

## WEBINAR (December 9<sup>th</sup> 2020)



### "Protection of the Innocent: Combating the Over-sexualisation of Children and Harmful Internet Access"



Organised by MEP Geuking (Germany)  
and the European Parliament Intergroup  
on *Demographic Challenges, Work-life balance and Youth Transitions*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honored to be here before you today, and first of all I would like to thank Mr. Geuking and your Intergroup of the European Parliament for their invitation to come and speak to you about these important issues of child protection and education. And I also thank all of you for being virtually present at this conference.

I am an emotional and sexual advisor and co-founder of the *Décllic* association, which work aims at raising awareness, preventing, supporting and training professionals on the consequences of pornography. And it is for this purpose that I came to you today, to show you the many impacts of children hypersexualization.

On a daily basis, my job is to accompany young people in schools, from 4th grade (*CM2 in France* – translator's comment) for puberty to the last class of High School on subjects such as self-esteem, construction of one's personality, relationship to the body and sexuality, prevention... I also receive in consultation in my office in Paris or by internet on these same topics.

Whether in schools, at my office, or through my association, I am called upon to address and develop all these themes every day, and I am happy to do so with you today for the European Parliament.

First, I will deal with the consequences of hypersexualization by child pornography, which I believe is one of the primary causes of this hypersexualization of children. You will see that we tend to forget this point even though it causes immense damage.

Second, I will talk about the consequences of hypersexualization through communication systems, media and social networks.

And finally, third, I will address the consequences of the hypersexualization of children due to the contradictions of adults, and political figures in particular, on the subject of child protection.

When we talk about hypersexualization of children, I think it is important every time to remember that it is first and foremost for them to EXIST in a hypersexualized world. They exist in a world for which the body has first and almost only a sexual value, which is a recent vision of the body, because it results particularly from the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The perfect summary of this vision is the slogan of what has been called sexual liberation: the famous “my body belongs to me and I can do whatever I want with it”.

To talk about the consequences of hypersexualization of children is therefore to see what they receive from our society. What our society offers them in order to exist. And then, how they react to what they receive.

I say this to make it clear that children and teenagers, in all cases and at all ages, are victims of their own hypersexualization.

### **A. CONSEQUENCES OF HYPERSEXUALIZATION THROUGH CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**

I’m going to start from a very recent case that just happened in Perpignan, in the south of France, to point out what I see as one of the major causes of hypersexualization of children. Primary school children, aged 10-11, had had access to pornographic content at school during their technology classes. The affair caused a scandal and particularly shocked the parents, horrified that their children could see this kind of images, especially at school, a place which is supposed to protect them.

Here is what the world has to offer them. Nearly 800 million free-access pornographic websites. And we got now to the point of this sad trend: in France, one in three children between the ages of 10 and 14 uses pornography frequently. I take as a reference the most recent study on the subject of the IFOP, the French Institute of Public Opinion, of March 2017.

What I say about France is of course transferable to most other European countries unfortunately. Our president, Emmanuel Macron, said just a year ago that pornography is violence against children. I think he made a fair statement, and above all a clear and official one. Pornography is a scourge.

The reason why I created my association, Déclic, to raise awareness about the consequences of pornography is largely because of the day-to-day experiences I have in my job as an emotional and sexual counsellor. My associate, Maria Hernandez-Mora, is a clinical psychologist in hospital, specialized in addictology. She too poses an alarming observation on the consequences of pornography.

#### **1. The first observation is that hypersexualization through child pornography leads to a psychological traumatic wound of the same kind of those from sexual abuses**

Professionals in psychology and psychiatry agree on the use of the term “rape of the imaginary” for children early-exposed to pornography.

For instance, we find the same feelings or symptoms as after a sexual assault: the child feels dirty and guilty, he or she experiences shame and sadness, often with a feeling of disgust and a difficulty to dare to talk about what he or she saw.

And this is the terrible question of some teenagers, which also shows how profound the psychic impact is: "Ma'am, how can I forget?" How many times have I heard that question! You can't imagine the suffering, the real psychic torture, of children who realize they've been injured, and they're not protected. With tears, a 14-year-old kid was speaking to me about his addiction to pornography. I asked him what he would need to get better. His response was clear and imbued with such distress. "I just want it to stop," he told me.

Children are victims of these images, of these videos, of this ubiquitous pornosphere to which they have access in one click.

