Inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet

Submission by: Dr Michael Flood, University of Wollongong

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Contact:

Dr Michael Flood

Associate Professor and ARC Future Fellow

Sociology, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts

University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia

E mflood@uow.edu.au

Staff page: http://lha.uow.edu.au/hsi/UOW084229.html

Academic writings: https://uow.academia.edu/MichaelFlood

SUMMARY

Defining pornography

- Pornography can be defined as sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience.
    - Pornography includes representations of nudity or semi-nudity, implied sexual activity, and actual sexual activity.
    - Pornography can be textual or visual.
- This definition: neutral rather than normative

Patterns of pornography consumption

- Most everyday users of pornography are heterosexual men.
- Men are more likely than women to view pornography frequently, to be sexually aroused by it, and to have favourable attitudes towards it.
- Among boys and young men;
    - Significant proportions consume pornography;
    - They do so in greater numbers and with much greater frequency than their female peers.
    - Boys and men are more likely than girls and women to: use pornography for sexual excitement and masturbation; initiate its use; and view it alone and in same-sex groups.
    - Pornography is "a cornerstone of the autoerotic sexuality of males".

Shifts in children's and young people's exposure to pornography include:

- An increase in overall rates of exposure
- Likely exposure at younger ages
- Shifts in the means of exposure: increasingly, via the internet, and mobile phones
- Potential exposure to increasingly violent content
- A changing cultural context: the increasing normalisation of pornography use and the pornographication of mainstream culture.

Pornography's impact: Research into pornography's effects

- Research into pornography's effects includes experimental, correlational, and longitudinal studies.
- Experimental studies are criticised as artificial, but they may in fact *under*estimate pornography's effects.
- Three types of factor mediate the impact of exposure of pornography:
    - The characteristics of the viewer: e.g., age, gender, maturation, sexual experience, parental involvement
    - The viewer's engagement with the material

- The character and context of exposure: the type of material involved, the duration and intensity of viewing, and the context

Pornography has a series of demonstrated effects among children and young people (and among adults), as follows:

- Pornography as *sex education*: (i) Sexual knowledge and attitudes. Exposure to pornography is associated with:
  - Increased sexual knowledge, including about bodies and practices
  - Liberalised sexual attitudes (from both correlational and longitudinal studies)
  - Greater acceptance of pre-, extra- and non-marital sexual relations
  - More positive attitudes towards casual and recreational sex, and premarital and extramarital sex
  - Acceptance of one's own same-sex or other sexualities
  - Greater acceptance of pornography itself
- Pornography *as sex education*: (ii) Sexual practices and relations
  - Pornography is prompting shifts particularly in heterosexual boys' and young men's sexual expectations, practices, and repertoires.
  - There is clear evidence that pornography is shaping young men's and women's sexual practices.
    - This has been most well documented with regard to anal intercourse.
    - Pornography also may be shaping interest and participation in other sexual practices such as extra-vaginal ejaculation, deep fellatio, sex with multiple partners, etc.
    - Pornography use also may increase young people's practices of *unsafe* vaginal and anal intercourse.
  - Associations between pornography exposure and involvement in particular sexual practices such as anal intercourse or multi-partner sex can involve *sexual coercion*.
- Pornography as *addiction*?
  - Some individuals' use is compulsive and damaging.
  - However, it is problematic to frame this as 'addiction'.
- Pornography as *distress* (for younger children)
  - Premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content may be distressing for younger children.
- Pornography as *betrayal*
  - Much of heterosexual men's pornography use is likely to be hidden from their female partners.
  - A substantial proportion of female partners who are aware of their partners' pornography use experience hurt and distress.

- Pornography as *sexist education*: Pornography influences children's and young people's adoption of:
    - Sexist and stereotypical constructions of gender and sexuality.
    - Sexually objectifying understandings of and behaviours towards girls and women.
- Pornography as *rape training*
    - There is now very substantial evidence that pornography is associated with sexually aggressive and violence-supportive attitudes (in both experimental and correlational studies and from meta-analyses of these).
    - There is now very substantial evidence that pornography is associated with sexually aggressive behaviour (in both experimental and correlational studies and from meta-analyses of these).

Beyond simplistic accounts of effects

- We must move beyond simplistic, deterministic claims and towards more sophisticated and evidence-based accounts of pornography's effects.
- Pornography is one risk factor, among many, for sexual violence perpetration.
- Integrative models: Pornography consumption is one factor, which combines with others, to predict sexually aggressive behaviour. Pornography increases the risk of sexual violence perpetration for *some individuals* much more than others.
- Pornography's role in children's sexual offending is likely to be similar.
- The impact of exposure of pornography is complex.
    - The user / consumer matters: How users interpret form and content, and what users do during and after consuming pornography
    - The content matters: violent pornography appears to have stronger associations than non-violent pornography with sexually violent behavior, but this is complex.
    - The form matters: There is some evidence that pornography's form – online versus online, video versus print – matters.

How do we minimise the harms associated with children's and young people's exposure to pornography?

- My co-authored 2003 report argued for a multi-pronged approach, including educational, regulatory, and technological strategies.
    - Some specific legal and technological measures proposed here, however, may be both technologically impractical and politically dangerous.
    - We must explore stronger age verification measures for pornographic websites.
    - Adults' right to access sexually explicit content should be protected.
- Sexuality education and pornography education are crucial strategies with which to minimise the harms of children's and young people's exposure to pornography.
    - Including school curricula and other resources which foster healthy relationships, media literacy, and related skills and which increase young people's resistance to sexist and violence-supportive themes in pornography

- Developments in pornography education include:
    - The emergence of curricula and other resources for young people and those who work with them.
    - New evidence for the effectiveness of educational strategies among children and young people which seek to minimise the harms associated with pornography exposure.
- Ethical pornography
    - Criteria for more and less harmful forms of pornography should be developed and disseminated, to encourage the use of 'better' pornography.

A greater evidence base for programming and policy is needed.

There are important challenges or dilemmas in this work:

- Addressing sexual harm without reinforcing sex negativity / erotophobia.
- Recognising and engaging children and young people as sexual subjects with sexual agency.
- Supporting sexual diversity

Our task is to build a gender-just and sexually ethical society.

BACKGROUND

I am a researcher (Associate Professor) and educator based at the University of Wollongong. I was the co-author of the first Australian research to examine the extent of children's and young people's exposure to pornography. I co-published two reports in 2003, the first on children's exposure to pornography, the extent of this exposure, and its likely effects, and the second on what to do in response. These reports generated powerful debate in the community and among advocates and policy-makers. I have continued to explore issues of pornography, sexuality, and gender in my current work, including publishing two journal articles and a book chapter on children, young people, and pornography.

My submission focuses on a summary of contemporary scholarship on the impact of pornography exposure among children and young people. I describe this scholarship, updating the accounts given in my already published works, and I conclude with some brief recommendations.

DEFINITION

I start with a simple definition. 'Pornography' refers to 'sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience' (Malamuth, 2001: 11817). 'Sexually explicit' representations include images of female or male nudity or semi-nudity, implied sexual activity, and actual sexual activity. Note that this definition is neutral rather that judgemental, and does not involve using 'pornography' as a negative term referring to representations of bodies and sexual activity which are necessarily offensive, obscene, or harmful.

PATTERNS OF PORNOGRAPHY USE

Most everyday users of pornography are heterosexual men. Looking at, and masturbating to, pornography is the routine practice of large numbers of men. And most of the commercial pornographic industry caters to heterosexual men.

Males are more likely than females to use pornography, including among younger age groups. In general, men are significantly more likely than women to view pornography frequently, to be sexually aroused by it and to have favourable attitudes towards it (Johansson and Hammarén 2007: 60-4; Lo and Wei 2002: 16; Sabina *et al.* 2008: 69; Wallmyr and Welin 2006; Walsh 1999: 779). To take two recent examples;

- In a US study among university students aged 18-26, more men that women had ever used pornography (87 vs. 31%). Men's use was also far more frequent: almost half of all male respondents reported using pornography every week, while only 3.2% of women reported this same frequency of use (Carroll *et al.* 2008).
- In a Swiss study of youth aged 16-20 who had used the internet in the last 30 days, 29.2 per cent of males and 1.4 per cent of females reported deliberately viewing online pornography in the last 30 days (Luder *et al.* 2011).

There are further gender contrasts in patterns and contexts of pornography use. Boys and men are more likely than girls and women to use pornography for sexual excitement and masturbation, to initiate its use (rather than be introduced to it by an intimate partner), to view it alone and in same-sex groups, and to view more types of images (Cameron *et al.* 2005; Flood 2007: 51, 56; Flood and Hamilton 2003a: 13-14; Nosko *et al.* 2007: 2).

