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Youth and Pornography in Australia
Evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects

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Note: This publication includes descriptions of certain sexual activities and sexually explicit language that may disturb or offend some readers.

However, we believe that it is important for readers to press on when reading becomes difficult. The debate on pornography in Australia needs well-informed citizens and this includes awareness of some of the more disturbing material that is freely available to children on the Internet.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures	iii
Preface	iv
Summary	v
1. Introduction: Grounds for concern	1
1.1 What is pornography?	1
1.2 Children, sex and pornography	2
2. Exposure of youth to pornography	6
2.1 Paths to exposure	6
2.2 How much pornography?	11
2.3 Existing data	12
2.4 New evidence: X-rated videos	14
2.5 New evidence: Internet sex sites	17
3. What young people see: The content of pornography	21
3.1 Softcore versus hardcore	21
3.2 Female bodies and male viewers	21
3.3 Genres of content	25
3.4 Violence in pornography	30
4. Effects of exposure to pornography	36
4.1 Harm to minors	36
4.2 The effects of sexual content	37
4.3 Pornography's impact on adults	40
4.3.1 Experimental studies on attitudes	41
4.3.2 Experimental studies on behaviour	42
4.3.3 Correlational studies on attitudes	43
4.3.4 Correlational studies on behaviour	43
4.3.5 Correlational studies on sexual assault	44
4.4 Mediating the impact of exposure	45
4.5 Effects among young people	46
4.6 Other effects on young people	47
4.6.1 Premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content	47
4.6.2 Being disturbed by seeing 'extreme' behaviours	48
4.6.3 The inappropriate acceptance and adoption of non-mainstream sexual practices	49
4.7 Conclusion	52
References	55

Tables, Figures and Boxes

Table 1	Perceptions of exposure to X-rated videos among youth	15
Table 2	Exposure to X-rated videos among youth	16
Table 3	Perceptions of use of Internet sex sites among youth	17
Table 4	Accidental exposure to Internet sex sites among youth	18
Table 5	Deliberate use of Internet sex sites among youth	19
Table 6	A sample of types of Internet pornography	27
Table 7	Types of pornography studies	41
Figure 1	Listing of Sex Picture Sites From Google	8
Box 1	Some Paths for Deliberate and Inadvertent Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material on the Internet	10
Box 2	Summary of the likely effects on young people of exposure to sexual media content and pornography	37

Preface

The research reported here was motivated by a concern that young people are being exposed to a wide range of pornographic material, some of it of a violent and extreme kind, and that this exposure may be having long-lasting detrimental effects on some young people and on society at large. In particular, the Internet has in recent years seen a proliferation of pornographic content of a disturbing kind. This material is easily accessible to children.

Public debates over pornography in Australia, as elsewhere, have tended to be dominated by, on the one hand, moral conservatives who seem to many to find sex itself distasteful and, on the other, civil libertarians who appear unwilling to concede that some forms of pornography may cause psychological damage to individuals and give rise to wider social problems.

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However, responsibility for the views in this paper rests entirely with the authors.

Summary

Children have always sought out sexually explicit material but doing so today is easier, quicker, cheaper and more anonymous. While the system of video classification is designed to exclude those under 18 from viewing pornography, there are virtually no age-related barriers to pornography on the Internet. Children can spend hours wandering online through a vast array of free images and movie clips much of which would be prohibited on video. They can be drawn or coerced into viewing material they have no desire to see through 'pop-ups', 'mousetrapping', spam emails and manipulation of search engines. Yet despite the scale and possible consequences of this social problem, it has received almost no public attention.

Exposure of youth to pornography

For this study, Newspoll was commissioned to carry out a special survey of 16 and 17-year olds to determine the extent of their exposure to X-rated videos and Internet pornography. Younger individuals could not be interviewed for ethical reasons.

When asked whether watching X-rated videos is widespread among boys of their age, five out of six boys (84 per cent) and the same percentage of girls said that it is. When asked whether watching X-rated videos is widespread among girls of the same age, only 4 per cent of girls agreed. Boys overestimate girls' use of pornography, in that 15 per cent of boys believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread among girls.

The fact that most 16-17 year-old boys and girls believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread among boys suggests that watching these videos is considered to be normal or at least common behaviour among boys. The normalising of this activity may give pornography consumption a high degree of social tolerance and acceptability within youth culture.

Respondents were next asked: 'Have you ever watched X-rated videos yourself?' If the respondent agreed then they were asked: 'How often would that be?' The results are shown in Table S1. Just under three-quarters (73 per cent) of boys report that they have watched an X-rated video themselves. One in twenty watch them on a weekly basis while more than a fifth watch an X-rated video at least once a month. Over half of those who watch these videos do so only occasionally. The perception that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst 16-17 year-old boys therefore proves to be accurate.

Among girls, only 11 per cent report that they have watched an X-rated video and all of those who have done so say that has been less often than once every two to three months. The 15 per cent of boys (and 4 per cent of girls) who believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst 16-17 year old girls are clearly wrong in their assessment.

Boys and girls follow different paths to exposure to pornography. Typically, girls watched pornography only once, because a boyfriend or somebody wanted them to or because they were curious, and then did not watch again. The majority of boys are also

exposed to pornography for the first time through the encouragement of others, but it is more likely to be by male friends.

Table S1 Exposure to X-rated videos among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	73	11
Every week	5	0
Every 3 to 4 weeks	16	0
Every 2 to 3 months	11	0
Less often	40	11

Totals may not add due to rounding.

The survey also asked young people about their exposure to ‘sex sites on the Internet’. Only 2 per cent of boys and girls said they never use the Internet. A third use it every day and 84 per cent use it at least once a week. Nearly nine out of ten 16-17 year-old boys (88 per cent) believe that looking at sex sites on the Internet is widespread among boys of the same age, and girls have a similar perception of the extent to which boys look at Internet sex sites (83 per cent). Among 16-17 year-old girls, only seven per cent believe that looking at sex sites on the Internet is widespread among girls of the same age. As in the case of X-rated videos, a substantially higher proportion of boys (16 per cent) believe that looking at Internet sex sites is widespread amongst girls.

Young people’s exposure to Internet pornography may be deliberate or accidental. Respondents to the survey were first asked, ‘When using the Internet yourself, have you ever seen sex sites accidentally or when you didn’t mean to?’ They were then asked how often the accidental exposure had occurred. The results are shown in Table S2.

Eighty-four per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls say they have been exposed accidentally to sex sites on the Internet. It is fair to conclude that anyone who uses the Internet extensively has a high probability of coming across sex sites when searching for something else or being sent pornographic links or images via e-mail.

Respondents were then asked, ‘Have you ever searched for or looked at sex sites on the Internet on purpose?’ The results are shown in Table S3.

Nearly two in five 16-17 year-old boys (38 per cent) have searched the Internet for sex sites. Only four per cent say they use the Internet for this purpose on a weekly basis, but over one fifth of boys (22 per cent) access Internet sex sites at least every two or three months.

