

Submission to the Senate Environment
and Communications References
Committee Inquiry into the harm being
done to Australian children through access
to pornography on the internet

Australian Psychological Society

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The Australian Psychological Society (APS) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee. The APS is well placed to contribute to this consultation, with members who have research and clinical expertise in the effects of pornography on young people and relationships. APS psychologists also offer expertise in the broader societal effects of representations of sex, sexuality, violence and online exposure and access to pornography, as well as changing social mores, particularly concerning sexual practices which may emanate from the impact of pornography.

On related topics, the APS made a submission to the Senate inquiry into sexualisation in 2008, and has developed resources for parents and made many submissions to related inquiries around online safety, with particular reference to young people.

Psychologists and other mental health professionals have long recognised the role pornography has played in the sexualisation of women and girls and its potential harmful effects on children and young people. However with the extraordinary proliferation of pornography on the internet, and the increasingly violent nature of much pornographic content, serious concerns are now emerging within and beyond psychology about the impact on young people's expectations of sex, sexuality and relationships, increases in sexual violence amongst children and young people, as well as concerning general societal effects like an increase in sexism, increased rates of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and negative impacts on how men regard women.

The APS supports this Inquiry and other actions to address and reduce the impact of pornography on young people, as well as on society in general.

Summary of Recommendations

The APS recommends:

- Zero tolerance for pornography for under 12 year-olds. Parents and schools need to play an active role in monitoring and boundary setting for young people in relation to cyber safety, but this must be done within the context of trusting and respectful relationships.
- Quality, inclusive and relationally-based sex education to be provided to all young people to ensure they are able to effectively and actively critique what is displayed in porn. School based strategies are recommended to deliver such education. This must go beyond the mechanistic approach (reproduction, sexual diseases) and also talk about expectations, norms, relationship education, and the role of pornography (among other factors) in sexual behaviours and decisions.
- Sexual health education for parents is required to assist them to navigate conversations about sex and porn, and to empower families to resist pornography's influence, such as assisting young people to respond to peer pressure to watch porn or to respond assertively when a partner initiates porn-inspired sex.

- Any response to reducing harmful impacts of pornography on children involves a range of cybersafety strategies that aim to give children safe and responsible ways of using and accessing content online. This includes topics such as sexting and cyberbullying, and should be delivered through schools and youth residential settings.
- Collaboration between governments, industry, schools and community organisations to raise awareness of the harmful impact of porn on young people and develop appropriate policy and legislative responses to prevent this harm. Industry regulation, enforcement and internet filtering can also contribute to minimising such risks.
- In particular, collaboration with the Australian Council for Children and the Media, the National Commissioner for Children, the E-Safety Commissioner and more generally with other youth focused organisations and women's health organisations is needed to develop and deliver effective public education campaigns aimed at reducing the harmful impacts of porn on children and young people.
- Provision of training for psychologists, youth workers, residential care staff, educators and others working with vulnerable youth to ensure they too have access to quality information about sex, and also about exploitation and abuse.
- Development of legislation to provide greater legal clarity and better protection for victims of revenge porn, that will make it a crime to distribute, or threaten to distribute, intimate images without consent.
- A requirement for industry and service providers to respond quickly to take-down requests when intimate, pornographic content has been posted without consent, and to cooperate with police investigations.
- A requirement for public institutions such as schools, workplaces and universities to include these behaviours in sexual harassment policies and to take complaints seriously.
- Strengthening of existing standards of classification, so as to reduce admissible levels of sexualised content within existing categories relating to children.
- Engaging young people themselves in developing initiatives to counter prevailing cultures of pornography and sexualisation.

RESPONDING TO THE INQUIRY

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

Trends of online consumption of pornography by children

Pornography is readily available on the internet, with one source estimating that 12 per cent of all websites are pornography sites and 25 per cent of all search engine requests are for pornography (English, 2005). Porn is big business. Annual US sales of pornography top \$10 billion and worldwide pornography industry sales are more than Apple, Google, Amazon and Microsoft combined (Berman, 2011).