In short, pornography is "a cornerstone of the autoerotic sexuality of males" (Hald *et al.* 2014: 26).

SHIFTS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPOSURE TO AND CONSUMPTION OF PORN

Several shifts are evident in children's and young people's exposure to and consumption of porn. Children and young people show increased rates of exposure, at younger ages, increasingly

through the internet, to a greater variety of material, including increasingly callous and hostile content.

An increase in rates of exposure

Overall *rates* of exposure are likely to be increasing in Australia, through both deliberate and accidental exposure. While there is no direct longitudinal evidence of this in Australia, there is US evidence that rates of unwanted exposure to pornography are increasing, and patterns are likely to be similar in Australia. Comparing data from 2000 and 2007, Mitchell *et al.* (2007: 120) found that rates of unwanted exposure to pornography had gone from 9 to 19 per cent for those aged 10-12, from 28 to 35 per cent for those aged 13 to 15, and from 33 to 44 per cent for those aged 16 to 17.

Exposure at younger ages

It is also likely that children's and young people's exposure to pornography is occurring at *younger ages*. There are several reasons to think this: children's and young people's internet use and access is increasing, and pornography itself appears to be becoming a more normalised aspect of children's and youths' peer cultures. At the same time, there is no direct Australian evidence that children's first exposure to pornography is now taking place at younger ages than before. In addition, while significant proportions of younger children have encountered pornography, rates of exposure are higher at older ages. For example, in an Australian survey, 44% of 9-16 year-olds had seen sexual images in the last 12 months, whether offline or online (defined in terms of images which are "obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex") (Green *et al.* 2011: 28). Exposure was higher at higher ages. Among 9-12 year-olds, 27% of boys and girls had seen sexual images, while among 13-16 year-olds, 58% of boys and 61% of girls had seen sexual images. Focusing on images or video seen online of someone having sex, 6% of 11-12 year-olds, 11% of 13-14 year-olds, and 29% of 15-16 year-olds had seen such images online in the last 12 months.

Exposure increasingly via the internet

Children's and young people's *means* of exposure are shifting. Exposure is increasingly mediated by technology, particularly the internet and mobile phones. (In addition, children and young people also show increasing involvement in the production of pornography itself, via 'sexting'.) For example, an Australian study found that children were more likely to see sexual images online than in other media, while a US study found that rates of online exposure were at least as high as offline rates:

- In an Australian survey of 9-16 year-olds, children were more likely to see sexual images online than in other media. 28% had seen sexual images on any websites in the last 12 months, 22% on TV, film, or video / DVD, 12% in a magazine or book, and 6% by text or otherwise on a mobile phone (Green *et al.* 2011: 29).
- In a recent longitudinal study of US youth aged 10 to 15, with three phases of data collection over 2006-2008, 19% of youth reported exposure to X-rated material in the past 12 months at Wave 1, 27% at Wave 2, and 22% at Wave 3. By mode, 14% reported exposure to X-rated movies, 12% to X-rated magazines, and 11% to X-rated websites (Ybarra *et al.* 2011).

Potential exposure to increasingly violent content

Also, the *kinds of materials* themselves to which children and young people are exposed are likely to have shifted.

There has been little or no research which analyses pornography's content over time. It is hard therefore to say conclusively whether this content has shifted over time. Nor has there been research to explore exactly what kinds of content children and young people encounter, and

whether this has changed over time. However, certainly it is clear that contemporary pornography routinely includes violent, hostile, and sexist content, as several recent studies show.

A recent analysis of 50 of the top-selling and top-renting pornography titles in the USA found high levels of violence in pornography's content. Of the scenes analysed, "88.2% contained physical aggression, principally spanking, gagging, and slapping, while 48.7% of scenes contained verbal aggression, primarily name-calling" (Bridges *et al.* 2010: 1065). Aggression was primarily by males, and overwhelmingly against females. Close to 90% of scenes contained aggression, largely physical aggression (while only 10% of the scenes contained positive behaviours like kissing, laughing, embracing, etc.). The most common physically aggressive acts were spanking, gagging, and open-hand slapping, as well as hair-pulling, choking, and so on. The most common verbally aggressive act was name-calling (bitch, slut, etc.) (Bridges *et al.* 2010).

Thus, if an individual watched the top 50 pornography titles in the US, they would see 3,375 aggressive acts. They would see that women were "gagged 756 times, experienced an open-hand slap 361 times, had their hair pulled or yanked on 267 separate occasions, and were choked 180 times" (Bridges *et al.* 2010: 1077).

In pornography, rather than the sexual dominance of unwilling women, what is now the norm is the *sexual dominance of willing women* (Bridges *et al.* 2010: 1080).

A second study, of free and easily available Internet videos, found that themes of exploitation and degradation were common in these videos (Gorman *et al.* 2010). Earlier studies of pornography's content also document the significant presence of violence (Flood and Hamilton 2003a: 30-34).

A changing cultural context for pornography exposure

The cultural context for young people's pornography consumption is shifting too, with the increasing normalisation of pornography use and the pornographication of mainstream culture. This is visible in an increased blurring of boundaries between pornography and mainstream media and artistic representations, and an incorporation of the language and visual codes of pornography in mainstream media (Attwood 2002: 98). Such trends may intensify and normalise pornography use among children and young people.

PORNOGRAPHY'S IMPACT: RESEARCH INTO PORNOGRAPHY'S EFFECTS

Pornography consumption has a series of identifiable effects, among both young people and adults. There is debate regarding the methods used to demonstrate that pornography has effects, so I begin with this, before offering some caveats for my own claims.

Research into pornography's effects

Research into pornography's effects can be divided into various types, according to two dimensions: the study design, and the type of effect being studied. In terms of study design, some studies are experimental, often in laboratory conditions, and involve testing the impact of exposure to pornography on participants' attitudes or behaviour. Other studies are correlational and involve the investigation of possible relationships between 'naturalistic' pornography use (in everyday life) and attitudes or behaviour. Longitudinal studies examine the use of sexual media and its correlates over time. In terms of the type of effect being studied, much research focuses on attitudes, while some focus also or only on behaviours (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 41-2).

Laboratory-based experimental studies on pornography have been criticised as excessively artificial and formal (Boyle 2000: 188). Pornography is often defined by the particular effect it produces in the spectator, that is, sexual arousal and masturbation to orgasm. Yet masturbation is usually absent in experimental studies. The experimental context is very different from the natural setting of pornography consumption, for instance where a young man masturbates to Internet pornography in his bedroom or a group watch an X-rated video in the living room. Masturbation and orgasm, as powerful physical and emotional experiences, are central to the pornographic

experience and influence the interpretation and effect of the material. It is therefore possible that experimental studies in fact *under*estimate the effect of pornography (Jensen 1998: 105). Experimental studies have also been criticised for focusing on measures of physiological arousal rather than affective or emotional responses such as pleasure or shame, and neglecting long-term effects given that their definitions of 'massive' exposure may be as small as five hours worth (Jensen 1998: 104) and their time scales may be only weeks long (Thornburgh and Lin 2002: 156).

Correlational studies do not allow determinations of causality: associations between exposure to sexual media and particular attitudes or practices may go either way, be reciprocal, or shaped by other factors such as sexual interest (Hald 2006; Janghorbani *et al.* 2003). A stronger type of evidence of impact is given in longitudinal studies, which trace the use of sexual media and the formation of sexual and gender identities over time, although few studies are longitudinal.

Existing empirical research is robust enough for us to be able to claim that pornography consumption does have discernable effects. It suggests too that at least three types of factor mediate the impact of exposure of pornography: the characteristics of the viewer, their own engagement with the material, and the character and context of exposure. I begin with this, before discussing the effects of pornography evident from the research.

Mediators of impact

The characteristics of the viewer: First, the likely effects of viewing sexual content among young people are moderated by such variables as age, gender, maturation, sexual experience, and parental involvement. Age and maturation influence children's levels of understanding of, comfort with and interest in content such as sexual humour and innuendo. In a study of 11 to 15 year old girls, girls who were more physically mature and had been in an intimate relationship with a boy were both more interested in and more critical of portrayals of sex in the media (Huston *et al.* 1998: 15-16). Research on the relationship between pornography and sexual aggression finds that important moderating variables include the individual's cultural background (emphasis on gender equality or inequality), their home background (sexually permissive or restricted), their personality characteristics, and their current emotional state (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 55).