Among girls, only two per cent say that they have deliberately sought out Internet sex sites and all of those have done so only very occasionally. The figure of two per cent of girls who have *deliberately* sought out sex sites stands in stark contrast to the 60 per

cent of girls who have had *accidental* exposure to explicit sex on the Internet. Internet users who have no interest in sex sites therefore find it difficult to avoid seeing the images displayed on these sites.

Table S2 Accidental exposure to Internet sex sites among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	84	60
Every week	24	7
Every 3 to 4 weeks	22	6
Every 2 to 3 months	11	11
Less often	27	36

Table S3 Deliberate use of Internet sex sites among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	38	2
Every week	4	0
Every 3 to 4 weeks	7	0
Every 2 to 3 months	11	0
Less often	16	2

The fact that teenagers view X-rated videos more than Internet sex sites is surprising as access to the Internet is much easier than access to X-rated videos. However, only a third of homes are connected to the Internet. In addition, there may be an element of self-censorship among young people, as Internet sex is known to feature extreme and ‘deviant’ sexual practices, which some young people find disturbing or offensive. In addition, it may be felt that since X-rated videos are officially approved for adult use it is acceptable for those who see themselves as near adulthood to view them.

The figures in our study are likely to understate the true incidence of pornography consumption among youth. Although the telephone survey was anonymous and confidentiality was guaranteed, some respondents may have been reluctant to admit to these activities or concerned that their anonymity would not be protected.

What young people see

In seeing X-rated videos or Internet pornography, children and adolescents are exposed to explicit images of a wide range of sexual acts. Most pornography centres on images of women's bodies and of male-female sexual activity, and most is directed at a heterosexual male audience.

A typical X-rated video shows a series of scenarios, each lasting for anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, with common practices including kissing, sexual touching, masturbation, fellatio, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and cunnilingus. Typical practices depicted in X-rated videos also include 'double penetration' (where two men simultaneously have vaginal and anal intercourse with the one woman), one woman kneeling between two or more men and practising fellatio on each in turn, and one woman engaged simultaneously in vaginal or anal intercourse with one man or two men and fellatio with a second or third man.

Two additional sexual practices have become staples in X-rated videos. It is standard practice in heterosexual pornography for the male partner to withdraw from intercourse or fellatio before orgasm to ejaculate onto the body or face of his female partner. These are commonly described as 'cumshots', while the sub-genre 'facials' refers to images of men ejaculating onto women's faces and women's faces covered in semen. Male-female anal intercourse is a second, almost mandatory, inclusion in pornographic depictions of heterosexual sex. While anal intercourse is routine in representations of heterosexual sex in X-rated videos, Australian studies suggest that this is a minority practice.

Across the myriad of pornographic images and texts, there are common classificatory schemes for types or genres of content. Among X-rated videos, there are series focused on particular sexual practices, sexual participants, body parts or other aspects of sexuality. On the shelves of an adult store, one can find videos focused on 'teens' and young women, 'new' or 'amateur' female participants, anal intercourse, fellatio, male ejaculation or 'cumshots,' breasts, buttocks, 'lesbian' sex, Asian and black women, voyeurism, large penises, multiple male partners or 'gangbangs', pregnant women, 'fisting' (the insertion of the hand into the vagina or anus), men over 50 with young women, female underwear, gay male sex, and a range of other categories. Internet pornography includes all these categories, but also goes beyond them to include genres of violent and fetishistic pornography which are illegal in X-rated videos.

A distinction needs to be drawn between 'mainstream' pornography (in commercially available X-rated videos) and the proliferation of violent and extreme material on the Internet. While violent and degrading depictions of women in particular are evident in some X-rated videos, they are widespread in Internet pornography. Themes of sexual violence are common in the stories and images circulated in Internet newsgroups. There is little systematic research on the extent of violent content in pornographic websites. Nevertheless, one can easily find portrayals in Internet pornography that embody forms of violence and themes of subordination and degradation. Perhaps the most pervasive form of degradation of women is the common use of derogatory language to describe the women pictured and the sexual acts done to them. Some websites list groups of pictures as follows: 'Fatties getting fucked,' 'Pissing sluts and skanks,' 'Ethnic Asian whores,' 'Ethnic black bitches,' and so on.

Furthermore, there are three types of Internet pornography that focus on non-consenting sexual acts – rape, bestiality and ‘upskirts’ websites. Videos featuring these would be ‘Refused Classification’ and banned from sale or hire by the Office of Film and Literature Classification.

A recent study analysed 31 rape-focused websites. There is no way to tell if the sites show images of actual rapes or staged depictions. The victims are usually tied with rope or other restraints, a weapon is shown being used, and typically the victim’s face is depicted as screaming or expressing pain. Half the rape sites describe the victims as young, using such terms as ‘young’, ‘teen’, ‘schoolgirl’ and ‘lolita’. Accompanying text accentuates the violent nature of the images depicted or available for a fee, using such language as ‘rape’, ‘torture’, ‘abuse’, ‘brutal’ and ‘pain’. All these websites are accessible without paying for the images, and without verifying one’s age.

Bestiality refers to sexual activity between human beings and animals, and it is easy to find at least a handful of sites which offer free photographs and movies of women (and occasionally men) engaged in masturbation, oral sex or intercourse with dogs, horses, snakes and other animals.

‘Upskirts’ refers to photographs taken such that the viewer can see ‘up the skirt’ of the woman pictured. Some photographs on ‘upskirts’ sites are clearly posed for the camera, but other photographs appear to have been taken illicitly, without the woman’s knowledge. A similar ‘peeping Tom’ genre on the Internet centres on images of women undressing, showering, toileting, naked or having sex, again apparently taken illicitly through windows or using hidden cameras.

One sexually explicit genre that has attracted more public attention and concern than any other, child pornography, is not visible on the ‘public’ domain of easily accessible websites. The genre of ‘teen’ pornography (boasting ‘barely legal’ and ‘youngest teens on the net’) is an important and easily available one, but true child pornography is only accessible through highly secretive networks.

Effects of exposure to pornography

What is the likely effect of exposure to pornography on children’s attitudes, values and behaviours? There is very little direct research evidence to help answer this question, mainly because of ethical difficulties associated with research on exposure to explicit sexual material among individuals below adult age. In one of the few studies, a survey among 522 African-American females aged 14 to 18 found correlations between viewing X-rated movies and the following: holding more negative attitudes towards using condoms; having multiple sex partners; and, engaging in sex more frequently. A study of 275 Canadian teenagers with an average age of 14 found a significant correlation between boys’ frequent consumption of pornography and their agreement with the idea that it is acceptable to hold a girl down and force her to have intercourse.

On the other hand, a wide range of studies has been conducted among young people aged 18 to 25. One of the most important areas of social concern has been the impact of pornography on men’s sexual behaviour towards women, and particularly male sexual aggression or rape. One major study integrated the findings of a broad range of research

and concluded that there is consistent and reliable evidence that exposure to or consumption of pornography is related to male sexual aggression against women. This association is strongest for violent pornography and still reliable for nonviolent pornography, particularly when used frequently.

