as theory and rape as practice. Like pornography, rape also humiliates and degrades the women. During the course of our research work, we saw some pornographic materials portrayed women as victims of rape, beaten and tortured. They were simply seen as sex objects to be used and abused by men. Should the Ghanaian society endorse this violence against women, which is the result of the effect of consumption of pornographic materials? Women should be seen as equal to men created in God's image and should be respected and not be used as sex objects.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to examine the impact on the usage of pornography on the attitudes, moral foundations and behaviors of the youth taking inspiration from Christian ethical perspectives in the light of the Ghanaian context. The paper examined the term pornography and the Christian ethical position on pornography. Views from two hundred respondents were evaluated. It was discovered that the consumption of pornographic materials by the youth in Ghana have diverse negative repercussions. For the future of the Ghanaian youths not to be bleak, the paper therefore suggests that

the Government of Ghana must ban the importation and production of pornographic materials. Parents, teachers, religious personalities and agencies in Ghana must spearhead the campaign against the consumption of pornographic materials by educating the youth. The paper concludes that the consumption of pornographic materials by the youth in Ghana has negative effects on their attitudes, behaviours and moral foundations.

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