According to the latest IFOP statistics from March 2017, most of the first pornography visits are around the age of 11. But it happens more and more early. Pediatricians, doctors, children's professionals in general, have been denouncing and alerting for some time about the impact of screens on children under 3 years of age. It is a poison in terms of health. And the fact that parents lend a tablet or a computer to their child with NO PROTECTION WHATSOEVER is also a time bomb.

Young children pass from Noddy and his little car, to a porn movie that one of the parents watches with the same tablet! True story. I will be coming back to this issue of adult responsibility right after that. But it is one of the most obvious, the easiest and yet the least implemented issues of action.

The main culprit of child pornography consumption still remains the smartphone with unlimited data that children possess more and more early. I am not specifically opposed to the use of a computer or phone by a child, but when I know that one out of five internet searches in the world via a mobile phone is pornographic, please understand that I invite you to pay particular attention to this matter with regard to children.

**2. After the psychological traumatic injury, the second observation I make is that hypersexualization through pornography leads to an emotional maturation disorder for children**

The global hypersexualization of our world sends a sexual message to children. But this message arrives in still immature bodies and psyches. We talk about immaturity when a person has not yet reached his full development, whether physical, psychological or intellectual. A child's immaturity makes him permeable and easily influenced by the world around him. And what is generally a good thing (because one can thus mature, grow, learn from others) turns into a trap when one receives things that are not adapted to him.

The pornographic culture of our world hurts children and creates in them a pattern of thought, on which they have no way of taking a step back, precisely because of their immaturity, but most of all because they build their identity. They do not act like adults who "add" external elements to their identity.

For some, the development of a new neural pattern from a biological point of view begins very early, when they are confronted directly and repeatedly with sexual contents. This is why they can also easily develop an addiction to these images without their knowledge: the physical addiction to dopamine plays the same role as a drug, as alcohol or cigarettes. The consumption of pornography triggers in fact a physical HYPERstimulation to masturbatory purpose, which has nothing to do with the «simple» stimulation of desire an adult can have in front of a person. This hyperstimulation is a shock to the body of a child. And it promotes the state of sideration when children are confronted with this content, again just as for sexual assault.

Thus, with the narcissistic weakness of children, their personal construction still fragile, and their early exposure to speeches and images of a sexual nature which they are not yet able to assume psychically or physically, it makes sense that the child would also react with hypersexualized affectivity. With a quite normal immaturity related to their young age, receiving these images regularly ends up becoming a form of incentive to EXPOSE, EXHIBIT themselves, their own body, or to require others to do so. The notion of intimacy has simply disappeared in their homes, at the very moment when it is supposed to be built.

We find here all the problems of sexting and sending nudes, these photos of a part or the whole naked body that a number of young people exchange without understanding the full scope. No intimacy, no sense of the body, no limits. Everything is exposed. And they're so used to it that most of them don't even see it as a problem anymore. "I have the right, I do what I want" is typically the sentence of a teenager betraying his immaturity: the question of whether his action respects him as a human person, a unique human person in addition, is totally forgotten.

One last point about the impact on their emotional maturity: it must not be forgotten that their ongoing psychic development is characterized in particular by a need for recognition, a need to be loved and valued, and above all to be seen as a person worthy of respect and unconditional love. And I think this is where our society is particularly sick. I like that quote from Rimbaud that says "the world thirsts for love". What do we give as a response to these children who TREMENDOUSLY thirst for our attention, our care, our love?

Today we provide them with very little love. I'd be able to develop several hours on the feeling of abandonment that I observe in a very large number of children and teenagers that I meet each week. The absence of parents on these subjects of personal construction, sexuality and prevention is unfortunately most of the time an aggravating factor in the development of addiction and risky behaviors.

With the publication in 2017 of my book *Révolutionner sa vie affective – 10 exercices pour réussir*, and given the success it has received, I see how urgent it is to develop a new pedagogy of emotional and sexual education, which speaks of self-esteem, help young people to build their lives, and give them the means to reflect on the consequences of the pornographic vision of the body that the world offers them. There is a real lack at that level, and it will be one of the essential answers to help them position themselves with maturity in the face of what society offers them.

### **3. What I am telling about emotional and sexual education is particularly important as hypersexualization through child pornography influences their day-to-day behavior, especially their relationships**

Here is one of the IFOP figures that struck me the most when they released their study on the use of pornography by young people: 73% of middle school students developed a sexuality based on pornography.