The number of internet porn web sites has expanded from 70,000 worldwide on the web in 2001 to currently 4.2 million porn sites in the United States alone (Glass, 2014). In 1988, approximately 2,000 hardcore video titles were released, but by 2005 that number had exploded to more than 13,500 titles (Dines, Whisnant & Jensen, 2007). Now, it is virtually impossible to calculate how many titles are being released because anyone with a mobile phone could be a potential producer.

Children and young people are able to access pornography whenever and wherever they want. iPhones, iPads, laptops, tablets, gaming consoles and so on, all provide high-speed, high-quality access to the most graphic of images. Indeed, young people appear *to be the main consumers of pornography, with research indicating that young males aged 12-17 years were the most frequent consumers of online pornography (Haggstrom-Nordin, Hanson & Tyden, 2005)*. Young men are also more likely than young women to use porn alone and in same sex groups, and to view a wider range of images.

Research has shown some worrying trends, particularly related to earlier onset exposure (Kraus & Russell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2014), with one study indicating the average age of first-time exposure to pornography was 12.2 years old (Skau, 2007). Most boys aged from the age of 13 have seen pornography online, with access at times being accidental (often through search engines) and effortless (as well as anonymous). According to some sources, the average first age of exposure to pornography is 11 years, with 100% of 15 year old males and 80% of 15 year old females reporting that they have been exposed to violent, degrading online pornography, usually before they have had a sexual experience themselves (Horvath et al, 2014). Thus pornography exposure – for young men at least – is at saturation point.

At the same time that pornography has become more mainstream, much of it has also become more aggressive (Pratt, 2015). A recent content analysis of the most popular porn found that 88% of scenes included acts of physical aggression and 48% of the scenes contained verbal aggression (Horvath et al, 2014). Wosnitzer and Bridges (2007) analysed 50 randomly selected films from the top 250 grossing pornography films of 2007. They reported over 3,300 different acts of verbal and physical aggression, or an average of 11.5 acts of aggression per scene analysed. They also found that the aggression (which was mainly displayed by the men in the scenes) was responded to with either neutral or pleasure expressions by the respondents (mainly women) in over 95% of the scenes.

The following themes in contemporary porn are of great concern:

- Men being aggressive and in control; women being happily dominated
- Acts of aggression including gagging, choking and slapping, directed at women
- Degradation and humiliation of women
- Women portrayed as sex objects for men's sexual pleasure
- A focus on men getting what they want, with the women there just to please the men
- A focus on particular types and ways of doing sex which are not reflective of what most people – particularly women – like or want in real life
- Showing people doing unsafe sexual acts, including multiple partners having unprotected sex.
- Porn performers with bodies that do not reflect how most people look.

Pornography's reach crosses social, economic and cultural boundaries. It affects straight and gay young people and impacts on both boys and girls. All sectors of the population are affected.

Impact of pornography on the development of healthy and respectful relationships

With the proliferation of the internet, and the increasingly violent nature of much pornographic content, serious concerns are now emerging within and beyond psychology about the impact on young people's expectations of sex and sexuality, the role pornography plays in facilitating and normalising violence against women, and how it contributes more broadly to representations and normative understandings about sex, sexuality and gender in society.

Much of what young people are learning from pornography is problematic in that pornography conveys complex messages about gender, power, sexual health, bodies, pleasure, consent, performance, sexuality and sex. Many young people often do not have the critical frameworks required to deconstruct and understand these messages. For example, porn often communicates that sex does not require relationships or affection – it's just something people do with anyone. So porn is not teaching young people that sex is something that they do with someone they care about or love, or that it is a way of feeling close to someone, expressing love and enjoying each other (It's time we talked, 2016, tip sheet 3).

Porn also gives the impression that everyone wants to have sex all the time, but it does not teach young people that consent is crucial, nor how to communicate with your partner how and when you would both like to have sex, and how to respect their needs as well as meet your own.

Repeated exposure to pornography has been found to desensitise youth to the material viewed and to lead to distorted views of what are "acceptable" behaviours in relationships (Prescott & Shuler, 2011). Emerging evidence linking porn consumption to increased levels of sexual aggression and violence in adult samples (e.g., Malamuth et al.) indicates subtle but significant impacts on how men treat women in relationships.