In experimental studies, adults show significant strengthening of attitudes supportive of sexual aggression following exposure to pornography. These attitudes are measured by scales designed to measure 'rape myth acceptance', 'sexual callousness', 'adversarial sexual beliefs' and 'acceptance of interpersonal violence against women'. These centre on beliefs that blame the female victim for rape and justify sexually assault. Such attitudes correlate with behavioural sexual aggression, and have other anti-social effects such as failure to report rape and unwillingness to support victims.

A second cluster of studies examines correlations between the use of pornography in everyday life and aggressive attitudes or behaviours. An analysis of eight studies involving 2020 participants found that there was *not* a significant, reliable relationship between the amount of pornography use and attitudes supporting sexual aggression, although the study did not distinguish between the effects of nonviolent and violent pornography. However, studies among men in the general population find significant associations between the use of at least certain forms of pornography and levels of sexual aggression. Men who use hardcore, violent or rape pornography, and men who are high-frequency users of pornography, are shown to be 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.

Although it is not the only source of sexist and violence-supportive imagery and ideas, pornography clearly plays a role in helping foster the kinds of attitudes and values which may predispose some men to rape women. Overall, the evidence lends some support to the concern expressed in the 1980s slogan 'Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice'.

Several studies suggest that in assessing the likely meaning and impact of young people's exposure to pornography, we need to consider the nature of this exposure – the type of material involved, the duration and intensity of viewing and the context (whether voluntary or involuntary, and whether solitary or collective). Several variables have been shown to moderate the impact of pornography, including the individual's cultural background (e.g. emphasising gender equality or inequality), their home background (sexually permissive or restricted), their personality characteristics and dispositions, the viewer's current emotional state (angered or not), and the environment in which exposure occurs. In particular, men who are at higher risk of sexually aggressive behaviour also show the strongest negative effects of exposure to pornography, particularly to materials combining sex and violence.

Effects on young people

In our view, the research literature's documentation of significant associations between adult use of certain types of pornography and sexual aggression is of real concern. It is likely that similar relationships exist among teenagers: that consumption of pornography, particularly high frequency use or consumption of violent portrayals, is

associated with sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviours. This association may be particularly strong for the four to five per cent of 16 and 17-year-old boys in our study who watch X-rated videos and view Internet sex sites every week.

Regular consumption of pornography, and particularly violent pornography, therefore is a risk factor for boys' and young men's perpetration of sexual assault. In addition, it may foster greater tolerance of this behaviour by others. This is particularly important given that young women are three to four times more likely to be subject to sexual and physical violence than older women and young men aged 15-25 are responsible for more sexual assaults than older males.

There are three other potential impacts on children and young people of exposure to pornography that should also be considered. First, depictions of sexual behaviour may be emotionally disturbing to the young person who encounters them. They may be shocked, troubled or disturbed by premature or inadvertent encounters with sexually explicit material. A recent Australian survey found that 53 per cent of children aged 11-17 had seen or experienced something on the Internet they thought was offensive or disgusting. The respondents said that they felt 'sick', 'yuck', 'disgusted', 'repulsed' and 'upset'.

Second, young people may be troubled or disgusted by images or accounts of non-mainstream behaviours, just as adults may be, given that the range of sexual activity found on the Internet is broader than the range found in 'mainstream' society.

Third, young people exposed to images of non-mainstream sexual behaviours may be more likely to accept and adopt them.

Sexual behaviours involving rape, bondage, sadomasochism, transsexuality, urination, defecation, and bestiality are widely regarded as harmful, immoral or unethical in and of themselves, and indeed some are criminal offences, and their portrayal may incite, eroticise and give legitimacy to such behaviours. There is not yet a body of evidence with which to assess with any certainty whether young people exposed to eroticised images or accounts of bondage, bestiality and so on are more likely to adopt these practices than young people who have not viewed such material, but it seems highly plausible that this is so.

In conclusion

While further research is needed to draw definitive conclusions about the impacts on children of exposure to pornography, in our view the evidence available provides grounds for serious concern about exposure of children to particular types of pornography, notably pornography involving violence and extreme behaviours. More concerted action to minimise exposure of children is therefore warranted.

The starting point should be the minimisation of involuntary exposure to pornography. A second goal should be the minimisation of children's consumption of violent pornography and pornography showing non-consenting sexual depictions (such as rape, bestiality, 'upskirts' and images of children).

The situation may be less clear-cut with respect to depictions of other ‘non-mainstream’ sexual practices such as sex involving multiple partners, bondage and sadomasochism, transsexuality, urination and defecation, although certain extreme behaviours such as coprophilia and amputee sex are clearly disturbing in themselves. OFLC guidelines prohibit portrayals of these themes in films and videos and, in our view, if these are considered unsuitable for adults then children should certainly not be exposed to them.

1. Introduction: Grounds for concern

Children and young people in Australia are routinely exposed to sexually explicit images. They encounter pornography while on the Internet, some watch X-rated videos and, like adults, they live in a culture increasingly saturated in sexualised representations. This report documents the extent of children's exposure to X-rated videos and Internet pornography, the kinds of material that children see either accidentally or deliberately, and the likely effects of that exposure on the attitudes of youth to sex, sexuality, relationships and violence. We use the term 'children' to refer to all those under 18 years of age.¹

Our interest in the issue of young people and pornography was prompted particularly by a story in the *Guardian Weekly* of May 30, 2002 under the headline 'Survey finds pornographic films shape French children's views on sex.' It describes a French survey which found that nearly half of children had seen an adults-only sex-related film by the time they were 11, and by the age of 16 or 17, 89 per cent of boys and 81 per cent of girls had seen a pornographic film (Henley 2002). The story centres on community concern that children's attitudes towards sexuality and relationships are being shaped by early exposure to hardcore pornography and, particularly, that this influences the attitudes of adolescent boys to rape. The exposure of children to sexually explicit materials is an issue of widespread community concern in Australia, yet there is not a single Australian study that focuses on the prevalence of this exposure or assesses its likely impact. Our study undertakes both tasks.

This report focuses on children's exposure to pornography, rather than the representation of children *in* pornography. Child pornography is a deeply troubling aspect of sexually explicit media, and by definition involves the abuse and exploitation of children. Nevertheless, our focus is children's exposure to X-rated video and Internet pornography, and the harms that may follow from such exposure.

1.1 What is pornography?

Our study focuses on pornography defined as 'sexually explicit media that are primarily intended to sexually arouse the audience' (Malamuth 2001, p. 11817), a definition that includes both the content and intended effect on the viewer.² 'Sexually explicit' representations include, for example, images of female or male nudity or semi-nudity, implied sexual activity and actual sexual activity (such as oral sex, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and so on). Our definition of pornography is broad enough to include media centered on sex and involving only text, such as written materials, but our areas of primary concern are the image-centred media of X-rated videos and Internet

¹ In this report the terms 'children' and 'minors' refer to individuals aged under 18, 'adolescents' are those between 10 and 19, 'teenagers' are those aged 13 to 19, and the broadest category 'young people' refers to individuals aged up to 25.