Viewers' engagement with the material: Second, pornography's effects are shaped by the user's sexual, emotional and cognitive responses to the material (Fisher and Barak 2001: 317-320; Malamuth and Impett 2001). There is evidence that effects are greater for people who are more active and involved viewers, who watch the media in question with specific purposes in mind and who attribute greater realism to the portrayals (Ward 2002: 3). At the same time, little is known about children's and young people's active engagements with pornography, although children and young people are known to be active and agentic consumers of media, using critical skills and perspectives in interpreting sexual content (Buckingham and Bragg 2003).

The character and context of exposure: Third, the character and circumstances of exposure are important: the type of material involved, the duration and intensity of viewing, and the context (whether voluntary or involuntary, and whether solitary or collective) (Thornburgh and Lin 2002). For example, when a young man watches an adult video or views a pornographic website alone and masturbates, the powerful physical and emotional experiences of arousal, masturbation and orgasm may lend greater intensity to the sexual images viewed (Jensen 1998: 104-5). Mixed effects may occur when boys watch an X-rated video or look at Internet pornography in a group. On the one hand, the intensity of the experience may be lessened as there are distractions, taboos apply to open displays of sexual arousal and group interaction may be characterised by sexual banter, playfulness and sarcasm rather than sexual absorption. On the other hand, watching pornography in groups may enhance group and collective acceptance of the value systems embedded in pornography and normalisation of the particular sexual practices shown.

PORNOGRAPHY'S IMPACTS

Some of pornography's impacts are innocuous or even desirable, but others are problematic if not deeply troubling. Below, I move from less troubling to more troubling effects. To summarise these, pornography provides information about sex and sexualities, tends to liberalise sexual attitudes, and shifts young men's sexual practices and repertoires. Its use, particularly when secret, can harm partners' sense of intimacy and trust and can take compulsive and obsessive forms. Pornography encourages sexualised and sexually objectifying understandings of girls and women. Finally, pornography consumption intensifies boys' and men's tolerance for and perpetration of sexual violence.

Pornography as sex education: (i) Sexual knowledge and attitudes

There is overwhelming evidence that pornography shapes the sexual knowledge and attitudes of its users. I focus in this section on the influence of pornography on general knowledge of and attitudes towards sex and sexuality, while in later sections I address pornography's influence on sexist, sexually objectifying, and violence-supportive attitudes.

Pornography use informs greater sexual knowledge and more liberal attitudes towards sex among children and young people (and how one assesses this depends then on one's wider assumptions). Support for this comes in the first instance from studies of exposure to sexual content in mainstream media. As one might expect, exposure to sexual content in mainstream media is associated with greater sexual knowledge among children and young people, about such topics as pregnancy, menstruation, homosexuality and prostitution (APA 2007; Huston *et al.* 1998; Strasburger and Wilson 2002; Thornburgh and Lin 2002; Ward 2003).

Consumption of pornography and other sexual media shapes a liberalisation of children's and young people's sexual attitudes. Experimental and correlational studies find associations between exposure to sexual media content and for example, greater acceptance of pre-, extra- and non-marital sexual relations, the belief that one's peers are sexually active, and a more favourable attitude towards recreational sex (Strasburger and Wilson 2002), and acceptance of prostitution and pornography itself (Johansson and Hammarén 2007; Thornburgh and Lin 2002).

Studies among young people find that pornography is a significant source of information about sex and sexualities for boys and young men in particular (Measor 2004). Pornography is a significant source for many boys' and young men's formative sexual knowledge (Allen 2001).

A series of recent studies continue to find correlations between pornography use and young people's nonrelational and recreational attitudes towards sex and more positive attitudes towards premarital and extramarital sex. Such associations are evident for example in recent cross-sectional studies among US adolescents (Braun-Courville and Rojas 2009), US university students (Weinberg *et al.* 2010), and Taiwanese adolescents (Lo and Wei 2005).

Stronger evidence still of pornography's impact on sexual attitudes comes from longitudinal studies. For example;

- Among Dutch youth, prior pornography exposure predicted more subsequent recreational attitudes toward sex among both boys and girls a year later (Peter and Valkenburg 2010).
- Among US early adolescents, among males, increased exposure to pornography at baseline predicted more permissive personal sexual norms two years later, even after controlling for baseline sexual norms, demographic variables, and sensation seeking (Brown and L'Engle 2009).

For same-sex-attracted young people, internet pornography depicting same-sex sexualities may be a source of information about potential sexual practices and of affirmation of their own sexual identities and desires. In the context of a silence about homosexuality and other non-normative sexualities in their everyday lives, young men and women may use pornography to learn what to

do when having sex, to improve their knowledge about sexual behaviour, or as a substitute for sexual relationships (Hillier *et al.* 2001).

Pornography as sex education: (ii) Sexual practices and relations

Pornography also shapes individuals' actual sexual practices and relations. In particular, and given the fact that most pornography consumption is by men, pornography is shifting boys' and young men's sexual expectations, practices, and repertoires. There is evidence that males' consumption of pornography is informing an increased interest in, demand for and participation in particular sexual practices which are routine in pornography's content. I focus in this section largely on pornography's influence on consensual sexual behaviours, while I examine pornography's influence on sexually coercive behaviour in a later section.

Even before studies focused on the impact of pornography on young people's emerging sexualities were available, there was substantial evidence that sexual media can influence children's and young people's sexual behaviour. Various studies find correlations between young people's actual sexual behaviour and the consumption of sexual media content (Huston *et al.* 1998; Strasburger and Wilson 2002; Ward 2003; Johansson and Hammarén 2007; Wingood *et al.* 2001). Beyond correlational studies, three recent large-scale longitudinal studies document that exposure to non-explicit sexual content on television and in other media frequently used by adolescents predicts earlier initiation of sexual behaviors, including intercourse (Ashby *et al.* 2006, Brown *et al.* 2006, Collins *et al.* 2004).

There is clear evidence that pornography is shaping young men's sexual practices. A recent review of the field notes that a wide range of cross-sectional studies find associations between greater pornography consumption and greater sexual interest, greater sexual desire, greater number of sexual partners, greater number of casual sexual partners, higher frequency of masturbation, having had anal intercourse, and younger age of first intercourse (Hald *et al.* 2014: 21).

Longitudinal studies corroborate these findings. For example, a longitudinal study among US adolescents (aged 13-15 years) included analysis of pornography's impacts on sexual behaviour, only among adolescents who had not had oral sex or sexual intercourse at baseline. Exposure to pornography exposure did predict sexual behaviour two years later. Among both males and females, adolescents with higher exposure to sexually explicit media at baseline were more likely to have had both oral sex and sexual intercourse two years later (Brown and L'Engle 2009). Indeed, male adolescents who used all three types of sexually explicit media (movies, magazines, and internet content) at baseline were almost three times more likely to report oral sex and sexual intercourse at follow-up compared to males who had used no sexually explicit media.

In addition, some young male pornography users themselves report that pornography is shaping their sexual behaviours, either for themselves or for others. For example, in a Swedish study among young men aged 16-24 visiting a genitourinary clinic, over half agreed that pornography had had an impact on their sexual behaviour (Tyden and Rogala 2004). More believed that pornography influenced *others'* sexual behaviour, and this 'third-person effect' – the belief that others are more affected by media messages than oneself – is a common finding in studies of media effects.

The impact of pornography on young people's sexual behaviour has been most well documented with regard to anal intercourse. Anal intercourse is routine in representations of heterosexual sex in contemporary pornography, with various studies finding its inclusion in 15-42% of scenes (Lim *et al.* 2015). Five studies among Swedish young people find that young men who are regular consumers of pornography are more likely to have had anal intercourse with a girl, and to have tried to perform acts they have seen in pornography, and that girls who have seen pornography also are more likely to have anal intercourse (Tyden *et al.* 2001; Rogala and Tyden 2003; Tyden and Rogala 2004; Haggstrom-Nordin *et al.* 2005; Johansson and Hammarén 2007).

Pornography's influence on increased anal intercourse is not of concern because there is something inherently problematic about anal sex. Instead, my concern here is that because pornography is informing a growing interest particularly among young men in having heterosexual anal intercourse, it may increase the extent to which young men *pressure or coerce* their female partners into a sexual practice they do not want or enjoy. In addition, pornography may shift expectations and social norms among girls and young women such that they acquiesce to practices which they find unpleasant or painful.

Evidence of pornography's impact on sexual behaviour also comes from research among men who have sex with men (MSMs). These find associations between the consumption of pornography or particular genres of pornography and masturbation, an interest in anal sex, and unprotected anal intercourse (Hald *et al.* 2014: 22).