Impact on young people's sexual practices

Internet pornography can be a disturbing introduction to human sexuality. Pornography increasingly plays a significant role in shaping social norms in relation to sexuality, and in shaping sexual tastes, particularly among young people. This is associated with increased confusion and anxiety as young people feel pressured to behave in ways commonly displayed in pornography. Crabbe and Corlett (2013), in their ground-breaking Australian research, show clearly that young men actually believe that what they are watching provides real templates for sexual activity (see Crabbe and Corlett's 2013 documentary film *Love and sex in an age of pornography*). Young women, conversely, risk feeling pressured to go along with it, and to participate in sexual acts they may not feel comfortable with.

In other Australian research, Green, Brady, Olafsson, Hartley, & Lumby (2011) suggest that adolescent sexual practice is heavily influenced by both technology and pornography. A 2014 Australian study (Mitchell, et al., 2014) noted that over half of students in the sample (full sample n = 2136) had received a sexually explicit text message, a quarter had sent a sexually explicit photo of themselves, and 70% reported having received a sexually explicit photo or text over social media.

Pratt and Fernandes (2015) describe pornography as providing a "how to" manual, showing every possible angle of what goes where and who can do what to whom, as well as providing sexual stimulation and shaping patterns of sexual arousal. They argue that, when coupled with other risk factors present in the young person's life, pairing the "how to" with the sexual stimulation provided by pornography both equips and primes youth to undertake more advanced sexual practices earlier than they otherwise might, or earlier than those who have not accessed pornography, simply because they now have a template for what to do, based on the graphic nature of pornography.

Research indicates that youth are engaging in sexual practices earlier, and that youth who view pornography engage in oral sex and intercourse at an earlier onset age, than those who do not view pornography, with consumption before the age of 12 found to be particularly problematic (Kraus & Russell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2014; Skau, 2007). Mosher et al. (2005) studied changes in adolescent sexual practices between 1993 and 2008, and found that the rate of oral sex in adolescence had increased, with around 54% of females and 55% of males reporting having engaged in oral sex.

Porn often shows people doing unsafe things such as anal sex followed by oral sex, ejaculation in mouths and eyes, and unprotected sex with multiple partners. It is not surprising, therefore, that Horvath and colleagues (2013) suggest that access and exposure to pornography may contribute to engagement in risky sexual behaviour. In other studies, young people who had seen pornography online reported having higher numbers of sexual partners, a wider diversity of sexual practice, and drug and alcohol use while engaging in sexual encounters (Braun-Corville & Rojas, 2009; Lo & Wei, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006a, 2006b). Many young women report that their partners are initiating the 'signature sex acts' (ejaculating on faces and bodies, deep-throating fellatio and anal sex) from pornography. Adult women also reported more pressure to engage in acts seen in pornography (Guy, Patton, & Kaidor, 2012). For young people, pornography has

redefined sexual activity, with oral sex provided to young males now seen as an act to be performed by females if they do NOT wish to engage in sex. This in itself presents a disturbing picture of how porn normalises some sexual acts and privileges the importance of 'satisfying' men.

Skau (2007) and Skau and Barbour (2011) studied 470 Canadian youths and reported that 98% of their sample had been exposed to pornography. Skau found disturbing differences between those who initially viewed pornography at age 9 or younger compared with youth aged 10 or over. The younger age group sample reported having engaged in more sexually questionable acts, a desire to engage in more varied sex, and more sexual arousal to violence. They also showed a higher consumption of pornography later in life, and spent more time each week looking at pornography than those who were first exposed to pornography aged 10 or over.

Finally, and importantly, much of the more readily accessible pornographic content overlooks crucial notions of mutual pleasure (or female pleasure), respect and negotiating consent. Porn also often misrepresents pleasure, because performers in commercial porn are paid to act like they are enjoying what they're doing even if it is uncomfortable, painful or humiliating. Because much of what is shown in porn is unsafe, aggressive, and degrading, and does not reflect what many people actually enjoy in sex, it does not equip young people for a sexuality that is respectful, mutual, consenting and safe (It's time we talked, 2016, tip sheet 1).

Even so called 'amateur' pornography now mimics what was once the script of 'professional' porn, and as such, it may be difficult for youth to understand that home-made porn is now just another brand of commercial pornography production.