² Most academic studies use definitions which include elements of sexual explicitness and/or the intention to arouse. Goodson, McCormick and Evans (2001, p. 105) define as sexually explicit those materials 'that either show clear pictures of, or talk/write about sexuality using sexual vocabulary'. Baron and Strauss (1989) define pornography as 'written pictorial or audio visual materials that are produced for the purpose of sexual arousal' (cited in Gossett & Byrne 2002, p. 694). More practically, Jensen (1998a, p. 2) notes the widespread lay definition of pornography as 'the material sold in pornography shops for the purpose of producing sexual arousal for mostly male consumers'.

pornography. Scholarship on the nature and impact of sexual media images often uses the term ‘sexually explicit’ instead of ‘pornographic’, defining it to include textual or verbal references to sexual activity, innuendo, implied sexual activity, and visual presentation (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, p. 6).

The terms ‘pornographic’ and ‘sexually explicit’ are used interchangeably throughout this report. There are some forms of imagery or text that some members of the community will perceive as ‘pornographic’ and others will not: a billboard advertisement for lingerie, a ‘raunchy’ music video clip, a painting of a nude in an art gallery, images of women in bikinis in a ‘New Lad’ magazine, a gay newspaper, and so on. It is not our intention to resolve these debates; we focus on the two forms of sexually explicit material for which there is likely to be greater community consensus regarding their status as ‘pornography’ – X-rated videos and sexually explicit Internet sites. (‘Videos’ in this report refers to both video cassettes and digital video disks or DVDs.)

The term ‘pornography’ has often been used pejoratively, referring to representations of bodies and sexual activity which are offensive, obscene, harmful or otherwise problematic. Some discussions therefore contrast pornography with ‘erotica’, where the latter refers to sexually explicit representations which are free of sexism and other inequalities (Russell 1993, pp. 2-3) or have a ‘higher’ artistic or intellectual purpose or merit. Our own discussion avoids this distinction. We do not assume that sexually explicit representations are necessarily offensive or harmful in some way. At the same time, we are critical of aspects of contemporary mainstream pornography, as Section 3 attests.

Media content related to sex and sexual activity can also be found interwoven with much nonsexual content, for example television programs and movies largely nonsexual in content but containing some sex-focused scenes (Malamuth 2001, p. 11817). An extensive scholarship on children’s exposure to ‘sexual content’ in media examines verbal references to sexual activity, sexual innuendo, implied sexual activity, and visual presentations of sex in television, movies, music videos and magazines (Huston, Wartella, and Donnerstein 1998; Strasburger & Wilson 2002). While such representations are not our primary concern and are excluded from this study’s account of ‘pornography’, we discuss this literature in assessing the effects of exposure to pornography in Section 4.

1.2 Children, sex and pornography

Children’s and young people’s exposure to sexually explicit materials is only one of a number of issues relating to children and sexuality which have been the subject of public controversy and political activity. 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. Such fears also have deep historical roots, and there are long histories dating back to the nineteenth century in Western countries of efforts to ‘protect children’ (Heins 2001, p. 8; Levine 2002, pp. 5-6). On these and other issues of sexuality, there are periodic ‘moral panics’ in which particular threats are identified, concern escalates, moral barricades are put up, imaginary solutions emerge, and, after

some time, anxiety subsides (Weeks 1985, p. 45). Popular concerns about the premature sexualisation of children are evident in recent media stories regarding sexualised products such as thong underwear, padded bras and ‘Lingerie Barbie’ being directed at pre-teen girls or ‘tweens’ aged 10 to 13 (Meryment 2002; Needham 2002; Roffman 2002) and the sexualised marketing of teenage pop stars (Zuel 2002).

Adolescent sexuality is often seen in terms of its undesirable, deviant or risky nature (Moore & Rosenthal 1998, p. 35). Sexual activity in an individual’s teenage years is typically portrayed as uncontrollable, risky and potentially calamitous (Levine 2002, pp. 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, p. 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, p. xxxiii) notes, ‘Sex among [Australia’s] youths, like sex among its adults, is too often neither gender-egalitarian, nor pleasurable, nor safe.’ In addition, moral panics are unhelpful in responding to the issues of physical and emotional health which *are* faced by children and adolescents.

While community and government concerns about young people’s exposure to pornography have diverse sources, they are prompted in part by five genuine shifts in young people’s sexual lives over the last few decades, and by profound changes in the cultural environment in which all of us dwell. First, children in Western countries are now starting puberty and adolescence earlier and staying in it for longer than ever before. The average age of puberty is now ten to ten and a half for girls, and eleven and a half to twelve for boys (Roker and Coleman 1998, pp. 4-5). Second, the average age of first intercourse has declined. Twenty per cent of year 10 students and 48 per cent of year 12 students in Australia have had sexual intercourse, and higher percentages have experienced passionate kissing and sexual touching (Lindsay, Smith & Rosenthal 1997, pp. 9, 25). At the same time, average ages of first intercourse and levels of sexual experience vary with class, education, location (urban versus rural), religiosity, and ethnicity.

Third, there has been a generational change in sexual ‘styles’. Younger people engage in a significantly wider variety of sexual behaviours than older people, including oral sex and heterosexual anal intercourse (Moore and Rosenthal 1998, pp. 47-48). Fourth, young people now have a greater number of sexual partners, and over a lifetime will have a substantially greater number of partners than did their parents (Moore and Rosenthal 1998, p. 50). However, Australian research among secondary students shows a slight decline in numbers of sexual partners over 1992 to 1997. For example, in 1997 over 50 per cent of year 12 males and over 60 per cent of year 12 females had only one partner in the last 12 months (Lindsay, Smith & Rosenthal 1997, p. 29).

Finally, in the last thirty years a positive and supportive gay and lesbian community and culture have emerged, offering safe spaces for the expression and exploration of same-sex desires, practices, relations and identities. Australian surveys have shown that about one in ten secondary school students is *not* exclusively heterosexual, and is sexually

attracted either to the same sex only or to both sexes.³ At the same time, owing to financial, geographical, social or legal reasons, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender adolescents have less access than adults to non-heterosexual communities for support.

Today's children are growing up in a cultural environment which is vastly different from that experienced by their parents and grandparents as children. Late twentieth-century Western cultures saw a proliferation of sexual imagery and an explosion of popular sexual debate (Levine 2002, p. 4). Contemporary youth experience levels of 'sexualisation' in society higher than ever before, in the form of sexualised media representations and everyday interactions (Goldman 2000, p. 11). The frequency and explicitness of sexual content in mainstream media has increased steadily. For example, a 2002 study found that 82 per cent of American teenagers' favourite primetime programs contain sexual content, with an average number of seven scenes per hour displaying sexual content (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, pp. 147-150). While sexual speech and behaviour have long been around for children to witness, children now move in a 'hypermediated' environment in which pictures and words have unprecedented cultural influence (Levine 2002, pp. 4-5).

The mass media plays a powerful role in the socialisation of children and adolescents (Goldman 2000, p. 16). In fact, the media may be particularly important in shaping young people's sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours in that they have limited access to other sources of sexual information. Parents seldom provide detailed information and communicate about sexuality-related topics only with difficulty, while school sexuality education often focuses on the biology of reproduction and neglects sexual behaviour, romance and interpersonal relations. Children and adolescents are thus forced to rely largely on peers and mass media (Huston, Wartella & Donnerstein 1998, p. 6, 13). Our own research focuses on the two forms of media which are particularly important sources of young people's exposure to pornography, videos and the Internet. Examining the latter is especially important given the American evidence that children and adolescents are spending more time with computers and less with television, and that the Internet is catching up to television as the most commonly used medium (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 306).