Pornography may also shape an increased interest among young men not only in anal intercourse but in other practices which are routinely portrayed in pornography. These include extra-vaginal ejaculation e.g. on the face or body, fellatio where the penis is placed far down the throat, sex with multiple partners, simultaneous intercourse with multiple partners ('double' and 'triple penetration'), and other sexual practices.

Pornography use also may increase young men's and women's practices of *unsafe* vaginal and anal intercourse. Portrayals of condom use are very rare in heterosexual pornography (Lim *et al.* 2015) and the vast majority of pornography shows sex without condoms (Wright 2014: 306). Pornography exposure is associated with a reduced likelihood of contraceptive use and safe sex, from several cross-sectional studies.

- In a study of girls aged 14-18 years in the USA, pornography exposure was associated with a lack of contraceptive use and testing positive for chlamydia (Wingood *et al.* 2001).
- In a study among Swiss high school students, exposure to pornography was associated with noncondom use among boys (Luder *et al.* 2011). (However, this study found few other associations among youth aged 16-20 between pornography exposure and risky sexual behaviours.)
- Among men who have sex with men (MSMs), various studies show that viewing unprotected anal intercourse is negatively associated with condom use (Nelson *et al.* 2014; Traeen *et al.* 2014).

The relationships between pornography use and sexual behaviour are likely to be complex. For example, for some young men, both their use of pornography and their involvement in anal sex may represent a broader, sexually adventurist or experimental orientation (Johansson and Hammarén 2007: 66). Similarly, the association between pornography use and unsafe sex may reflect in part the influence of pre-existing sexual preferences, where individuals with pre-existing preferences for unsafe sex both practise unsafe sex and use pornography (most of which depicts unsafe sex).

However, it is also clear that exposure to pornography exerts an independent and significant influence on sexual attitudes and behaviours. For example, in a longitudinal study among US adolescents examining influences on sexual attitudes and behaviours, of all the variables, exposure to pornography was one of the strongest predictors, even after controlling for demographics, pubertal status, sensation seeking, and the baseline measure of the attitude (if relevant) (Brown and L'Engle 2009). Thus, as these authors conclude, "exposure to sexually explicit media should be considered an important factor in the sexual socialization of early adolescents" (Brown and L'Engle 2009: 145). I return to the issue of causality later in this document.

Finally, associations between pornography exposure and involvement in particular sexual practices such as anal intercourse or multi-partner sex may involve *sexual coercion*. For example, a US study among adolescent females aged 14-20 found an association between past-month

pornography exposure and the experience of engaging in sex with more than one partner simultaneously (Rothman *et al*. 2012). However, this did not reflect these girls' own interest in having group sex having seen it in pornography. Instead, it involved their male partners' coercive re-enactment of pornography (Rothman *et al.* 2012). Ten percent of all the girls and young women had ever been forced or threatened to participate in sexual behaviors that the perpetrator saw in pornography, and 52.4 percent of those who had experienced multi-person sex. I return to the issue of pornography's influence on sexually coercive behaviour in a later section.

Pornography as distress (for younger children)

Premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content may be distressing for younger children. Children and adolescents may be shocked, troubled, or disturbed by premature or inadvertent encounters with sexually explicit material *per se*. They may be at an age or developmental level where they are unaware of and inexperienced in sexual activities. Or they may be unfamiliar with or uninterested in sexually explicit details so that involuntary exposure to such portrayals is surprising and upsetting. Thornburgh and Lin (2002, p. 158) note that children of different ages may react very differently to sexually explicit material;

> The youngest children may not find such images remarkable or memorable because they do not have the cognitive abilities or understand the social meaning of explicit images. In contrast, because they are becoming curious about sex and are experiencing changing bodies and a changing social landscape, those in the 9 to 12 age range may be more vulnerable to disturbing portrayals of sex and sexual activity… [Older children] noted that they were exposed to similar material in every other part of their lives, and they now found it more annoying than upsetting.

Several studies document that distress is one potential impact of pornography exposure for younger individuals, although distress may be experienced by only a minority of viewers.

- In an Australian survey, 53 per cent of young people aged 11 to 17 had seen or experienced something on the Internet they thought was offensive or disgusting (Aisbett 2001). Pornography dominated the list of content reported, although there is insufficient detail to determine whether the material was troubling because it was sexually explicit or because it was offensive in some more particular way.

- In a US survey of 1500 youths by the Crimes Against Children Research Center, (only) six per cent of 10 to 17 year olds reported that accidentally viewing a sexually explicit image had been distressing to them (Thornburgh and Lin 2002: 133-135).

- In a survey of 1200 respondents aged 10 to 24, 55 per cent of the 15 to 17 year-olds who had stumbled across pornography were 'not too' or 'not at all' upset by it, while 45 per cent were 'very' or 'somewhat' upset by it. Girls were much more likely than boys to say that they were very upset (35 per cent versus six per cent) (Kaiser Family Foundation 2001: 3, 12).

- In a recent survey among 10,000 European 9- to 16-year-olds, children reported a range of risks that concern them on the internet. Pornography was at the top of this list, named by 22% of children who mentioned risks (Livingstone *et al.* 2014).

Some children inadvertently exposed to Internet pornography are upset not by its content but by the potential reactions of their parents (Aisbett 2001, p. 41; Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 170). They are concerned that their parents may catch them with this content on screen, may be disturbed by this or may not believe that the sexually explicit material was encountered by accident.

Pornography as addiction

Another dimension of pornography's impact concerns *how* it is used, and in particular, problematic or 'addictive' forms of use.

An emerging scholarship on sexual, internet, and cybersex 'addiction' suggests that some pornography consumers come to use pornography in ways which are obsessive, compulsive, and have damaging consequences for themselves or others (Cooper *et al.* 2004; Young 2008). However, there is little data on what proportion of pornography consumers use pornography in such ways.

While it is problematic to frame pornography use as 'addiction', some men's (and women's) use of pornography clearly is habitual, compulsive and has negative effects on other areas of their lives, resulting for example in social, occupational or financial difficulties. Such patterns of use may be less well framed as 'addictions' and more accurately described as impulse control disorders, akin to eating disorders or pathological gambling (Heron and Shapira 2003).

Pornography as betrayal

So far I have reviewed evidence regarding the impact of pornography on users' attitudes and behaviours. Another dimension of pornography's potential negative impact concerns how pornography use is understood by individuals in the context of their sexual and intimate relationships.

Pornography, for some couples, is experienced as a healthy part of their sexual intimacy. For this to take place, presumably the use of pornography should be freely chosen, mutual and open. However, it is likely that for most heterosexual men who use pornography and are in relationships, these conditions are not met. Instead, their pornography use is hidden from their partners.

There is no data with which to assess what proportion of pornography use in couples is with the knowledge of the other partner. It may be that there is a widespread denial and dishonesty in heterosexual relationships in which women do not know of, or turn a blind eye to, their partners' use of pornography.

Among those women who *do* know of their partners' pornography use, some experience significant distress at this. In studies among women who are aware of their male partners' use of pornography, most have largely neutral attitudes to this use. They 'don't mind' and see it as 'normal', although this may reflect the cultural normalisation of pornography. In any case, a substantial proportion have much more negative attitudes, experiencing their partners' pornography use as damaging both for their relationships and themselves. In a US study, one-quarter of women saw their partner's pornography use as a kind of affair, one-third felt that it had had negative effects on their sexual lives and relationships, and over one-third agreed that they felt less attractive and desirable and more like a sexual object (Bridges *et al.* 2003).

Some heterosexual men use pornography in their sexual relations in ways which women find coercive or abusive (Fisher *et al.* 2000: 31; Jensen 1998: 108-119). For example;

- A US survey of 4,446 university women found that 6% of the young women had been exposed to pornographic pictures or materials by someone when they did not wish to see them (Fisher *et al.* 2000: 31).
- A US study among adolescent females aged 14-20 accessing a health clinic found that 10.8% had ever been forced or threatened to participate in sexual behaviors that the perpetrator saw in pornography (Rothman *et al.* 2012).

There is no doubt that some women freely choose to consume pornography and some consider pornography a positive force in their lives. At the same time, other women experience distress and harm in relation to their male partners' use of pornography.

I turn now to perhaps the most troubling dimensions of pornography's negative impact, among children and adults alike, its influences on sexist and violent attitudes and behaviours.

Pornography as sexist education

Pornography's influence on young people's and adults' attitudes includes the encouragement of sexist and stereotypical understandings of gender and sexuality.

If we first consider sexual (but non-pornographic) content in mainstream media, both correlational and experimental studies find that adolescents' and young adults' exposure to mainstream media which sexualises girls and women is associated with greater acceptance of stereotyped, sexist, sexualised, and sexually objectifying attitudes towards girls and women (Ward 2002; Ward *et al.* 2005; APA 2007: 31-32).