Impacts of gay porn

Gay porn is often referred to as a source of liberation for same-sex attracted young people. Yet, in a world in which their sexual orientation may be invisible or derided, portrayals of gay and lesbian sex can be equally gendered, aggressive and limiting. It often perpetuates negative messages about gender, power and aggression, often showing more masculine performers acting aggressively towards the more feminine performer. As well, gay porn communicates many of the same messages as heterosexual porn about bodies, sexual health, pleasure, performance and consent (Crabbe and Corlett, 2013). Additionally, it is likely that young gay men in particular use porn as sex education, due to the lack of real sex education that is inclusive of gay practice and culture.

Impact on sexually abusive behaviours

The relationship between pornography and engagement in sexually abusive behaviours is still not well understood, and more research is needed to better understand this. There is no direct evidence that use of pornography leads to sexually abusive behaviour per se, and it seems that the majority of people who use pornography (given the very high rates in the general population) do not go on to sexually abuse others. There is evidence of a link, however, between aggressive or violent sexual practices and exposure to sexually explicit material in adult samples (Guy, Patton, & Kaidor, 2012; Malamuth, Addison & Koss, 2000), but no such links have been found in adolescent populations.

A small amount of research has tended to focus more on whether exposure to pornography in adolescence either has some 'causal' relationship to sexually abusive behaviours, or whether exposure has some qualitative effect on the nature of sexually abusive behaviours (i.e., more/less severe abuse, more/less gratuitous or functional violence - see Pratt & Fernandes, 2015 for examples). More research is needed, but the ethical issues of researching young people, sexual practice and pornography are difficult to overcome.

A study by Burton et al. (2010) on adolescents and sexual abuse found that adolescents who sexually abused reported more exposure to pornography than those who engaged in non-sexual crimes. In a similar vein, for young people who were deemed 'at risk', the viewing of pornography increased the likelihood of engaging in coercive sexual behaviour, sexually aggressive language, and sex with animals (Owens et al., 2012).

Pratt (2015) reports on a growing trend of younger children engaging in problem sexual and sexually abusive behaviours generally aimed at younger children – in other words, children sexually assaulting children. As well as a rise in the rate of such sexual abuse and the children committing the behaviours being younger, anecdotal evidence from agencies engaged with these youth suggests that the abusive behaviours also include more episodes of anal, vaginal, and oral penetration – all the staple fodder of pornography. Pornography is providing too many 10-year-olds with the mechanical "how to" knowledge to anally, orally and/or vaginally penetrate younger siblings, cousins and acquaintances.

"Revenge porn", when a partner or ex-partner posts nude or intimate pictures or videos online and without consent, is another way in which porn is linked with sexually abusive behaviours (and also domestic violence more generally). An Australian study by Powell and Henry (2015) uncovered significant levels of image-based sexual abuse. One in 10 adults has had a nude or semi-nude picture of them taken without their permission. The same proportion has had a sexually explicit image of them sent to others without their permission, or had someone threaten to publicly share such an image. Victims describe feeling sexually violated when they discover their images have been posted online (Powell & Henry, 2014). Once online, these images are almost impossible to remove. This leads to an ongoing violation as the images are shared and watched over and over again. The harm is magnified by the massive potential audience for revenge porn. There are now underground revenge porn web sites where people trade non-consensual images for bitcoins. Emerging evidence suggests that it is most often women and girls who experience this kind of victimisation. According to Powell and Henry, intimate images are also being used in domestic violence and sexual assault situations to blackmail victims, or to discourage them from seeking help from the police. They argue that it is not just 'revenge' towards an ex-lover that motivates perpetrators of these harms. In many cases, it is part of a pattern of abuse against women.

Pornography's role in the sexualisation of women and girls

The sexualisation of women and girls is a specific outcome of pornography (but of course is not limited to this medium – however it could be argued that it is *driven* by this medium). All forms of media provide examples of sexualised images of girls and women, but these images are ubiquitous in most pornography. Research on

pornography imagery indicates that women more often than men are portrayed in a sexual manner (e.g., dressed in revealing clothing, with bodily postures or facial expressions that imply sexual readiness) and are objectified (e.g., used as a decorative object, or as body parts rather than a whole person).

