

**Submission  
No 8**

# **SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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## Dear Committee on Children and Young People

As a 22 year old male I have personally experienced the radical effects that the sexualisation of Australian Society has had on Children and Young Adults. Both female friends who have been sexually abused by boyfriends addicted to porn and male friends who have found themselves addicted and spiraling into crises of mental health issues. We have an idea that the rate of consumption of explicit sexual content is significant in the population – however we have no idea as to the size of this epidemic.

The research on the rates of consumption of pornographic material in Australian populations is scant. In 2003 a study of 16-17 year old boys found that 38 per cent had deliberately searched the Internet for sex sites with 22 per cent accessing Internet sex sites at least every two or three months. At this time only **one third of homes** were connected to the internet (Flood, 2003). In 2011 the ABS reported that 92 per cent of all households with internet access, in 2015 the number is very likely close to 100 per cent. There is no comprehensive Australian Research on the rates of consumption, content consumed and demographics of porn.

While we don't know how large the issue is in Australia we do know that the consumption pornography is profoundly harmful. It causes issues within relationships, familial breakdown, engenders addiction and mental illness, encourages abusive sexual action toward women, and harms children. I outline the research behind the harms of pornography in the document below.

This epidemic is something that is being felt by men and women everywhere. It is damaging individuals, relationships and family's. It is damaging children and it will likely damage their children. It is a voluntary epidemic going on in the rooms of 17 year olds and 40 year olds, it is fed by addiction and hidden by shame. Fundamentally pornography replaces our real, loving, self-giving relationships with empty, violent, ego-centric lust for pleasure.

The NSW parliament can do two things for the young people of Australia on this issue:

**Protect:** by the provision of an Opt-In filter for all adult material on the internet, which would offer the best protection for children online.

**Educate:** Provide education on the real and endemic harms that pornography poses to individuals and society. This education should not

only be provided to school children but to all adults as porn consumption is not limited to a particular age bracket but spans the entire population.

Sincerely

Matt Lennon

## Changes in the use of pornography

Over the past decade or so we have seen radical changes in the number of people using pornography, the rates at which they are using it and the types of content consumed. Pornography is defined here as 'sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience'. A 2003 study of 16-17 year olds 73 per cent of boys reported that they had watched an X-rated video with more than a fifth watching an X-rated video at least once a month. Nearly two in five 16-17 year-old boys (38 per cent) had deliberately searched the Internet for sex sites and over one fifth of boys (22 per cent) accessed Internet sex sites at least every two or three months. (1)

At this time only a third of homes are connected to the Internet. (1) In 2011 92% of all households had internet access (2). Now it is very likely close to 100% with 89% of Australians possessing a smart phone, each of which has internet access.

In terms of adult consumption of pornographic material there is a similar paucity of Australian evidence. In 2014 there was a survey conducted by the Barna Group in the U.S. in 2014. The results are summarized in the table below

	Men		Women	
	>Weekly Use	>Monthly Use	>Weekly Use	>Monthly Use
18 – 30 y/o	63%	79%	21%	76%
31 – 49 y/o	38%	67%	5%	16%
50 – 68 y/o	25%	49%	0%	4%

In addition to this information 55% of married men say that they watch pornography at least once a month compared to 70% of non-married men (3).

The consumption of pornography has been increasing from generation to generation with Mckee's study finding that 79.2% of those that were born in the 1980's had been exposed to porn before 16 compared to 36.7% of those who were born in the 1940's.

Current age	Under 16 when?	% who saw porn before
66+	1950s or before	36.7%
56-65	1950s, early 1960s	22.8%
46-55	1960s, early 1970s	35.7%
36-45	1970s, early 1980s	58.7%
26-35	1980s, early 1990s	77.4%
18-25	1990s – 2001	79.2%

How has this situation reached such epidemic proportions? The internet has changed the use of pornography forever – for three reasons: accessibility, anonymity and affordability. From 2001 to 2007, Internet porn went from a \$1-billion-a-year industry to \$3-billion-a-year in the U.S (4). According to the Journal of Internet Law, in 2005 pornography accounted for 69% of the total pay-per-view Internet content market, outpacing news, sports, and video games. (Aldo Forgiione, “The good, the bad, and the ugly: the frontiers of Internet law,” Journal of Internet Law, July 2005.)

It is clear that the consumption of pornography is ubiquitous within our society. The question then remains. Is it genuinely harmful?

