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Nowadays, it's brutal, accessible; PORNOGRAPHY

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The guy on the other end of the phone wants to talk about how terrible pornography is. But I'm thinking, "What's the big deal?"

I'm thinking: Hey, I don't believe in censorship. And hey, as long as nobody gets hurt, what somebody does in private is none of my business. And hey, I've seen my share of Playboy magazines and it all seemed pretty harmless.

But **Robert Jensen** quickly sets me straight.

"In case you haven't figured it out, we're old," says the 49-year-old Jensen when he learns I'm 50. "And pornography has taken a quantum leap to this younger generation."

In a nutshell, Jensen says, today's pornography is more cruel, brutal and accessible than ever. And, he argues, it's warping our young men in ways we haven't begun to understand.

"We're conducting one of the greatest social engineering experiments in history," says Jensen, associate professor in the school of journalism at the University of Texas and the author of *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity*. "If you flood young people with this kind of overtly sexist and racist material . . . what happens?"

"Well, we don't know what happens," he says. "But increasingly, the evidence is we should be worried."

Jensen, who'll deliver his ideas this morning at UWO (at the Social Science Centre, room 9420 at 9 a.m.) and this evening at the London Convention Centre, says today's porn industry has been fuelled by the three A's: Accessibility, affordability and anonymity.

Accessible? Anyone with Internet access can view pornography. Affordable? Jensen says that in addition to the proliferation of free amateur porn, many young men now simply download the short "teaser" ads offered by subscription sites, then edit them into a longer video. Anonymous? Unlike 40 years ago when a consumer usually had to buy porn in a public setting, any Internet subscriber can consume unlimited pornography without venturing from their residence.

In the U.S., it's estimated pornography compiles annual revenues of about \$15 billion. Another widely quoted statistic, which is included in a study compiled by TopTen Reviews.com, estimates more than 28,000 Internet users are

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viewing pornography every second.

And according to Jensen, those images are more disturbing than ever.

And while he emphasizes there's no conclusive proof that pornography leads to rape, Jensen argues its effect on young men's attitudes about women and intimacy is deeply troubling.

"It's become so normalized among young men," he says. "It's become almost as common as comic books were for you and me."

"We learn about the world through stories," adds Jensen. "And if one of the predominant stories we tell about sex is through this increasingly cruel and degrading pornography, how can we not worry about the effect of that on the whole culture?"

IF YOU GO

What: Pornography and Masculinity, a discussion by **Robert Jensen**

When: Today, 7 p.m.

Where: London Convention Centre

Admission: Free

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LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

NOTES: Ian Gillespie is the Free Press city columnist.

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