Porn: Eroticising Violence and Inequality

Why pornography is a violence prevention issue we can’t afford to ignore

What’s Coming Up?

• The ‘mainstreaming’ of pornography
• The nature of contemporary pornography
• Pornography’s impact on young people
• Pornography’s relationship to gender-based violence
• What we can do about it
‘It’s every where!’

The mainstreaming of pornography

The world’s biggest porn site reported:

- **92 billion** videos watched in 2016
- **64 million** visitors each day
- **Pornhub** is the 23rd most popular website in the world*
- **61%** of traffic is from a mobile device

*Source: SimilarWeb 2017, [https://www.similarweb.com/blog/new-website-ranking](https://www.similarweb.com/blog/new-website-ranking)
About 30% of all internet traffic is porn-related*

With the click of a button, young people can now access a vast array of free pornographic imagery.

* Source: S Anthony 'Just how big are porn sites?' www.extremetech.com, 4 April, 2012.

• More than 90% of boys have seen online porn
• More than 60% of girls have seen online porn*
• Young people’s exposure can be intentional or accidental

* Source: Boys & girls aged 13-16, University of Canberra, Fleming et al.
Consumption of pornography is highly gendered

Young men are much more likely than young women to be active and enthusiastic consumers of pornography.

Young women are more likely than young men to say they feel disturbed by what they see in pornography and to express concern about the implications for expectations on their own sexuality.

Sources: Flood, 2010; Horvath et al, 2013

Levels of pornography use

- **47%** of 15-19 year old boys used pornography everyday
- **27%** more used pornography weekly
- The mean age for first viewing pornography was **13** years for boys and **16** years for girls

Source: Lim et al, 2017: Study of 15-29 year old Australians
The mainstreaming of pornography

- Porn’s influence can be seen throughout popular culture, in music, films, TV, fashion and advertising
- The pervasiveness of pornography’s presence in popular culture makes it seem legitimate

‘Rougher and harder’

The nature of contemporary mainstream pornography
Porn is no longer the centrefold it used to be…

Pornography has changed and it’s rougher, harder and more violent than ever.
“You know, when I started, it was like very lovey dovey sex, not tough like Gonzo. After three years, they wanted to get more energy, more rough and they do one girl with, you know, four guys and just take over and destroy her.”

Anthony Hardwood, Porn performer

“In the last 10 years, there’s been an increase in what I would call the aggression that we see on camera.”

Nina Hartley, veteran porn performer
“We want to see people pushing themselves, and working really hard, doing something that’s beyond what they’ve normally done before. That’s what’s really exciting. That’s what’s visually interesting. That’s why rough sex and strong sex works, because it’s incredible to look at. As human beings, we want to see stuff like that.”

John Stagliano, Founder of ‘Gonzo Porn’

Acts of aggression are commonplace in best selling pornography

- **88%** of scenes include physical aggression
- **48%** of scenes include verbal aggression
- **94%** of cases – including gagging, choking and spanking – are directed at females
- **95%** of aggression is met with neutral or positive response

Source: Study of 50 best-selling pornographic videos, Bridges et al, 2010
“So, this is what sex is like?”

The impact of pornography on young people

The genie is out of the bottle.* Pornography is now the most prominent sex educator for many young people.**

*Larry Flynt 2010, **Michael Flood 2009
Welcome to Sex Ed by Porn

While porn producers may not see their role as sex educators for young people that is effectively what they have become …

Pornography teaches about:

- Sexual Health
- Pleasure
- Negotiating consent
- Relationships
- Race/ethnicity
- Performance
- Gender, power and aggression

A ‘new normal’ in pornography has arrived, providing a disturbing model of sexuality for young people today
“When boys start having sex, they imagine porn and everything that goes on in porn because that’s the dream really, like boys, you know, have their way with girls, whatever they want. Girls can put their legs behind their head and, you know, take it all.”

Sara

“The first time I had sex, because I’d watched so much porn I thought ‘all chicks dig this, all chicks want this done to them, all chicks want it up here, all chicks love it there. So I tried all this stuff, and yeah, it turned out bad.”

Jake
“Girls, like they love it in the porn, so maybe boys think that girls like that. And, you know, when you love someone, you’re always willing to just make them happy… At the end it just became like, I just became an object, just to blow his load on. I just felt gross at the end of it.”

Sara

Putting it in context

Pornography’s relationship to violence against women
Gender inequality is the key driver of violence against women

- Support for violence against women
- Unequal gender relations, where men are in control and women’s independence is limited
- Rigid gender stereotypes and roles
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women

Source: Our Watch, VicHealth & ANROWS, 2015

Eroticising inequality:

Pornography not only suggests that violence against women is okay… …it says it is sexy
So what can we – as parents, schools, workers, political and community leaders, and as a community – do?

What we can do about porn

1. **Limit** young people’s *exposure and access* to pornography
2. **Equip** and encourage young people to *critique* what they see
3. **Help** young people develop the *skills* required to resist pornography’s influence
4. **Inspire** young people that relationships and sex can be *better* than what they see in porn
What does it look like in practice?

- **Talking** about pornography – and sex, gender, power, aggression and the media – with *young people*
- **Equipping** the *people who live and work with young people* to have the conversations
- **Supporting** *political and community leaders* to understand the issues, and how they can be addressed through policy and practice
- **Finding** creative and compelling ways to explore the issues and have the conversations *as a society*

What does that mean for policy makers?

- **Building awareness** about pornography and the need to address it, amongst policy-makers
- **Developing policies** to minimise pornography’s harmful influence – through parent education and support, school-based education, public campaigns, and other initiatives
- **Resourcing the implementation** of those policies – particularly building capacity in the relevant workforces
- **Supporting ongoing research** – to better understand the issues as they emerge, and inform interventions
Pornography isn’t going to go away. It has become a violence prevention issue we can’t afford to ignore.

Young people need support to critique pornography’s influence, and to aspire to relationships that are safe, respectful and consenting.
Porn: Eroticising Violence and Inequality

Why pornography is a violence prevention issue we can’t afford to ignore