## Pornography: Perhaps it's not so bad?

It is the popular view in psychology that for most consumers pornography has no negative effect and may in fact make some people less likely to commit sexual crimes.

### Relationships

In 2007 researchers at the University of Zagreb in Croatia surveyed 650 young men about their pornography use and sex lives. As they reported in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the scientists found that users of mainstream, nonviolent pornography were neither more nor less sexually satisfied than nonusers. Both groups felt the same degree of intimacy in their current or recent relationships and shared the same range of sexual experiences. But when it came to violent or fetishist porn, the groups diverged. Consumers of these types of pornography appeared to masturbate more frequently, have more sexual partners over the course of their life, and experience slightly less relationship intimacy than their nonviolent porn-viewing counterparts.

### Attitudes towards women and Sexual Violence

In Mckees Study from Queensland Univerisity of Technology responses from 1,023 pornography users indicated that the amount of pornography the subjects consumed did not predict whether they would hold negative attitudes toward women. Rates of rapes and sexual assault in the U.S. are at their lowest levels since the 1960s," says Christopher J. Ferguson, a professor of psychology and criminal justice at Texas A&M International University. The same goes for other countries: as access to pornography grew in once restrictive Japan, China and Denmark in the past 40 years, rape statistics plummeted. While this doesn't prove that pornography decreases occurrences of rapes it indicates that there is no evidence that pornography perpetuates the rape myth.

## Mental Health

It turns out that among porn viewers, the amount of porn each subject consumed had nothing to do with his or her mental state. What mattered most, Twohig found that the more porn users tried to clamp down on their urge for sex or porn, the more likely they were to consider their own pornography use a problem (5).

## Harms of inadvertent exposure of young people

Porn is everywhere. While the excesses of child pornography grab headlines, images of sex, nudity and related activity are organically linked to many people's sexual lives. Porn resides most famously on the internet, but has seeped throughout society - it sells in service stations, infiltrates mainstream advertising and profits stock exchange-listed companies. There is simply no doubt that our children are being exposed to it, most on a daily basis.

In an Australian survey from 2000, 53 per cent of young people aged 11 to 17 had experienced something on the Internet they thought was offensive or disgusting. Girls were more likely than boys to be troubled by sexually explicit images. Examples of images encountered were anal intercourse, multiple partners, bondage and sadomasochism, transsexual sex, urination or defecation, bestiality and rape. Given that our brains are hardwired to remember such images these impressions of human sexuality will stay with these young people often for the rest of their lives.

## Porn is a powerful and terrible teacher

More and more commonly pornography is becoming the primary sexual educator of children. One of the primary issues with porn and part of the reason it is such a powerful teacher in our society is the medium itself.

Individuals generally learn better using images as opposed to words and pornography uses the most compelling kinds of images in order to attract and maintain attention. Furthermore long term memories are cemented by emotions such as joy, fear, excitement and sexual tension. The sexual component of pornography means that images are burnt into the memory of those young people and adults who view it. Then in addition to this the reward pathway involved in orgasm provides a further catalyst for reinforcement of the message. Fundamental to the learning of deviant sexual practices is repetition, which is present in the ubiquity of pornography. Amongst children in particular learning is promoted when they see role models perform a behavior – seeing them rewarded or punished will have some of the same effects on us as if we were rewarded or punished. Because of all these factors pornography becomes a permission giver. It both teaches and validates specific sexual behaviour's, general attitudes toward women and children, and a thoroughly unhealthy understanding of relationships, and the nature of sexuality.

When 304 sex scenes in top-selling porn films were analyzed recently, it was discovered that 88% of these scenes contained physical aggression against women, and 49% of these scenes contained disgusting verbal aggression (6). Such pornography viewing by teens disorients them during the developmental phase when they have to learn how to handle their sexuality and when they are most vulnerable to uncertainty about their sexual beliefs and moral values (7).

Indeed one third of sexual abuses against children are performed by children themselves. This is something that has become increasingly apparent in the UK and Australia [14].

### Porn is addictive

“It is as though we have devised a form of heroin... usable in the privacy of one's own home and injected directly to the brain through the eyes.”

Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, Princeton University

The DSM-5, slated to publish in May of 2014, contains in this new addition the diagnosis of Hypersexual Disorder, which includes problematic, compulsive pornography use. Bostwick and Bucci, in their report out of the Mayo Clinic on treating Internet pornography addiction with naltrexone, wrote “...cellular adaptations in the (pornography) addict's PFC result in increased salience of drug associated stimuli, decreased salience of non-drug stimuli, and decreased interest in pursuing goal directed activities central to survival.” [9].