Similarly, the consumption of pornography is associated with more sexualised and sexually objectifying views of women, as a series of studies find.

- In a US correlational study, men with higher levels of pornography consumption were more likely than other men to describe women in overtly sexual terms (Frable *et al.* 1997). They were more likely to perceive women spontaneously in sexual ways, corroborating the view that pornography primes most men to frame social interactions with women as sexual encounters.

- In a Dutch study, assessing adolescents' exposure to sexual content of varied explicitness, adolescents with exposure to more sexually explicit content showed stronger views of women as sex objects, and exposure to sexually explicit material (pornography) in online movies was the only form of exposure related to this belief in their final regression (Peter and Valkenburg 2007).

Experimental studies demonstrate the impact of pornography on such attitudes. For example, in a recent experimental study in Denmark, pornography consumption was shown to increase notions of women as sex objects and to be associated with significantly stronger gender-stereotypic attitudes and cognitions (Hald *et al.* 2013). In a longitudinal study among US early adolescents, increased exposure to sexually explicit media at baseline did not predict gender-role attitudes among males at follow-up two years later, but it did predict less progressive gender-role attitudes for females (Brown and L'Engle 2009: 142).

Men's consumption of sexualised media also influences how they actually treat and respond to real women in subsequent interactions. At least three studies find that when men are exposed to sexualised content they are then more likely to treat women in sexualised ways (APA 2007: 32). I address other forms of behaviour, specifically sexual coercion and sexual harassment, below.

Exposure to narrow ideals of female sexual attractiveness in pornography constrains men's appreciation of and intimacy with female partners:

> exposure to pornography […] leads men to rate their female partners as less attractive […] to indicate less satisfaction with their intimate partners' attractiveness, sexual performance, and level of affection […] and to express greater desire for sex without emotional involvement. (APA 2007: 29)

Pornography as rape training

The final area of pornography's impact I consider is the most troubling, its relationship to sexual violence against girls and women. There is consistent evidence that exposure to pornography is related to male sexual aggression against girls and women (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 53). The body of evidence demonstrating this link is overwhelming, with no fewer than three meta-analyses now available.

I first address violence-supportive attitudes, and then actual violent behaviour.

Violence-supportive attitudes

In experimental studies, adults show significant strengthening of attitudes supportive of sexual aggression following exposure to pornography, such as acceptance of rape myths, sexual callousness and adversarial sexual beliefs.

- In a meta-analysis across 16 experiments with 2248 participants, the association between pornography and rape-supportive attitudes is evident as a result of exposure to both nonviolent pornography (showing consenting sexual activity) and violent pornography, while the latter results in significantly greater increases in violence-supportive attitudes (Allen, Emmers *et al.* 1995: 19).

Correlational studies, and meta-analyses of these, also support the case that pornography fosters violence-supportive attitudes.

- Another, recent meta-analysis finds associations between pornography use in everyday life and attitudes supporting sexual aggression, particularly for sexually violent pornography but also for nonviolent pornography (Hald *et al.* 2009).

This association continues to be found in more recent research. For example, a study involving a large representative sample of U.S. men found a significant association between pornography consumption and attitudes supportive of violence against women. This was moderated by individual differences in risk of sexual aggression; consumers at the highest risk level of sexual aggression who reported the most frequent use of pornography also had the highest levels of support for violence against women (Malamuth *et al.* 2012).

Violent behaviour

Experimental studies show pornography's influence on aggressive behaviour. According to a meta-analysis of 33 experimental studies involving 2040 participants, adults also show an increase in behavioural aggression following exposure to pornography. Exposure to nonviolent or violent depictions of sexual activity increases aggression, and the effect is stronger in the case of exposure to violent pornography (Allen, D'Alessio *et al.* 1995: 271).

There are correlations too between everyday pornography use and actual sexually aggressive behaviour (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 50-52). Studies among men in the general population find significant associations between the use of at least certain forms of pornography or habitual pornography use and levels of sexual aggression. In addition, men who use 'hardcore', violent, or rape pornography and men who are high-frequency users of pornography, are also significantly more likely than others to report that they would rape or sexually harass a woman if they knew they could get away with it (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 50-52). A more recent meta-analysis, by Wright *et al.* (2015), updates this account, and I return to this below.

Three recent longitudinal studies, including two among adolescents and teenagers, support the claim that pornography increases the likelihood that individuals will perpetrate sexual violence:

- In a recent longitudinal study of U.S. youth aged 10 to 15, with three waves of data over three years, individuals who intentionally consumed violent X-rated materials were over six times as likely as others to engage in sexually aggressive behaviour. After controlling for other potential influences on the association, individuals who saw X-rated materials in which a person was being physically hurt by another person while doing something sexual were still twice as likely to report sexually aggressive behaviour in the past year (Ybarra *et al.* 2011).

- In a second longitudinal study among male university students in Brazil, pornography again was linked to the perpetration of sexual aggression, both directly, and indirectly through its impact on sexual scripts and sexual behaviour (D'Abreu and Krahe 2014).

- In a third longitudinal study among US early adolescents, increased exposure to pornographic media at baseline did predict more frequent sexual harassment perpetration two years later for males (but not for females) (Brown and L'Engle 2009: 142).

There is evidence of a circular relationship between pornography and sexual aggression, from research among adults, in which men at higher risk for sexual aggression (given their attitudes and so on) are more likely to be attracted to and aroused by sexually violent media and may be more influenced by them (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 55). Men who are at higher risk of sexually aggressive behaviour because of self-reported attraction to sexual aggression and high scores on measures of hostile masculinity also show the strongest negative effects of exposure to pornography, particularly to materials combining sex and violence. This relationship goes both ways.

> Men who are relatively high in risk for sexual aggression are more likely to be attracted to and aroused by sexually violent media… and may be more likely to be influenced by them (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 55)

As a test of these findings in other studies, Malamuth, Addison and Koss conducted a nationwide random survey of about 3000 American males with a mean age of 21, assessing their degree of exposure to the leading men-orientated sexually explicit magazines and their sexual and nonsexual aggression against women, sexual experience and gender-related attitudes. This study found, on the one hand, that high pornography use is not necessarily indicative of a high risk of sexual aggression. On the other hand, men who were at high risk of sexual aggression and who were also very frequent users of pornography, were much more likely to have engaged in sexual aggression than those men who consume pornography less frequently (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 79-80).

A new meta-analysis of pornography use and actual sexual aggression again demonstrates, reliably, indeed undeniably, that pornography use increases the likelihood of perpetrating sexual aggression. This meta-analysis – of 22 studies, from seven countries, comprising over 20,000 participants – finds consistent evidence that pornography consumption is associated with acts of sexual aggression, in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Wright *et al.* 2015).

Various further findings from this meta-analysis are of interest:

- *Sex:* The association between pornography consumption and sexual aggression was similar for males and females (Wright *et al.* 2015: 9). (This does not mean that similar numbers of males and females perpetrate sexual aggression, but that among the large number of males and far smaller number of females who consume pornography, associations with sexual aggression are similar.)

- *Age:* This association was not moderated by age, and was similar for adolescent and adult participants (Wright *et al.* 2015: 9). This is contrary to the assumption that children or young people necessarily will be influenced by pornography to a greater extent than less impressionable adults. However, remember that most of the studies among adults are among university or university-aged students in early adulthood (Wright *et al.* 2015: 15).

- *Behaviour:* This meta-analysis finds stronger correlations between pornography consumption and actual acts of sexual aggression than in earlier studies of proxies or surrogates for the risk of perpetration (Wright *et al.* 2015: 14).

- *Nonviolent / violent content:* The meta-analysis did not find significant differences in associations between the consumption of nonviolent pornography compared to violent pornography, but it did find a slight difference between violent pornography and general pornography. There was a stronger association in the cases that measured violent

pornography consumption than in the cases that measured general pornography consumption (Wright *et al.* 2015: 12). I return to the question of pornography's content further below.

These and other meta-analyses *answer* the call for more methodologically robust research on pornography's effects, and they answer the criticisms offered by others (Wright *et al.* 2015: 14). This meta-analysis also means that we must reject a 'catharsis' theory of violent pornography and sexual aggression, which postulates that individuals who consume violent pornography purge their aggressive inclinations and thus reduce the likelihood of being aggressive (Wright *et al.* 2015: 18). On the contrary, violent pornography consumers are more – not less – likely to commit actual acts of sexual aggression.