In other words, 73% of middle school students, in one way or another, mimic in their own sexuality what they have seen in porn. But the message conveyed to these young people is simple: it encourages them to experience sexuality not in a relational way but in a compulsive way, where violence is admitted, encouraged and even praised by consumers' fantasies. A way that makes them lose the very notion of what is respectful and what is violent.

Last week, I had the testimony of a 12-year-old girl whose 14-year-old brother regularly tried to put his hand in her panties. As I can see in consultations, the most injured children gradually developed a dependence on, or even an addiction to pornography. It is common to hear that sometimes they get to imagine their own mother or sister naked. And others that their fantasies are becoming more and more violent and that they are afraid of them.

The proliferation of incest, sexual assault, and recently domestic violence among young people as a new phenomenon of study is literally staggering.

To summarize what I have just said in this first part, I would tell that since children are literally addicted to pornography, they grow up with a vision of women, men and sexuality that is completely biased and especially extremely violent. They are no longer living in relationships, but they make "sex".

As a counsellor in emotional and sexual life, this shift and impulsive vision of sexuality is alarming because it transforms sexuality into one activity among others. And the trivialization of sexuality in children makes them lose the exceptional value of what it offers us to live, which is a deep human aspiration: the total gift of self to someone, in respect and love, that is, by living both the inner unity and relationship of bodies, hearts and spirits with the other.

Unity of life and unconditional respect for self and the other are values that have become almost obsolete. There is a great urgency to restore these fundamental values.

## **B. CONSEQUENCES OF HYPERSEXUALIZATION THROUGH CHILDREN'S MEDIAS**

I was talking about the fact that children and teenagers had mobile phones with no filter, no limit, nothing actually. From there, one of the huge problems, in addition to hypersexualization via pornography, is the relationship to social networks.

Since pornography is ubiquitous, one easily finds its influence and codes in the various media and content that social networks offer. We could say that these social networks are the ideal way to transmit a hypersexualized vision of the body, especially to children.

One of my fifth graders (age 12) last week was talking about Onlyfans, which is a social network specifically for sexuality, where sexual content can even be monetized. The measures of quarantine have led to an explosion in the number of people on that platform. This is one of the most egregious steps in the moving of pornography into the public arena, and again: with no filter and no age verification.

But beyond this special social network on sexuality, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram to name a few, continue to promote a vision of the body only from its “sexually attractive” angle.

**1) Therefore, after the loss of the sense of sexuality, which I spoke about, we are witnessing a genuine destruction of the sense of the body, of its value and dignity**

What do social networks and media offer as models? Influencers, that is, minors or adults, whose media exposure has made them benefit from the holy grail called « popularity». In order to make themselves known and, above all, to be recognized, many publicize themselves in a more or less sexually explicit way.

As for minor influencers, they stage their physical, psychic, intellectual and relational immaturity on their own page or «feed». They make it up by acting like an adult. And here’s the drama! They are pretend adults, they dress like adults, they claim rights like adults. But they are children or teenagers. The role reversal is particularly serious in adolescent psychology because it invites the child who is still supposed to be able to rely on adults, to think of himself as an adult and therefore no longer be able to benefit from the emotional security that the child-to-parent relationship is supposed to bring. Increasing emotional security to grow up will lead to a better emotional maturity!

This phenomenon affects millions of influenced young people. Social networks are a huge success for these young generations because they come to meet their exacerbated needs of appreciation and recognition. They create dependency on others, of which they are for some fully aware: they replace parental education through the Internet and these networks.

And the educational message of these networks is simple: my body belongs to me, it’s an object I do what I want with. Even what doesn’t respect it. Again last week, I explained the value of the body, its precious character because beyond the “my body belongs to me”, truth is that “my body is me”! The unconditional respect we owe the body refers to the fact that not everything can be exposed, in order to keep the notion of modesty and intimacy, that is to say respect for one’s body.

These notions of modesty and intimacy almost no longer exist under the pretext that one has the right to dress as one wants and to do what one wants with one’s body. And that’s the bottom line: "My body is me," neither I nor the others can’t do anything with it.