The neurophysiological basis of this relies on the reward pathway in the brain. Each time pornography is consumed the brain receives a hit of dopamine. Eventually, as the brain acclimates to the over-load of dopamine, users often find that they can't feel normal without that dopamine high.

Little things that used to make them happy, like seeing a friend or playing their favorite sport, can't compete with the dopamine flood that comes with porn, so they're left feeling anxious or down until they can get back to it. On top of that, dopamine doesn't travel alone. When the brain is getting a hit of dopamine, it's also getting new pathways built into it with a protein called "iFosB" (pronounced delta fos b). Essentially, iFosB's job is to help you remember to do things that feel good or are important. While dopamine is motivating your brain to do things and rewarding it for doing them, iFosB is quietly leaving trail markers in your brain, creating a pathway to help you get back there. As little as one dose of many drugs will cause iFosB to start building up in the brain's neurons, and of course porn's powerful dopamine surge causes iFosB to build up as well.

## Effects on the relationships of young people

Adults highlights such impacts as decreased sexual intimacy, perceived (and actual) infidelity and sexual 'addiction'. Partners of adult pornography users report decreased sexual intimacy, lowered esteem and demands that they participate in activities they find objectionable. Pornography consumers come to use pornography in ways which are obsessive, compulsive, and have damaging consequences for themselves or others. It was found that adolescent exposure to sexually explicit Web sites is associated with high-risk sexual behaviours such as anal sex, multiple sexual partners, and substance use during sex. [13]

## Effects on mental health

A significant relationship also exists among teens between frequent pornography use and feelings of loneliness, including major depression. Adolescents exposed to high levels of pornography have lower levels of sexual self-esteem [11, 12].

## Effects on attitudes towards Sexual Harassment and Violence

The recent meta-analysis by Hald et al. strongly supports and clarifies previous data demonstrating correlation with regard to pornography inducing violence attitudes against women.[10] With such strong correlative data, it is irresponsible not to address the likely possibility of causation in these regards. Reviewing this data in the context of current usage patterns is particularly concerning; 87% of college age men view pornography, 50% weekly and 20 daily or every other day, with 31% of women viewing as well.

## Objectification of women and men

Pornography offers a radically decontextualised portrayal of sexual behaviour, a relentless focus on female bodies. Exposure to pornography helps to sustain young people's adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships. And, especially among boys and young men who are frequent consumers of pornography, including of more violent materials, consumption intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault.

While there are disagreements over how to judge pornography's effects, pornography exposure can lead to emotional disturbance, sexual knowledge and liberalised attitudes, shifts in sexual behaviour, and sexist and objectifying understandings. Particularly for boys and young men, the use of pornography may exacerbate violence-supportive social norms and encourage their participation in sexual abuse.

More than having effects on young men particularly sexualised representations of girls and women, can encourage girls and young women to see themselves primarily in sexual terms, to equate their worth and appeal with narrow standards of physical attractiveness, and to see themselves as sexual objects—to focus on others' sexual interest in and judgment of them rather than their own desires and interests.

## Other Issues - Erectile Dysfunction

Several large-scale epidemiological studies recently pointed to a high prevalence of erectile dysfunction (ED) among younger men. In an Italian study, men aged 17–40 comprised more than a quarter of sexually active patients seeking medical assistance for ED for the first time. Almost half of them reported severe ED. In Brazilian and Swiss community studies, around a third of men aged 18–40 reported mild or severe ED. Similar findings were reported in a study with Croatian and Norwegian men of the same age. Overall studies demonstrated that there with increasing frequency of use of pornography there was a loss of ability to engage in intercourse (8).

## Conclusion

Pornography addiction is widespread and increasingly on the rise – given that it is an issue that so radically affects patients sexual health, mental health, relationships and is so central to the growing issue of sexual harassment and violence the medical profession, and to a greater extent the population at wide can no longer continue to ignore it.



I think that as a final note we need to consider this: when 304 sex scenes in top-selling porn films were analyzed recently, it was discovered that 88% of these scenes contained physical aggression against women, and 49% of these scenes contained disgusting verbal aggression.

An honest question: Does it not say something about our culture when we are consuming epidemic-levels of glorified violence against women and girls for entertainment or sexual satisfaction?

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