X-rated videos and 'adult' websites on the Internet are hardly the only sources of young people's encounters with sexually explicit representations, given the increasing sexualisation of mainstream media. In fact, one can argue that we are witnessing an increasingly pornographic mass culture, a 'pornographication of the mainstream' (McNair 1996, p. 23). There is an increased testing and blurring of boundaries between pornography and mainstream media and artistic representations, an incorporation of the language and visual codes of pornography in mainstream media, and endless 'sex talk' in popular culture (Attwood 2002, p. 98). One criticism of feminist anti-pornography efforts is that they neglect other equally problematic cultural representations of women (Campbell 1988, p. 161) and that pornography is only a small subset of the sexist and

³ A survey of 3000 young people in years 10 and 12 from every State and Territory in Australia found that 8-9 per cent said that they had experienced sexual attraction to the same sex. Three per cent were attracted only to people of the same sex (Lindsay, Smith & Rosenthal 1997, p. 27). Similarly, a survey of 1200 young people aged between 14 and 16 years in Australian country towns found that 11 per cent said that they had experienced sexual attraction to the same sex (Hillier, Warr & Haste 1996; Dempsey, Hillier & Harrison 2001).

violent imagery pervading our culture and media (Strossen 1995, p. 261; McNair 1996, p. 82). We acknowledge that representations which may be harmful to children and adolescents are plentiful outside pornography, but focus on pornography because it is at the centre of contemporary debates regarding youth and sexually explicit representations.

Community attitudes to the exposure of children to sexualised and sexually explicit representations are diverse and entrenched. There are at least three clusters of opinion. Among moral conservatives, defenders of ‘traditional family values’ argue that pornography and other sexual content in media have a deeply corrupting effect on youth. Libertarians may be supportive of protection of children from exposure to pornography but argue there is no evidence to suggest that this exposure is damaging (Berger, Searles & Cottle 1991, pp. 17-22). Many feminist advocates argue that pornography plays a causal role in men’s sexual violence against women and that young people’s consumption of pornography is associated with increased tolerance for and commission of rape. Other feminist advocates are sceptical about these claims and critical of the censorship-based strategies, among others, with which they are associated.

This report begins by assessing children’s actual exposure to sexually explicit materials, both accidental and deliberate, including new evidence on exposure to X-rated videos and Internet sex sites from a survey of children aged 16 and 17 (Section 2). The report then gives a detailed account of what young people are likely to see, the content of X-rated videos and Internet pornography (Section 3). Finally, it documents the harms to young people that may be associated with exposure to pornography (Section 4). Our companion report, *Regulating Youth Access to Pornography* (Australia Institute Discussion Paper Number 53), proposes a new strategy designed to lessen young people’s exposure to pornography and to minimise its harmful effects when exposure does occur.

2. Exposure of youth to pornography

There is very little data on patterns of exposure to pornography among Australian young people. Our study provides invaluable information on the extent of minors' exposure to sexually explicit material in both X-rated videos and Internet pornography. We begin however with a discussion of young people's paths to exposure. We then outline existing data on children's and adults' consumption of pornography, before describing the results of our own survey.

2.1 Paths to exposure

Young people can be exposed to pornographic material either deliberately or accidentally, and the distinction between these two paths is critical in understanding young people's encounters with pornography. First, children may deliberately seek and view sexually explicit materials. They seek such material for a variety of reasons including curiosity, interest in sexual and reproductive health, interest in information which may benefit their sexual and interpersonal relations, and a desire for sexual arousal and stimulation. Such motivations for consumption of pornography overlap with those of adults. Minors may look for, borrow, steal, or (illegally) hire or purchase pornographic magazines, videos, and films, or may persuade older people to hire or purchase videos on their behalf. On the Internet, minors may search for sexually explicit material using a search engine, go to a particular web site, ask in a chat room for sexually explicit pictures, visit a chat room focused on sexual dialogue, or sign up to a mailing list which sends out sexually explicit images.

Second, young people are exposed to pornography through accidental or inadvertent means. Minors may stumble across pornographic magazines and videos which are the property of older family members such as brothers and fathers or which have been discarded. And on the Internet in particular, it is easy for children and indeed all Internet users inadvertently to encounter pornography, or to be exposed to pornography by the deliberate and intrusive actions of others (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 136-138). Paths to exposure on the Internet are discussed in greater detail below. In our discussion then, the term 'exposure' refers to both deliberate and inadvertent, voluntary and involuntary, viewing of pornography. The terms 'use' and 'consumption' of pornography refer only to forms of deliberate exposure.

Legally, minors' lack of access to sexually explicit materials is very clear. Individuals under 18 years of age cannot purchase or view R- and X-rated films and videos and publications which are 'Category 1 restricted' or 'Category 2 restricted', and neither children nor adults can view 'Refused Classification' materials. In R-rated depictions, sexual activity can be realistically simulated, and nudity in a sexual context is allowed but should not include obvious genital contact. X-rated movies contain 'real depictions of actual sexual intercourse and other sexual activity between consenting adults' (OFLC 2000, pp. 12-14). Nevertheless, minors do gain access to X-rated materials, particularly through informal patterns of exchange and discovery. Children and adolescents may accidentally discover or deliberately search for the pornography collections of older family members, may be deliberately introduced to such materials by older friends and others, and may persuade older individuals to hire or purchase videos on their behalf (as occurs with alcohol). The commercial hire or sale of X-rated videos to minors is