According to the report of the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls (APA, 2007), the cumulative exposure of children and young people to sexualised images and themes has negative effects in many areas, including self-objectification, links with eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression or depressed mood and diminished sexual health. The APA has also raised concerns about the ways in which the sexualisation of girls and women contributes to broader societal consequences, such as sexism and sexist attitudes.

Impact of porn on sex trafficking

The American Psychological Association (2015) Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls reported major concerns about the links between exposure of children to pornography and sexual abuse of children, and between pornography and sex trafficking, including trafficking for the purpose of producing pornography, and pornography's potential to fuel trafficking via increased demand. The Task Force acknowledged that research related to human trafficking is challenging due to its complexity, and is difficult to measure due to the clandestine nature of the crime. Anecdotal evidence suggests traffickers may use pornography to 'train' women and girls for commercial sex work and as a coercion method (e.g., threatening to show family pornographic material involving the victim if she does not comply).

Current methods taken towards harm minimisation in other jurisdictions, and the effectiveness of those methods

The identification of any measures with the potential for implementation in Australia

Some excellent programs have been developed in Australia to help parents, schools and welfare agencies address pornography and reduce the harms for young people.

[Reality & Risk: Pornography, young people and sexuality](#) is a community-based project that supports young people, parents, schools, government and the community sector to understand and address the influence of pornography. The Reality and Risk project was developed by researchers Maree Crabbe and David Corlett in Victoria in 2009, and is auspiced by Brophy Family and Youth Services, in Warrnambool. This project grew out of Crabbe's work with young people in secondary schools and community settings, as Coordinator of Brophy's Safety and Respect Programs. <http://www.itstimewetalked.com.au/resources/>

By getting people talking about pornography and its impact on young people, *Reality & Risk* aims to:

- encourage young people and the broader community to critique the messages about men, women and sex conveyed in mainstream pornography
- promote understandings of gender and sex that are based on concepts such as mutual respect, equality, communication and consent
- encourage and equip people across a broad range of levels of influence – from parents, teachers and youth workers to school and community leaders

and to senior government staff and politicians – to address the influence of pornography.

Reality & Risk's work attempts to get people talking in three broad areas:

- young people in schools – through the development of education resources for use in secondary schools, and for teacher training
- the broader public – through production of a broadcast documentary film, *Love & Sex in an Age of Pornography*, written articles and speaking events.
- government and community organisations – through advocacy and training with a wide range of individuals and organisations, raising awareness about the issues, and equipping people to respond.

The South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) in Melbourne has also developed school resources for helping young people to deal with pornography and sexualisation. They have a sophisticated program on sexting called *Respect me don't sext me* - http://www.secasa.com.au/assets/Sexting/Sexting-teachers-resource_v15.pdf. The program is targeted at schools/teachers and aims to:

- provide teacher resources for use with secondary students about issues related to sexting.
- promote and encourage respectful relationships and ethical decision making in a digital world. The theme is 'Respect me. Don't sext me'.
- encourage young people to view sexting as a potentially embarrassing activity.
- provide young people with the knowledge and tools to:
 - have a better understanding of some of the negative outcomes of sexting
 - develop some strategies to resist sexting requests
 - know what to do if they receive sexts
 - challenge the attitude of 'sexting as normal and not a big deal'
 - be aware of the outcomes and risks for themselves and others: legal, social, personal and technological.

Another resource developed by SECASA are health promotion cards titled *What pornography teaches us about bodies, relationships and consent* that address the messages portrayed through pornography by presenting sexual health facts such as arousal and intimacy in relationships and the diversity of body parts and shapes.

Programs such as *Safe Schools* and *All of Us* can assist in creating a climate where issues of sexuality, diversity and relationships can be explored in ways that are inclusive of different sexual orientations and gender identities.

Conclusion

The proliferation of online pornography and ease of access for anyone with an internet connection means that people are able to access pornography wherever and whenever they want. Pornography is ubiquitous, easily accessible, and viewed by increasing numbers of young men and women, often as early as 12 years of age, or younger. The increasingly violent nature of much pornographic content, and the stereotyped scripts about the roles men and women play in sexual relationships, raise serious concerns about the impact on young people's expectations of sex, sexuality and

relationships, increases in sexual violence amongst children and young people, as well as general societal effects that are cause for concern.