A further type of potential evidence regarding pornography's effects concerns whether there are associations in particular communities or regions between the availability or use of pornography and levels of sexual violence. Studies in Denmark, Japan and elsewhere do not find positive correlations (Strossen 1995: 253-256). However, this is not surprising given that cross-cultural factors such as norms of sexuality and gender, which themselves shape men's risks of sexual aggressiveness, are likely to modify the role and influence of media stimuli (Malamuth *et al.* 2000: 83). There are a range of methodological problems with such investigations (Kingston and Malamuth 2011), and we can put these aside.

Beyond simplistic accounts of effects

Having argued that pornography has demonstrable, undeniable, effects on attitudes and behaviours, I wish to caution against some ways in which this claim is made. In media and popular accounts of pornography, simplistic and deterministic claims regarding its effects sometimes are visible. These make various problematic assumptions: that pornography's influence is all-powerful and determining of individuals' behaviour, that pornography's effects are homogenous, or that pornography is the single most important risk factor for children's or adults' sexually coercive or problematic behaviours. None of these claims are true.

In discussing pornography, we must move beyond simplistic rhetoric and towards more sophisticated and evidence-based accounts of pornography's effects. In particular, the effects of pornography are not uniform, and depend on individual, contextual, and cultural differences (Hald *et al.* 2014: 14).

Pornography is one risk factor, among many, for sexual violence perpetration. It is the confluence or interactive combination of these risk factors which has the strongest predictive power (Hald *et al.* 2014: 22).

Integrative models: Pornography consumption is one factor, which combines with others, to predict men's sexually aggressive behaviour.

There has been in scholarship increasing sophistication regarding understandings of pornography's influence, particularly in relation to sexual violence. The 1990s saw the emergence of models of pornography's effects which integrate multiple factors. These integrative models argue that pornography consumption is one factor, which combines with others, to predict men's sexually aggressive behaviour. Pornography use is particularly dangerous for men who also show *other* risk factors for sexual aggression: they have hostile and distrustful attitudes towards women, they get sexual gratification from controlling or dominating women, they are callous and unemotional, and so on (Hald *et al.* 2014: 7-9).

An increased risk of committing sexual aggression "may only be evident among men who are (more) predisposed to sexual aggression and among the most frequent pornography consumers" (Hald *et al.* 2014: 22). On the other hand, for men who are at low risk of perpetrating sexual violence, it may not 'add fuel to the fire'. Thus, pornography increases the risk of sexual violence perpetration for *some men* much more than others.

Pornography's role in children's sexual offending is likely to be similar.

Simplistic claims regarding pornography's role in sexual violence have been evident in Australia lately particularly in relation to children's sexual offending. A headline in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* (February 15, 2016) is typical: "Experts warn easy access to hardcore pornography is behind a surge in teen, pre-teen sex assault". The claim that pornography exposure is fuelling a significant increase in children's sexual abuse of other children comes from various quarters, including from people who work with children showing sexually abusive or problematic sexual behaviours. Such impressions by frontline workers are important, but they should be tested by empirical research.

Pornography's role in children's sexual offending is likely to be similar to its role in adults' sexual offending. Yes, pornography exposure is a significant risk factor for sexual violence perpetration by children and young people, as two studies cited above document (Brown and L'Engle 2009; Ybarra *et al.* 2011). There is no doubt: pornography exposure increases the risk of children's and young people's perpetration of sexual assault.

At the same time, pornography exposure is likely to increase the likelihood of perpetration for some children and young people more than others, depending on their pre-existing attitudes and behaviours. In addition, children's pornography exposure itself may be a part or symptom of a range of forms of abuse and trauma experienced by children who themselves are engaged in problem sexual behaviour (O'Brien 2008).

The impact of exposure of pornography is complex.

I commented earlier that various factors mediate the impact of pornography exposure. Returning to this now, I extend this account to highlight that the impact of exposure of pornography is complex.

The user / consumer matters

First, the user or consumer of pornography matters, and in particular, how users interpret form and content. For example, what are the implications for sexual violence if two people are watching the same pornographic content and one interprets it as violent and the other does not? (Hald *et al.* 2014: 25) We need to know more about how and why individuals perceive pornographic content. Also, what users do during and after consuming pornography matters. How does the sexual behaviour that typically accompanies pornography use influences pornography's effects (Hald *et al.* 2014: 25) Very little research measures the sexual behaviours, such as masturbation, which go along with pornography use.

The content matters

Second, the content matters: how elements of form and content within pornography alter their effects. A recent review notes the evidence that violent pornography has stronger associations than non-violent pornography with sexually violent behavior (Hald *et al.* 2014: 25). However, a simple distinction between violent and non-violent content may not address a third category of nonviolent but objectifying and degrading pornography. As the authors of a recent meta-analysis comment, if

> the majority of popular pornography has themes of aggression, degradation, or objectification […], then content nonspecific measures and measures of violent consumption should both correlate with sexual aggression (Wright *et al.* 2015: 4-5).

This was the case in the findings of this meta-analysis, of associations between sexually aggressive behaviour and *all* of non-violent, violent, and general pornography.

The finding that nonviolent pornography consumption is associated with sexual aggression is consistent with findings of prior meta-analyses (Wright *et al.* 2015: 16). At the same time, there are potential complexities:

> Measures of self-reported nonviolent pornography consumption may predict sexually aggressive behavior because acts that are indeed violent are not perceived as such by

> desensitized consumers […] or because content that is nonviolent is still objectifying and degrading (Wright *et al.* 2015: 16)

These authors thus urge caution regarding a conclusion that violent pornography has no greater impact on the likelihood of sexual aggression than nonviolent pornography. Only two studies available in their 2015 meta-analysis assessed nonviolent pornography consumption, and the measures used for such content were not entirely clear.

The form matters

Finally, the form matters. There is some evidence that pornography's form – online versus online, video versus print – can influence its impact. For example, in a recent longitudinal study of US youth aged 10 to 15, while the consumption of violent pornography, whether offline or online, was associated with sexually aggressive behavior, the magnitude of association was higher for those exposed online and via movies than through magazines (Ybarra *et al*. 2011). Other studies too find evidence that the association between pornography and sexually permissive attitudes is strongly for Internet pornography than for more traditional forms of pornography consumption (Ybarra *et al*. 2011: 18). Wright *et al.*'s (2015) recent meta-analysis was unable to include a direct comparison of the effects of online versus offline content.

I turn now to the question of what to do in response to this mountain of evidence.

How do we minimise the harms associated with children's and young people's exposure to pornography?

There is a clear and pressing need to take action to address the harms associated with children's and young people's pornography exposure in Australia.

Educational, regulatory, and technological strategies

In the 2003 reports I co-authored, we argued for a multi-pronged approach, including educational, regulatory, and technological strategies. This is reproduced below, and discussed in much greater detail in the report by Flood and Hamilton (2003b).

Box 1: Overview of a new strategy to address the exposure of youth to pornography (Flood and Hamilton 2003b)

School-based education

- Incorporation of pornography education into school curricula on health and personal development, media literacy and protective behaviours.
- Promotion of parental understanding, monitoring, and household guidelines.
- Provision to young people of compelling and educational Internet and other content on sexual health and relationships.

Mandatory ISP-filtering

- All Australian ISPs required to filter all material for prohibited content.
- Adult users may opt out of filtering and receive X-rated content.
- Website owners may apply to have their sites classified and thereby exempted from filtering.

Additional measures

- Stronger age-verification technology.

- Plain brown wrappers for Internet sex sites.
- Instant help functions for children exposed to offensive material.

I remain as convinced as ever for the need for social and educational strategies to minimise the harms of pornography exposure. My recommendations below focus on such strategies.

On the other hand, I am now less sure about the specific legal and technological measures proposed in the 2003 report, such as mandatory ISP-based filtering. I now have greater concerns that ISP-based filtering, for example, may be both technologically impractical and politically dangerous, the latter because it may shut down a range of forms of sexual speech which are legitimate and desirable. Another option canvassed at the time was that ISPs offer end-user filtering on an opt-out basis. Under this system, subscription to an ISP automatically would include an end-user filtering product or service, and users could choose not to accept the filter. One advantage of an end-user system is that more sophisticated filtering technologies can be used because of the smaller volume of content flowing through individual computers. Another is that computer users have greater discretion in determining the kinds of content they or their children can see. A different option concerns the locations of pornographic content online, and involves a dedicated ".xxx" domain for adult content.

While I do not spend further time in this submission on regulatory and technological strategies, I do strongly recommend exploration of stronger age verification measures for pornographic websites. These may go some way towards minimising minors' exposure, both deliberate and accidental, to pornography.