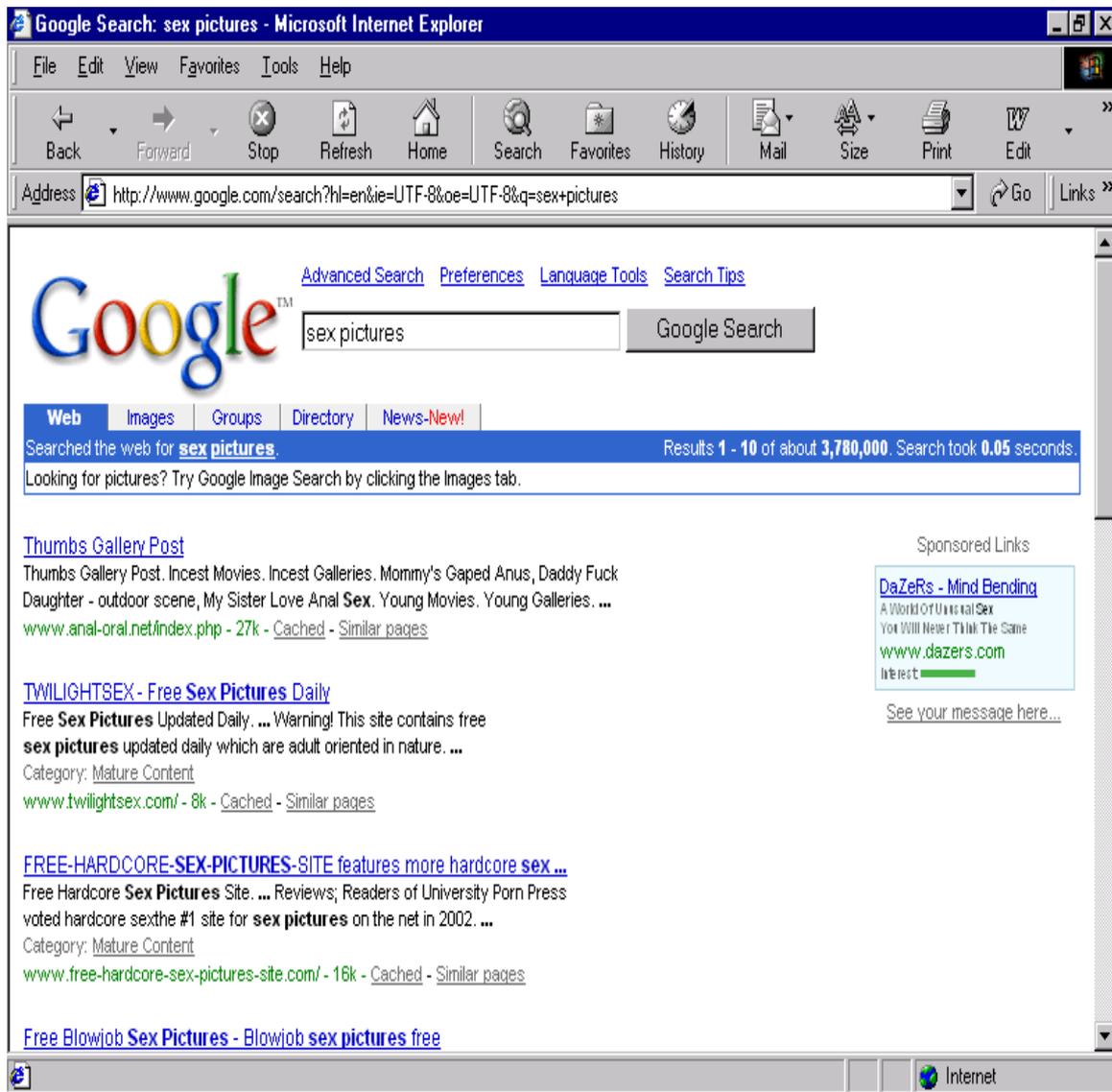
probably rare, given the financial penalties for retailers and high political costs for the pornography industry as a whole. Nevertheless, sales to older children may occur. Staff of at least one Canberra adult outlet report that they may sell X-rated materials to people who appear to be 18 or older, who drive to the store (although one can gain a driver's license at 17), or who are married (although one can marry at 16 with parental agreement).

In contrast, it is child's play to find sexually explicit materials on the Internet. It is far easier for a minor to gain deliberate access or be inadvertently exposed to Internet pornography compared to other pornographic media because of three distinct characteristics of Internet pornography. First, sexually explicit material is available free in large quantities. The Internet includes sources carrying pornographic material for commercial purposes, and the commercial online adult entertainment industry offers a very wide range of content. Commercial websites routinely include free images which are 'teasers' for paid subscriptions to gain access to, or be regularly e-mailed, further images (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 128-129). Collections amassed by individuals are another common source of free images; these can be collected electronically, scanned from printed publications or personally produced and placed on a website. Many websites include long lists of numerous links to other websites containing free pictures. One estimate identifies that 70 to 80 per cent of adult material online is carried on free sites (Rosoff 1999). Further noncommercial carriers include individuals sharing pictures online, bulletin boards and newsgroups containing sexually explicit material, chat rooms and instant messages involving 'cybersex' (online dialogue centred on sexual interaction), personal profiles and web pages. Sexually explicit images can also be found on the websites of companies with a bricks-and-mortar presence off the Internet, such as those advertising lingerie (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 129-130).

Children have sought out and found sexual material for a long time but today 'the process is easier, faster, more anonymous, and likely to bring to the computer screen anything a child wants' (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, pp. 308-309). A sexually curious child can type in sexual words and word combinations in a search engine and will be given a list of literally thousands of sites in response. The child can then easily gain access to the sites listed. To illustrate, a search for 'sex pictures' using the popular search engine Google yields over three million web sites in 0.05 seconds. Figure 1 shows the first four results. They include reference to incest, anal sex and fellatio ('blow jobs').

The Internet is an ideal environment for pornography as it is an excellent medium for the storage, display and transfer of images and text. Users can gain easy and affordable access to pornographic materials across geographic boundaries and age groups, they can view pornographic materials in anonymity, they can select and customise the materials they wish to download, they can store images discreetly and conceal them from others, and in 'cybersex' they have some protection from the risks involved in face-to-face sexual interactions (Lo & Wei 2002, p. 30).

Figure 1 Listing of Sex Picture Sites From Google



Lack of money may prevent children from gaining access to pornographic videos and magazines. Yet they can spend hours wandering online through a vast collection of free images and video clips. Given the high degree of interconnectivity among adult websites, it is simple to move (or be pushed) across networks of pornographic sites (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 73). As a report on MSNBC News noted:

Virtually every adult site — whether operated by a Webmaster with a single home page or a company with thousands of domains — is connected in a vast traffic-sharing vortex. In most cases, the smaller portals redirect potential customers to ‘pay sites’ operated by big companies with large libraries of content. Those big players, in turn, pay small operators for any sales that result from the traffic that they directed to them (Brunker 2000a).

The second reason that children are easily exposed to online pornography is that there are virtually no age-related barriers to access. It is straightforward for any individual of any age with access to an Internet-linked computer to view such material. Three-quarters of commercial pornographic websites display adult content on the first page, where anyone can access it, often through sexually explicit ads for other sites. Only one-third of such websites offer a notice indicating that the viewer is entering an 'adult' site (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 78). Typical notices read, 'You must be 18 or older to continue,' or state that by clicking on the 'Enter' button and entering the website the viewer is affirming that they are of a legal age to view the material within. However, there is no mechanism that prevents a minor from entering the site, other than that person's own sense of lawfulness. Moreover, many sexually explicit websites offer links directly to free images on other websites and thus bypass any warnings which may be offered on the opening pages of those sites. A more substantive age-related barrier to access is represented by age-verification software. Some pornographic websites require that the viewer provide verification of their adult status, using either a credit card number (on the assumption that only adults have these) or programs such as 'Adult Check'. However, only 3 per cent of commercial adult sites require a credit card number or other 'adult check' to proceed past the first page of the site; most allow the user to take a 'free preview' of additional pornographic content (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 79).

Young people's exposure to Internet pornography is facilitated by a third feature of the medium – its indiscriminate and sometimes coercive relationship to potential consumers. An individual viewing 'softcore' pornographic websites will find that they are frequently subject to 'pop-ups', windows that appear unsolicited on their computer screen, advertising and offering links to other pornographic websites or inviting them to download content from other sites. Internet pornography is indiscriminate in the sense that the advertising in pornographic 'pop-ups' is typically 'hardcore', regardless of what kind of material the computer user has been viewing. Thus, a 15-year-old boy intentionally viewing a collection of softcore 'centrefold' images will find himself invited to visit far more sexually explicit sites.

