

Testimony of Jill Manning, Ph.D., LMFT, CCPS, EMDR, CCTP, BH-TMH

Licensed Marital & Family Therapist and Researcher

February 10, 2025, 10:00 AM Central (Remote Testimony)

Before the House Industry and Business Committee

Senate Bill 2380: Requiring Age-Verification to Access Obscene Materials Online

Chairman Barta and members of the Industry and Business Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 2380.

I am Dr. Jill Manning, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist specializing in the impacts of pornography and sexual betrayal on individuals and families.

Drawing upon twenty-five years of clinical and research experience, I testify as a clinician, researcher, mother, and mental health advocate.

We face an alarming reality: *underage pornography exposure is now the norm.*

The Internet has not only made obscene content more accessible to children, but it also actively *pushes* it into their lives through algorithms, pop-ups, and deceptive marketing—targeting them before they have a chance to think or choose. Between 58 and 66 percent of adolescents report encountering pornography *unintentionally* due to these violating tactics.

Yet, decades of peer-reviewed research confirm that early exposure to pornography has severe and lasting consequences. The disconnect is unacceptable.

Documented Harms of Pornography Exposure on Youth

To underscore the urgency of this issue, I will highlight five key categories of harm—harms that studies show adults grossly underestimate.

First, the impact on neurological development:

- Exposure to pornography structurally alters brain regions responsible for impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation while decreasing grey matter volume in the prefrontal cortex.
- It also increases susceptibility to compulsive behaviors, including addiction.

Second, cognitive and behavioral risks:

- Pornography normalizes aggression and misogyny, especially when violent content is consumed, and appallingly *most* mainstream pornography *is* violent according to content analyses.
- It also normalizes promiscuity and sexual violence, leading children to mimic what they see. A recent report out of the United Kingdom reveals children are now the largest group of perpetrators of child-on-child sexual abuse, with pornography identified as the leading factor in the quadrupling of such offenses.
- Additionally, pornography fosters mechanical views of sex and triggers earlier sexual initiation, increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections and the risk of relational dissatisfaction in adulthood.

Third, emotional and relational harms:

- Early exposure reduces empathy while increasing relational aggression and narcissistic tendencies.
- It lowers self-esteem, distorts body image, and diminishes the ability to form secure attachments.

Fourth, mental health consequences:

- Pornography consumption correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, ADHD, loneliness, delinquent behaviors, and suicidality.

Fifth, academic performance:

- Research links pornography use to impaired academic performance by disrupting attention, reducing focus, and slowing cognitive function.

Each of these harms reflects a grave failure to protect the well-being of our youth.

Expert Warnings on the Harm to Developing Brains

In a recent Amicus Brief submitted in an age-verification case heard by the Supreme Court last month, neurosurgeon Dr. Donald Hilton and biological psychology professor Dr. Frederick Toates stated:

“Childhood is the exact worst time for someone to be exposed to pornography... The weight of medical evidence demonstrates pornography can become both addictive and compulsive... The compulsive and addictive potential of pornography is a serious public health issue—most dangerous for young people, who are most susceptible...”

Why Senate Bill 2380 Is Essential

A 2018 study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 8.6 percent of American adults struggle with compulsive sexual behaviors and urges, the majority of whom were first exposed to pornography as minors. To put this into perspective, this means one in every 11.6 adults struggles with sexual compulsivity.

As a clinician, I have treated countless individuals harmed by early exposure. I have also *never* met a sexually compulsive adult who did not begin consuming this material in their youth.

If we remain inactive, these numbers will only rise. I know this because I have seen it happen. Despite testifying before a federal Senate Sub-Committee in 2005, much has intensified with widespread smartphone use and increasingly coarse genres of pornography. Now, two decades later, the rate of compulsive sexual behavior has more than doubled.

Protecting minors from harmful content is not censorship—it is a fundamental responsibility of adults. The long-established practice of rating, filtering, and monitoring media—such as radio, film, video games, and television—for age appropriateness is both reasonable and widely supported.

Passing Senate Bill 2380 is a long-overdue step toward aligning policy with today's digital realities.

Comparing the harm inflicted on minors to a minor delay for adults is a false equivalency.

I urge a DO PASS on Senate Bill 2380 to protect the health and safety of our youth. Thank you. I stand for questions.

References

- Braun-Courville, D. K., & Rojas, M. (2009). Exposure to sexually explicit web sites and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 45*(2), 156–162. (p. 157).
- Bridges, A. J., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis update. *Violence Against Women, 16*(10), 1065–1085.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210382866>
- Brief of Amici Curiae Scholars on the Neurological Effects of Pornography on Adolescents in Support of Respondent, *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton*, No. 23-1122 (U.S. Supreme Court, filed November 22, 2024).
- Carroll, J. S., Willoughby, B. J., Wilcox, B., & Toscano, M. (2025). *Unprotected from porn: The rise of underage pornography use and the ways it is harming our children*. Wheatley Institute and the Family Studies Institute.
<https://wheatley.byu.edu/00000194-4cf9-d31a-a79f-cffb5fff0000/unprotected-from-porn-report-pdf>
- Common Sense Media. (2023, January 10). *Teens and pornography*.
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org>
- Dickenson, J. A., Gleason, N., Coleman, E., & Miner, M. H. (2018). Prevalence of distress associated with difficulty controlling sexual urges, feelings, and behaviors in the United States. *JAMA Network Open, 1*(7), e184468.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.4468>
- Draps, M., Sescousse, G., Potenza, M. N., Marchewka, A., Duda, A., Lew-Starowicz, M., Kopera, M., Jakubczyk, A., Wojnar, M., & Gola, M. (2020). Gray matter volume differences in impulse control and addictive disorders—Evidence from a sample of heterosexual males. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 17*(9), 1761–1769. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2020.05.007>
- Kühn, S., & Gallinat, J. (2014). Brain structure and functional connectivity associated with pornography consumption: The brain on porn. *JAMA Psychiatry, 71*(7), 827–834. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2014.93>

Manning, J. C. (2005, November 9). *Testimony on pornography's impact on marriage & the family*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Property Rights, Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate.

Manning, J. C. (2006). The impact of internet pornography on marriage and the family: A review of the research. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, *13*(2–3), 131–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160600870711>

Mori, C., Park, J., Racine, N., Ganshorn, H., Hartwick, C., & Madigan, S. (2023). Exposure to sexual content and problematic sexual behaviors in children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *143*, 106255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106255>

Owens, E. W., Behun, R. J., Manning, J. C., & Reid, R. C. (2012). The impact of internet pornography on adolescents: A review of the research. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, *19*(1–2), 99–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2012.660431>

The Guardian. (2024, January 10). *Children now biggest perpetrators of sexual abuse against children*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/10/children-now-biggest-perpetrators-of-sexual-abuse-against-children>

Wright, P.J., Herbenick, D., Paul, B. *et al.* U.S. Parents Underestimate Their Children’s Pornography Use and Learning. *Arch Sex Behav* **52**, 373–383 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02449-7>