*What hurts my body hurts me. What takes care of my body, respects me.*

This is the message I deliver in my speech. This is also why, in the last institution where I spoke, we proposed a listening point for 8 hours for people to come and talk with me, to ask questions on the topics I am addressing. The students lined up to be able to exchange, to be taken in charge, to be listened to in their sufferings.

**2) I end this point about the long-term impacts of this hypersexualization of children through medias by pointing out that this hypersexualization weakens them on two areas**

First-of-all their ability to be in stable, long-lasting relationships, on which they can rely in their daily lives. Indeed, wounded personalities, devoid of self-esteem, with a truncated vision of themselves and the fear of what others feel about them, are unfortunately doomed to live in transient unsatisfactory relationships. If they are not accompanied and supported they fall short of the basic necessary elements for a couple to work. As I often say: 1 constructed personality + 1 constructed personality gives a constructed couple... 1 unstable personality + 1 unstable personality... gives an unstable couple.

This hypersexualization also weakens their ability to live a fulfilling sexuality. Sexuality requires time, it requires learning to communicate, a certain emotional maturity to know how to identify and communicate emotions... The reduction of sexuality to a certain genitality, to be "sex", comes to sacrifice the person and his happiness, which entails taking into account all the dimensions of the person and not simply his sex.

I did not develop this point but hypersexualization also adds the pressure of performance, which is one of the main causes of male sexual issues, but also generally, of sexual dissatisfaction. It is a real subject of accompaniment in practice right now: we no longer know how to be in relationship, so we no longer know how to live the summit of relationship that is sexuality.

**C. My last part will be very short: it aims at reflecting upon a delicate point :  
CONSEQUENCES OF CHILDREN HYPERSEXUALIZATION CAUSED BY SOME  
CONTRADICTIONS OF ADULTS**

**1) Individual Freedom VS Child Protection**

Indeed, there are some elements in the current context that it is urgent to dare to look at: we first highlight the individual freedom of adults (in their right to consume porn for instance). And we're having a hard time putting child protection first. There are laws about minors accessing pornography, but nobody enforces them!

The difficulty in setting limits is due to this first argument of individual freedom, of the non-negotiable absolute that everyone is free to do absolutely whatever he or she wants. Child protection comes automatically in second place. To me, that's a real problem.

But the major difficulty in enforcing protection laws is also related to the fact that we all live in this hyper-sexualized world, and that many adults, and our politicians too, consume and are

themselves influenced by pornography. And most of the time they don't even realize that. I often experience an awkward silence from some parents on these subjects, because they themselves find it difficult to have an authentic position on that matter. At the same time, I understand, and that is why I dare to say it. But believe that it can NO longer last.

I think our children deserve to be given everything to protect them from any kind of abuse, physical or mental.

It is our laxity that indirectly favors and promotes the abuse and hypersexualization of children. And I'm glad to see that adults are trying to take responsibility, and you in particular as politicians.

## **2) One measure that should be taken urgently**

I will use an example of a decision that is still not taken.

When will telephone operators be required to install filters as a matter of principle on routers and phones, for systematic protection, or at least to be as safe as possible for children? If adults want to watch them, nothing will prevent them from later deleting these filters with a code they will request with identity verification.

In saying this, be sure that I feel I am saying something common sense, obvious. But I feel compelled to recall it since the example of children in Perpignan shows that even in a place like school, which is supposed to be secure, it was not the reality! And it's far from being the only place where that happens. Just yesterday, I had the conversation with a friend whose little sister had seen pornographic images in her middle-school.

## **CONCLUSION**

At a time when I am obliged to speak of emotions and relational life to masked children, and being myself masked, let us dare to recover a vision of man that takes into account his unconditional value through his body, no longer seen as a simple object I do what I want with, but as my own person.

It is urgent to go back to a complete education of the person, based on an anthropology aiming not at freedom as an absolute, allowing everything (and therefore also unfortunately anything), but at freedom as the ability to choose the best for oneself and for others. Let us dare to say that pornography is the scourge of our society because it hurts, instrumentalizes and manipulates consciences by pushing them towards the use of people and not towards their unconditional love.

Thank you again for your commitment to child protection. The future of this world is at stake.

You can find all my work as well as my book *Révolutionner sa vie affective – 10 exercices pour réussir* on my website [www.libertepouraimer.com](http://www.libertepouraimer.com) and on the website of my association [www.assodeclit.com](http://www.assodeclit.com)

Thank you for your attention. And I am at your disposal for your questions.