While I am very critical of much pornography, and while there is overwhelming evidence that pornography consumption is associated with sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours, I do not argue that pornography should be unavailable to adults. Instead, we should defend adults' right to access sexually explicit content. This is not an argument motivated by 'free speech': there is no such thing as absolute 'free speech', in principle there is no problem with a community regulating the speech of its inhabitants, and in practice there is widespread agreement that certain kinds of speech should be regulated. Instead, my defense of adults' access to pornography is motivated by concern about the kinds of harms which may accompany the blanket censorship of sexually explicit media. Historically, such censorship has intensified sexual repression and limited the sexual freedoms of women, lesbian and gay communities, and other sexual minorities. As an aside, I also note the seeming contradiction that under Australia's current laws, young people can have sex at 16 but cannot look at pictures of people having sex until they are 18, but I do not endorse a lowering of the age at which individuals legally can access R- or X-rated content.

In the remainder of this discussion, I briefly canvass three kinds of social and educational strategy: sexuality education, pornography education, and ethical pornography.

Sexuality education and pornography education

Sexuality education is a crucial strategy. It is desirable in its own right, as a way to reduce the appeal of pornography, and as a way to reduce the negative impacts of exposure. Pornography education is a second, overlapping strategy which is also vital. In my co-authored 2003 report, we argued in detail for the inclusion in school curricula of materials addressing pornography (Flood and Hamilton 2003b: 11-15). I have taken the liberty of reproducing this material here, in the remainder of this section. The omission of text from the original report is signalled by "[…]".

"Given that boys and young men are likely to continue to consume pornography, an important strategy is to teach them the skills with which to read it more critically. 'Pornography education' centres on encouraging critical skills in media literacy, such that viewers are more resistant to

sexist and violence-supportive themes in pornography (Strasburger and Wilson 2002: 346-363; Thornburgh and Lin 2002: 248). Media literacy includes the skills to evaluate texts and images critically and to recognise the underlying messages.

"We believe that it is feasible to reduce greatly the exposure of young people to pornography on the Internet. However, we also recognise that it is impossible to exclude children completely from viewing pornographic images until they reach 18. We therefore support the development and implementation of a nation-wide program to teach high school children strategies to understand and critically evaluate pornographic images and messages and to encourage the development of ethical norms and practical skills that will help protect them from inappropriate and disturbing material.

"There is an emerging consensus in the scholarship on children and media, including research on children and pornography, that social and educational strategies are among the most effective approaches. […] [S]uch strategies

> seek to develop in young people the ability to make responsible and safe choices about Internet use, to make good decisions about content to be viewed, to reduce their exposure to inappropriate material, and to mitigate the consequences, if any, of viewing inappropriate material (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, p. 221).

"One aspect of this is media literacy, critical viewing and thinking skills that can be fostered among both young people and their parents, as a recent text on children and media emphasises (Strasburger and Wilson 2002, pp. 315-317). Media literacy includes the skills to evaluate texts and images critically and to recognise the underlying messages, whether they are associated with alcohol advertising or pornographic depictions of 'teenage sluts'. The evidence is that teaching media literacy improves children's ability to ignore or resist advertising messages and reduces the negative impact of portrayals of violence (Strasburger and Wilson 2002, pp. 317, 346-363). The results are optimal when parents too have media skills and can discuss media with their children at home and assist in their critical evaluation.

"Encouraging young people's information skills on the Internet reduces the likelihood of inadvertently encountering sexually explicit material. Media literacy also enables children to take a more detached and evaluative view of the material, whether they are exposed to pornography accidentally or deliberately (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, p. 248). […]

"Social and educational strategies go beyond media literacy and concern a range of other skills among young people, including

> how to… make wise choices, to stay in control of his or her online experiences, to be critical and sceptical about the underlying messages in advertising and romanticized and sexualized images, and to report other users soliciting personal information or harassing them (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, p. 224).

"School curricula in Australia provide an excellent framework in which to locate the teaching of skills and values that can minimise the harmful impact of pornography. […] Given that large proportions of young people are being exposed to pornography, teaching strategies must address this exposure and encourage critical skills and healthy values that can help teenagers understand and neutralise the power of pornography. Pornography education could be integrated into three of the nationally agreed areas of learning – Health and Physical Education, Studies of Society and the Environment, and English. […]

"The rationale for 'pornography education' in schools is similar to that for drug education, now a well-established aspect of the school curriculum. For both forms of education, the goal is not to encourage its use. Instead, pornography education would aim to minimise the harms associated

with pornography. It would do so by encouraging young people to develop an awareness of the associated risks, to make responsible choices regarding its use, and to avoid consumption or at least minimise the potential harms involved if they do choose to consume it. […]

"The principal advantages of social and educational strategies are that they encourage children's moral and ethical development and resilience, they are more effective than technological solutions in the long term, and they minimise the negative effects of exposure to inappropriate material if and when it does occur. Thornburgh and Lin believe that if children's ethical maturity is nurtured, their internalisation of appropriate values and principles will guide their future choices and behaviour (2002, p. 219).

"Others go further, arguing that children's exposure to, and opportunity to work through, 'the messiness of life' is a vital aspect of their socialisation and development, and that censorship hinders their 'mental agility and capacity to deal with the world' (Heins 2001, pp. 256-257). Although the importance of learning to deal with the messiness of life is recognised, we consider that children should not be exposed to some of the 'messier' aspects, including some forms of pornography, until they have reached an appropriate developmental stage. We don't throw children into the deep end unless we are very confident they can dog-paddle to the edge.

"Education-based approaches must take account of children's developmental needs and abilities. Where young children are concerned, parents and others can also use filtering and monitoring strategies (discussed below), gradually broadening children's choices and control over information and relaxing precautions as they mature.

"It is widely believed that the best approach to protecting young people online is the attentive presence of a responsible parent, guardian, teacher, librarian or mentor, and encouraging this attention would be an important adjunct to the school-based Internet awareness program proposed here. Most parents are pressed for time and constant in-person supervision of children's Internet use is unlikely to occur in most families. In addition, parents often underestimate or are unaware of the extent of their children's Internet activities (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, pp. 164-165; Stanley 2001, pp. 7-8).

"Nevertheless, parents can play valuable roles. As parental ignorance about use of the Internet is often a source of both complacency and excessive fear, parents should be encouraged to implement a number of practices for safer Internet use. They can develop a basic understanding of Internet content and uses. They can also locate home computers in public areas such as lounge rooms so that private and solitary viewing by children is difficult. They can discuss household rules and expectations regarding children's use of the Internet, provide guidance as to why the viewing of sexually explicit materials may be inappropriate, become aware of tools and programs for Internet safety, and set good examples themselves for responsible Internet use. Peers and near-peers such as siblings can also play a role, especially as peer mentoring and education strategies have proven helpful in relation to other social issues such as drug use and violence (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, pp. 225-234). […]

"Finally, young people will be less at risk of harm in relation to Internet and video pornography if there are alternative materials and venues to which they are drawn. The creation of stimulating, compelling and educational Internet and other content is an important one, and should come from both commercial and non-commercial sources (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, pp. 250-251). This content must include materials on sexual health and education. In fact, young people are already making widespread use of a range of responsible, informed and compassionate web sites provided for them (Levine 2002, pp. 143-148). These cover such topics as puberty, contraception and relationships, and include answers to frequently asked questions, articles and personal stories, interactive games and quizzes, and referral and advice. Providing sexuality-orientated venues and

materials tailored to and preferred by young people will be a key factor in reducing the appeal of pornography." [END OF EXCERPTED TEXT]

Developments in pornography education

Since the 2003 account above, two things have changed. First, there have been important developments in relation to pornography curricula in secondary schools. Second, new evidence supporting the effectiveness of pornography education and related strategies has emerged.

The emergence of curricula and other resources for young people and those who work with them

There are emerging efforts to incorporate pornography education into school curricula in Australia. The most significant example is the 'Reality and Risk' project, based in Victoria and coordinated by Maree Crabbe. Reality and Risk includes:

- Education resources for young people, schools, community organisations, etc.
- Engagement in public discourse and debate (including a documentary film, first broadcast on SBS in July 2013).
- Advocacy and training across a range of sectors.

Reality and Risk is a promising, evidence-based initiative to address the harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. While there are some similar initiatives in other countries, Reality and Risk is the most well developed of these. Maree Crabbe's submission addresses this project in greater detail.

Evidence for the effectiveness of pornography education

New evidence has emerged for the effectiveness of educational strategies among children and young people which seek to minimise the harms associated with pornography exposure.