Internet pornography is coercive in three ways: the use of pop-up advertising and traffic forwarding, 'spam' e-mails, and the manipulation of search-engine processes to maximise traffic to adult sites. 'Pop-ups' appear uninvited: multiple windows appear in quick succession, more opening as the viewer closes them, and it can be difficult to shut these windows and avoid going to the site being promoted unless one turns off the computer or Internet link altogether. 'Pop-ups' are hardly exclusive to the Internet marketing of pornography but their use in this context means that consumers are exposed to sexually explicit materials which they have not chosen to view. Adult websites often use the method of 'traffic forwarding' or 'mousetrapping' where the user is forwarded automatically and involuntarily to another site, while 25 per cent of commercial sites incorporate devices to hinder the user from leaving them (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 75-79). Similar strategies are used with electronic mail where individuals receive unsolicited commercial e-mails or 'spam' promoting pornographic websites or sending pornographic images themselves. A U.S. study by the Spam Recycling Center attributed a third of all 'spam' to pornography sites (Brunker 2000b). (Advertisers of pornographic websites will even employ electronic strategies to alter a user's starting page on the Internet, as this researcher found when his starting page

somehow was changed from the Australian National University homepage to the page for 'teenslut.com'.) Advertisers have little incentive to attract children to their sites from the standpoint of securing paying customers as most children will not have the ability to pay. However, by displaying ads for other adult sites, web site owners can make money in three ways: for each display of the ad, for each 'click' on the ad, and for each actual subscription to the other site. Most adult web sites operate on the first two models, so they have little incentive to differentiate between adult and child viewers (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 76).

Box 1 summarises young people's paths to exposure to Internet pornography.

Box 1 Some Paths for Deliberate and Inadvertent Exposure to Sexually Explicit Material on the Internet

Deliberate Exposure

- Searching for sexually explicit terms in a search engine and clicking on the links returned.
- Receiving e-mail with sexually orientated content after subscribing to a mailing list known to provide such content.
- Going deliberately to a Web site that the user is told contains sexually explicit material.
- Trading sexually explicit stories and images among friends and acquaintances through e-mail and other forms of online interaction.

Inadvertent Exposure

- Receiving unsolicited e-mail containing sexually explicit material or links to such material.
- Improperly guessing the address of a website and receiving inappropriate material as a result.
- Searching for terms with both sexual and non-sexual meaning in a search engine and clicking on the links returned some of which may contain sexually orientated material.
- Mistyping a request for information or the address of a Web site.
- Clicking on a link without really knowing what is to be expected at the site to which the link refers.

(Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 139)

The majority of Australian adults (61 per cent) have access to the Internet, and according to parents just over half (52 per cent) of children aged 17 years and younger have access, including 86 per cent of children aged 13 to 18 years. In 2001, just under a third of Australians had the Internet connected at home (Aisbett 2001, pp. 2-4). Children tend to be heavier users than their parents, more knowledgeable, and often use

the Internet with little parental control and minimal supervision (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 307). Thus most children have access to the Internet, further facilitating access to pornography.

Given the nature of access to the Internet compared to other media, it is not surprising that the majority (71 per cent) of Australian parents are more concerned about content available to their children via the Internet than via other media (Aisbett 2001, p. 42). Parents base this greater concern on their perception that there is less regulation of the Internet, it is harder to judge the suitability of content as it is not classified, access to unsuitable content is easy, monitoring and control of children's use is difficult, there are no time constraints on access (unlike television broadcast policy), and children may interact with undesirable others. This does not mean however that parents necessarily support content restrictions or censorship and many emphasise other strategies such as parental supervision (Aisbett 2001, pp. 42-44).

Although this discussion focuses on children's exposure to or consumption of pornography on the Internet and in X-rated videos, we should note that use of the Internet brings other dangers for children. In interacting online with others, young people may be subject to personal attacks, unwanted or inappropriate sexual advances, or recruitment into vulnerable sexual situations.⁴ The Internet is a new medium for the enactment of old forms of emotional and sexual child abuse, including the recruitment of children for sexual purposes, child pornography, paedophile advocacy, the promotion of child sex tourism, and the commercial exploitation of children through online advertising (Stanley 2001). At the same time, the Internet is an extraordinarily valuable, and indeed essential, educational tool for children and young people.

2.2 How much pornography?

There is an enormous number and an extraordinary variety of pornographic materials in circulation in Australia, as in other Western cultures. The production and consumption of pornography represents a mammoth global industry with substantial financial and cultural weight. Mass-produced commercial pornography began with the rise of magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (Dines 1998). Its expansion was greatly fuelled in the 1970s and 1980s with the dramatic explosion of video, and the current era of the Internet is extending yet further pornography's global reach and earning power (Barron & Kimmel 2000, p. 165). At the same time, estimates of the size and earnings of the pornography industry vary widely. Initial reports of the high prevalence of sexually explicit material on the Internet, particularly Rimm's (1995) study and the *Time* magazine front-cover article by Elmer-Dewitt (1995) which took this up, have since been roundly criticised (Hoffman & Novak 1995). Public discussions of Internet pornography have sometimes been driven as much by moral panic or commercial self-interest as by sound empirical research and careful analysis. Fisher and Barak (2001, p. 314) argue for caution, if not downright scepticism, regarding some claims proffered about the money made in the pornography

⁴ This is not to argue that all young people's online sexual interactions are dangerous. Young people also engage in mutually enjoyable exchanges of explicit sexual dialogue. Particularly for same-sex-attracted young people, the Internet has proved to be a crucial resource for finding one other and establishing both online and offline communities and relationships (Hillier, Kurdas & Horsley 2001).

industry,⁵ the frequency of visits to and search for pornographic sites on the Internet, and the proportions of Internet traffic and e-commerce accounted for by sexual material.

With these caveats in mind, how big is the pornography industry, particularly in relation to adult videos and Internet sites? Over 10,000 hardcore video titles were released in the U.S. in each of 1999 and 2000, according to the website for the special issue on pornography of the American documentary series Frontline, which used data from the pornography industry 'bible' *Adult Video News*. Video stores in the U.S. carrying both adult and general release stock between 300 and 800 adult titles (Frontline 2002). The website 'Internet Adult Film Database' has reviews of 40,023 adult video and DVD titles. In Australia, 640,000 people are on adult video mailing lists, and there are about 250 adult shops in operation, according to Australia's adult industry lobby group, the Eros Foundation (2002a).

With respect to Internet pornography, there are over 100,000 subscription sites with adult content in the U.S., and about 400,000 for-pay adult sites globally (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 72).⁶ Adult-orientated sites account for only about 1.5 per cent of total content on the World Wide Web but they account for significantly more Web traffic. For example, each week 70 million individuals around the world view at least one adult Web site (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 72).

In addition, Internet pornography is only one aspect of a range of sexuality-related exchanges and materials online, which include chat room interactions, personal web pages and online manifestations of the sex industry. These broader fields are not the focus of this report.

