

how far the porn-izing of American culture has progressed.

- As of last summer, the Web is home to more than 260 million pages of pornography, an increase of 1,800 percent since 1998.

- Nearly one out of five video rentals is pornographic.

- A quarter of all American adults say they watched an X-rated movie last year.

- The porn industry churns out 11,000 films a year.

And according to a Time magazine report, today's kids don't have to look for porn—it'll find them. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that almost three-quarters of 15- to 17-year-olds in their poll say they've stumbled across pornography online. "Pornography is affecting people at an increasingly young age," says sociologist Diana Russell in a Time interview. "And unfortunately for many kids growing up today, pornography is the only sex education they'll get."

Washington Post education reporter Linda Perlstein, who spent a year hanging out at a middle school gathering insights for her book *Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*, says the thing that surprised her the most was how common and pervasive sexually charged talk was among the kids she studied. "It's not so

much that more kids are having sex—I don't think they are—it's just that it sure is part of their vocabulary and psyche in a way that it didn't used to be," she says in a CNN interview.

The porn problem is so pervasive that psychologists and sociologists are now ringing the alarm bell. A sampling of how the porn culture is impacting young people:

1. According to cybersex addiction specialist Alvin Cooper, one out of every seven habitual users of online porn develops behaviors that disrupt their lives.

2. A 2003 study by Texas Christian University found that the more men view pornography, the more they're likely to describe women in sexualized terms.

3. In the Kaiser study mentioned above, almost two-thirds (59%) of 15-to 24-year-olds said online porn encourages young people to have sex before they're ready; and half (49%) said it promotes bad attitudes toward women and unprotected sex.

4. Online pornography is so addictive (author and cybersex expert Jennifer Schneider calls it "the crack cocaine of sexual addiction") that it can alter men's ability to have a normal sexual relationship later on.

5. Researchers have found a correlation between increased aggressiveness in boys and exposure to porn, and between childhood use of porn and sexually abusive behavior in adulthood.

What got us here, down in the valley of the shadow of porn? In her book *Liberation's Children*, Kay Hymowitz argues that an epidemic in early sexual talk and behavior is just another piece of evidence in the case against adults who've abdicated their responsibilities.

She says parents who substitute material things for engagement produce unhappy, confused, and needy kids. In turn, those kids learn they're responsible for setting their own boundaries—and the porn culture is right on their doorstep.