An early analysis of experiments regarding pornography education among adults did find that individuals shown violent pornography can be 'inoculated' against its negative effects through prebriefing or 'cured' afterwards through debriefing. Typically, participants are reminded that the material is fictional and that women do not enjoy forced sexual relations. An analysis of ten studies found that after such processes, participants' belief in rape myths was no greater than it had been prior to exposure to violent pornography and in six studies it was lessened (Allen *et al.* 1996). Prebriefing was found to be significantly more effective than debriefing afterwards. This suggests that educational efforts could be used to protect against or counter the negative impact of pornography consumption (Allen *et al.* 1996: 138). However, evidence regarding which methods of 'inoculation' are effective is only just starting to emerge.

Several more recent studies, now among children and young people themselves, also show the effectiveness of strategies such as media literacy and parent-child conversation.

- A US study examined the impact of a peer-led media literacy curriculum among 11-19 year-olds, with an average age of 14. Compared to students who did not go through the program, students who participated in the five-lesson curriculum were less likely to overestimate sexual activity among teens, more likely to think they could delay sexual activity, less likely to expect social benefits from sexual activity, more aware of myths about sex, and less likely to consider sexual media imagery desirable (Pinkleton *et al.* 2008).

- In a second quasi-experimental study, compared to other adolescents, adolescents who took part in a media literacy curriculum better understood that media influence teenagers'

decision making about sex and were more likely to report that sexual depictions in the media are inaccurate and glamorized (Pinkleton *et al.* 2012).

- In a US study among emerging adults aged 18-26, among those individuals who reported that their parents do talk to them about pornography, their own attitudes towards pornography were less positive, they had lower levels of pornography use, and there was less negative impact on the self-esteem of those individuals whose partners regularly view pornography (Rasmussen *et al.* 2015).
- In another US study, university students who reported that their parents critiqued media portrayals also reported a higher level of critical thinking and objectionable content had lesser effects on their sexual expectations and sexual behaviors (Radanielina-Hita 2015).

Ethical pornography

The final strategy I canvass perhaps is the most controversial: an ethical pornography. Nevertheless, I believe that it is desirable to encourage the production and use of more ethical pornography and more ethical forms of use. An ethical pornography would eroticise consent, respect, and intimacy and be produced without participants' coercion or harm.

If pornography is to be ethical, it must be ethical not only in its conditions of production, but also in its content and its use. First, pornography should be produced ethically: participants should have consented to their involvement and should not be harmed in the production of pornography. Beyond this however, an ethical pornography also must have ethical content. While there is debate regarding what this looks like and indeed whether it is possible at all, some obvious criteria for an ethical pornography are as follows. Violence is not depicted nor eroticised. The materials show sexual interactions which are respectful and mutual, rather than callous or hostile. The materials represent a diversity of body shapes and types, and show diverse forms of sexual interaction e.g. including sex which is intimate and affectionate.

Even pornography that meets all these criteria may not be harmless. It may still contribute, for example, to the sexual objectification of women. In addition, even the most 'positive' or 'progressive' content in pornography only exists and is understood in a contemporary cultural context in which sexist and violence-supportive norms and values are pervasive, limiting its progressive value. However, given that pornography is likely to continue to be consumed by large numbers of men and boys (and some women and girls) in the near future, it seems both pragmatic and urgent to give attention to what might comprise 'better', or at least 'less worse', pornography.

After I have given workshops for parents on young people and pornography, some parents have come up to me and asked, "What pornographic websites *should* my son be looking at?" It would be useful to develop and disseminate criteria for more and less harmful forms of pornography, so that parents and young people can make better choices regarding the sexually explicit media they consume.

The need for a greater evidence base for programming and policy

I have demonstrated that there is now a very substantial evidence base with which to identify the harms of exposure to pornography, among both children and adults. Those who argue that 'the jury is still out' on this issue, or that 'research on pornography's effects is mixed', are at best naïve and and at worst dishonest. However, this does not mean that we know all one needs to know to design effective programming and policy for reducing the harms associated with pornography. Instead, a wide range of research is needed. In brief, research is required on at least the following areas:

- The influence of pornography on boys' and young men's sexualities and gender;

- The influence of pornography on girls' and women's sexualities and gender, including e.g. their sense of themselves as sexual objects (self-objectification), body image, the kinds of sexualities they take on, and so on;
- How pornography combines with other risk factors to shape the perpetration of sexual violence;
- The relationships between pornography exposure / consumption and children's problem sexual behaviours (including sexual offending);
- The influence of how users interpret pornography's content;
- How elements of form and content within pornography alter their effects, such as the influence of violent content or of other, problematic aspects of pornography's content, and, above all;
- How to minimise the harms associated with pornography consumption or exposure, including robust empirical evaluations of the effectiveness of various strategies, including e.g. self-help groups, media literacy, pornography education, and so on.

Some dilemmas in addressing pornography

I conclude by identifying briefly some dilemmas or challenges in addressing the harms associated with children's and young people's exposure to pornography.

In addressing pornography in general, there is the general challenge of preventing and reducing sexual harm without reinforcing sex negativity. Sex negativity, or erotophobia, involve the assumptions that sex and sexuality are guilty until proven innocent, that sexuality in general is a site of danger and not only of pleasure. Such assumptions are powerful aspects for example of traditional Christian moralism, which has "has long encouraged control and denial of the body, devalued and discounted women, and shown nothing but contempt or pity for homoeroticism and other non-normative sexualities" (Ellison 2003: 3). We require, instead, progressive ethical frameworks that are sex-positive, respectful of sexual diversity, and responsive to sexual abuse and exploitation. To put it too simply, our positions should be anti-sexist, not anti-sex. We should protect sexual pleasure while challenging sexism and sexual inequalities.

In focusing on children and pornography, there is a related danger of assuming that the task is to protect children from sex. Instead, the task is to protect children from sexual harm. In fact, maintaining children's sexual ignorance fosters sexual abuse. Young people who know their sexual rights and responsibilities are more likely to speak up when they are being forced into sex, and they are less likely to abuse others.

There are long histories in Western countries of efforts to 'protect children' (Heins 2001: 8; Levine 2002: 5-6). Cultural anxieties and fears about children's sexuality have been articulated in recent decades on such issues as premarital teenage sex, homosexuality, teenage pregnancy, paedophilia and child abuse, and child pornography. Adolescent sexuality is often seen in terms of its undesirable, deviant or risky nature (Moore and Rosenthal 1998: 35). Sexual activity in an individual's teenage years is typically portrayed as uncontrollable, risky and potentially calamitous (Levine 2002: xxvi-xxvii). Yet moral panics about young people's sexual activity fail to acknowledge that most young people move into adulthood as healthy and responsible sexual beings (Roker and Coleman 1998: 1). This is not to say that all is well for young people in the field of sexuality. They face such issues as unwanted and premature pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, sexual violence and coercion, homophobia (fear and hatred of gays and lesbians), and unfair double standards of sexual reputation. As Levine (2002: xxxiii) notes, "Sex among [Australia's] youths, like sex among its adults, is too often neither gender-egalitarian, nor pleasurable, nor safe."

We must recognise and engage young people as sexual subjects with sexual agency (the capacity to act), rather than as necessarily 'innocent' of sex and passive. Children and young people deserve appropriate information on sex and sexualities. They need the facts, but also stories of consent, love, romance and desire. However, pornography is a terrible sex educator. One of the trickiest tasks here is to move beyond simplistic understandings of the premature sexualisation of children, recognising children's existing and emerging sexualities while also being able to criticise aspects of contemporary sexualisation (Hawkes and Egan 2008).

Fostering the health and wellbeing of children and young people is not well served by blanket condemnations of sexual speech. Yes, we must take action to minimise their exposure to pornography, and to sexist and violent materials in particular, but this should not be at the expense of sexual speech in general. And we must work to improve the kinds of sexual materials available to youth.

We must affirm sexual diversity throughout this work. Diverse sexual identities and orientations are not merely to be 'tolerated', but a positive social good to be affirmed. Efforts to address the harms of pornography exposure among children and young people must acknowledge the ways in which their lives are structured not only by gender inequalities but by heterosexism and the policing of non-heterosexual sexualities, and the distinct roles which pornography may play for same-sex attracted individuals in this context. At the same time, we should not naively assume that non-heterosexual pornographies are invulnerable to the powerful feminist critiques made also of mass-market heterosexual pornography (Kendall 1995).

The consumption of pornography is intensifying sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours among children and adults alike. Urgent action is needed – by governments, community services, parents, and others – to prevent and reduce the harms associated with exposure to pornography. This is one, vital element in the wider task of building an egalitarian and just society.

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