Whilst we may not be able to control the spread of pornography online, we can control how we choose to respond to it. Minimising the harms of pornography, particularly for children and young people, requires a whole of system approach that involves parents, schools, the health and welfare systems, governments, industry and community organisations. Parents and schools need to play an active role in monitoring and boundary setting for young people in relation to cyber safety (with zero tolerance for porn for under 12 yr olds), but this must be done in conjunction with developing trusting and respectful relationships with young people. Quality, real life, relationally-based sex education needs to be provided to all young people to ensure they are able to effectively and actively critique what they are seeing in porn, as well as develop an understanding of healthy, safe and respectful relationships. Young people themselves need to be engaged to develop initiatives to counter culture of pornography and sexualisation.

Appropriate policy and legislative responses must be developed to deal with industry regulation, enforcement and internet filtering, as these are also key to minimising such risks. Existing standards of classification need to be strengthened so as to reduce admissible levels of sexualised content within existing categories relating to children.

Recommendations

Specifically, the APS recommends:

Quality relationally-based sex education

Without quality sex education based on respectful relationships, young people's relationships, both sexual and non-sexual, are heavily influenced by the pornography script. Engaging children and young people in quality, relationally-based sex education is key to healthy and respectful sexual expectations and practices and also a protective factor against sexual exploitation and being a victim of abuse (Pratt, 2015).

School based strategies are recommended to deliver such education. This must go beyond the mechanistic approach (reproduction, sexual diseases) and also talk about expectations, norms, relationship education, and the role of pornography (among other factors) on sexual behaviours and decisions.

Quality sex education should include:

- positive messages about bodies and sex, including normative expectations about bodies coming in all shapes and sizes
- age-appropriate conversations about the importance of sex being consensual, safe, respectful and mutually pleasurable
- age-appropriate conversations about intimate relationships
- inspiring messages that relationships and sex can be better than what is displayed in porn, including messages that sex is not a performance, nor for spectators, nor something you just do for your partner

- discussions that involve teaching children to be critical of the overly sexualised images and scripts they are exposed to, and how to make safe choices and what makes for healthy relationships
- meaningful and inclusive education for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth.

Tools to critique pornography should include:

- learning that porn is fantasy
- learning how to 'de-code' porn
- learning that porn misrepresents reality, and that it conveys misleading messages about what it means to be a man or a woman, about bodies, sexual health, aggression, humiliation, performance, etc
- understanding that the imagery in a lot of porn has been constructed for a commercial purpose
- conversations about what messages they think the images in porn send to young people about relationship expectations
- learning that porn often does not portray respectful, safe sex that is likely to feel good for everyone involved
- realising that much porn is performed by actors who are paid or forced to pretend to feel pleasure, even when they are not.

Equipping young people to resist pornography's influence should include:

- coaching in ways to respond to peer pressure to watch porn, or to respond assertively when a partner initiates porn-inspired sex
- assertive communication skills
- encouragement to seek support from trusted adults when feeling pressured or unsafe
- a range of cyber safety strategies that aim to give children safe and responsible ways of using and accessing content online, like teaching them what to do if they come across inappropriate content.

Setting appropriate limits on technology use

Broader strategies for supporting online safety are an important part of minimising the harmful impact of pornography on children. Technology does bring risks as well as tremendous benefits, and setting age-appropriate limits on technology use is advisable for children and young people. The online environment offers parents an opportunity to build resilience among children and young people by enabling them to experiment, develop autonomy and make decisions about their online engagement. This is especially important in adolescence.

There are many ways of helping children to manage online risks and ensuring online experiences are safe and positive, including:

- ongoing discussions about online safety with children
- keeping up-to-date with online technologies and environments
- establishing limits to online use. For example, it is recommended that parents establish limits to their children's time and access online, especially for younger children or where their online behaviour is having a negative impact on other aspects of their life
- use of internet filters that restrict access to specific websites and material
- encouraging and supporting alternative activities and influences.

Zero tolerance for pornography for under 12 year-olds

There is emerging evidence that there are serious negative impacts for these children, largely in terms of increased sexual abuse by young children on other children involving anal and vaginal penetration. Limiting children's access to online technologies is important. Parents and schools need to play an active role in monitoring and boundary setting for young people in relation to cybersafety, but this must be done within the context of trusting and respectful relationships. Industry regulation, enforcement and internet filtering can also contribute to minimising such risks.

Training for people working with vulnerable youth

It is important that training is provided for psychologists, youth workers, residential care staff, educators and others working with vulnerable youth to make sure that they too have access to quality information about sex, as well as issues of sexual exploitation, abuse. These young people often fall through the gaps, particularly if they are living out of home or not in school.

Educating schools and welfare workers in how to respond to the use of pornography, or sexualised behaviour from young people

There is a need to educate and support teachers, welfare staff, chaplains and youth workers in some of the developmental factors involved in young people accessing pornography. Care needs to be taken that teachers and welfare workers do not inadvertently increase guilt, shame and confusion in dealing with sexualised behaviour and porn use, nor end up in a tug of war between the discipline arm and the pastoral arm of the school.

Encouraging parents to model respectful, loving relationships, and to talk about sex and relationships with children

Children and young people are assisted enormously by being exposed to healthy familial relationships that allow them to measure what they see in 'porn world' alongside what they see in the real world. Conversely, if young people are exposed to gender inequality, family violence, taboos about discussing sexual and relationship matters, or a harsh and unyielding parenting regime, then the relationships portrayed in pornography may not look as comic, sad or alien to them.

It is also very important for parents to talk openly about sex and relationships. Parents need to have open, honest and age appropriate discussions with children about all aspects of sexuality, sexual expression, and relationships (see <http://www.talkingthetalksexed.com.au/parent-groups.html> for examples of how to empower parents to talk about sex with their children).

Working collaboratively with governments, industry, schools and community organisations to raise awareness of the harmful impact of porn on young people and develop appropriate policy and legislative responses to prevent this harm

A whole-of-system approach is needed to raise awareness and develop good policy to minimise harm from pornography. Collaborations between the Australian Council for Children and the Media, the National Commissioner for Children, the E-Safety Commissioner and more generally with other youth-focused organisations such as the Safe Schools Coalition, as well as women's health organisations, has the

potential to develop and deliver effective public education campaigns aimed at reducing the harmful impact of porn on children and young people.

Existing standards of classification could be strengthened so as to reduce admissible levels of sexualised content within existing categories relating to children. Australian laws could be created to provide greater legal clarity and better protection for victims of revenge porn that make it a crime to distribute, or threaten to distribute, intimate images without consent. Industry and service providers could be required to respond quickly to take-down requests when intimate, pornographic content has been posted without consent, and to cooperate with police investigations.

Engaging young people themselves to develop initiatives to counter a culture of pornography and sexualisation

Children and young people should be engaged in the development and delivery of efforts to prevent, minimise and challenge the culture of pornography and sexualisation, and in setting the agenda in all key decision-making processes. This can include broad based programs in schools for youth *by* youth, that empower children to become active rather than passive consumers of media, teach them how to stop shaming and blaming victims of 'revenge porn', to tell peers that they don't think it is okay to disrespect a person by sharing their images without permission, and to advocate that their school, (or workplace or university) take account of these behaviours in sexual harassment policies and take complaints seriously.

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About the APS

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is the national professional organisation for psychologists with over 22,000 members across Australia. Psychologists are experts in human behaviour and bring experience in understanding crucial components necessary to support people to optimise their function in the community. Psychologists regard people as intrinsically valuable and respect their human, legal and moral rights (APS, 2007).

A key goal of the APS is to actively contribute psychological knowledge for the promotion and enhancement of community wellbeing. Psychology in the Public Interest is the section of the APS dedicated to the communication and application of psychological knowledge to enhance people's mental health and wellbeing. Educational and developmental psychologists, particularly those working in schools, can be of assistance in bringing a non-judgemental and developmentally appropriate evidence based approach to highly sensitive topics like pornography and sexualisation of children.

Further APS resources on the subject of the sexualisation of girls are available at: <http://www.psychology.org.au/community/public-interest/sexualisation/> Articles from the Special Feature on *Psychological perspectives on pornography* in the April 2015 edition of the APS magazine *InPsych* are available at <http://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2015/>