2.3 Existing data on children's exposure

It is clear that children and adolescents are routinely exposed to pornography, and that one significant source of this exposure is the Internet, although there is relatively little data thus far on patterns of this exposure in Australia. According to a study by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, in Internet-using households with children under 18, close to half of 11-17 year olds have seen or experienced something on the Internet which they thought was offensive or disgusting, and pornography was the material most commonly cited (Aisbett 2001, p. 41). Similar patterns of inadvertent and troubling exposure are evident among adult Internet users.⁷ Measurement of exposure to pornography based on self-reports is complicated by diverse understandings of what 'pornography' is (Bryant & Brown 1989, p. 52). Where surveys do not define this term, one can assume though that those who report encountering or viewing 'pornography'

⁵ Several recent pieces in the U.S. media described total sales by the American pornography industry as \$10 billion per year, but others argue that the figure is between \$2.6 and \$3.9 billion per year (Richard 2002; Ackman 2001).

⁶ Other sources give diverse estimates. A report for MSNBC News gives a figure of 30,000 to 40,000 adult websites (Brunker 2000a). Lo and Wei (2002, p. 13) state that there are 300 new sites per day and a total of 170,000 sites. Danowski and Choi (2001, p. 47) estimate over 12 million head page addresses.

⁷ Among negative Internet experiences, the most common related to exposure to pornography expressed by 14 per cent of Internet users. Qualitative analysis among 310 Internet-using households with children under 18 found that one-quarter of adults had encountered distasteful content, with pornography causing the most concern (Aisbett 2001, p. 40).

have some sexually orientated concept in mind, even if that concept varies from person to person (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 133).

American research among children finds similar levels of unwanted exposure to sexually explicit content on the Internet. According to a study by the Crimes Against Children Research Center, 25 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 reported having had at least one unwanted exposure to sexual pictures in the last year while another found even higher levels of exposure among older youth. A 2001 study found that 31 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 with a computer at home had seen a 'pornographic' web site, in some cases by accident. The figure was higher for older users where 45 per cent of those aged 14 to 17 had seen such a site, compared with 15 per cent of those aged 10 to 13 (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 132-133). In the Kaiser Family Foundation study *Generation Rx.com* (2001), of the 95 per cent of 15 to 17 year-olds who had ever gone online, 70 per cent had accidentally stumbled across pornography, including 23 per cent 'very' or 'somewhat' often.

Data on adult web sites themselves provide further evidence of children's exposure to pornography. Nearly 16 per cent of visitors to adult-orientated web sites in February 2002 were under the age of 18 (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 78). Traffic on some adult sites comprises 20 to 30 per cent children, and even sites using adult verification systems experience traffic that is five per cent children (although this may be reduced to two per cent as screening improves).

Young people may also deliberately seek out sexually explicit or pornographic material and they are increasingly likely to use the Internet to do so. In the survey by the Crimes Against Children Research Center above, eight per cent of youths aged 10-17 had sought out X-rated Internet sites (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 138). The report's authors state that this is likely to be an understatement of the true number. A study of 750 American youths aged 12 to 17 found that 15 per cent had lied about their age to access a Web site, an act often used to gain access to pornography sites. This included one fifth (19 per cent) of all boys, and 25 per cent of boys aged 15 to 17 (Lenhart, Rainie & Lewis 2001, p. 33).

According to a recent survey of French children, nearly half had seen an adults-only sex-related film by the time they were 11, and by the age 16 or 17, 89 per cent of boys and 81 per cent of girls had seen a pornographic film (Henley 2002). Among 522 African-American females aged 14 to 18 in the U.S., 30 per cent had seen at least one X-rated film and 89 per cent had seen an R-rated film within the past 3 months (Wingwood et al. 2001). A Swedish study found that 30 per cent of adolescent boys and 3 per cent of adolescent girls were watching pornography at least once a week (Forsberg 2001, p. 161). A study in the early 1990s found that of 16 popular R-rated films, 53 per cent to 77 per cent of ninth and tenth graders had seen most of them (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 184, citing Greenberg et al. 1993).

In general, boys are more interested than girls in visual depictions and more likely to view online adult-orientated sexually explicit material (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 158-159). North American research suggests that among minors, adolescent males are especially likely to be regular consumers of pornography such as adult videos, while adolescent females find sexual content elsewhere and are less likely to seek out sexually explicit materials. A study of 275 Canadian teenagers with an average age of 14 found

that nine out of ten boys (90 per cent) and six out of ten girls (60 per cent) had ‘watched pornography’ (with the survey listing as prompts the further terms ‘sex video, video porn, X-rated, adults-only, movies of people having sex, lots of nudity, naked bodies’) (Check 1995, pp. 89-90). However, one-third of the boys and only two per cent of the girls watched pornography at least once a month. Greenberg, Brown and Buerkel-Rothfuss’s (1993) overview of media use by young people documents that high school boys see more R-rated movies than girls, have fewer rules about watching TV and face less parental control over movie choices. They say in summary:

American adolescent girls appear to have their primary media sex experiences in the soaps, in girls’ confession and advice magazines, and in the music they listen to and watch... Adolescent boys seem to wander among a stronger set of sexual content — they seek sex in R-rated movies, in men’s magazines and in music videos and move on to occasional X-rated content (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, p. 75, citing Greenberg, Brown & Buerkel-Rothfuss 1993).

Gender patterns in pornography consumption are also evident among adults in Australia. A Roy Morgan poll in 1999 of 1009 adults found that over one-fifth had accessed X-rated films and videos (22 per cent) or erotic magazines, books and other publications (20 per cent) (Eros Foundation 2002b). Most men watch X-rated videos alone while two-thirds of women watch with an intimate male partner. Men use videos more often than women do for masturbation and men take a dominant role in the selection of video purchases and hiring (Potter 1986, pp. 108-119). One in six adult Australians (16 per cent) with Internet access has looked up sites for their sexual content with most reporting that they did so ‘sometimes’ or ‘occasionally’ and only one per cent reporting that they did so ‘quite often’ or ‘all the time’. Males are much more likely than females to use the Internet for looking at sexual content (25 per cent versus six per cent) (Aisbett 2001, pp. 27-28).

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 (Lo and Wei 2002, p. 16; Walsh 1999, p. 779). At the same time, women’s consumption of pornography is receiving growing attention, in both the marketing of pornography and scholarship (Juffer 1998; Lumby 1997, p. 103; Segal 1998, p. 45; Strossen 1995, p. 144). However, image-centered pornographies have not developed mass appeal among women. Even when the content of X-rated videos is developed to appeal specially to women, it appears that female viewers are less sexually aroused, experience more negative and fewer positive emotional responses, and are less absorbed in the experience than male viewers. However, women do respond more positively to such materials than they do to videos intended for men (Mosher & MacJan 1994).⁸

2.4 New evidence: X-rated videos

For this study a special telephone survey was commissioned to determine the extent of children’s exposure to X-rated videos and Internet pornography. The survey was conducted by Newspoll in September 2002 and included 200 respondents (100 boys and

⁸ On the other hand, erotic romance novels attract a widespread female readership.

100 girls) aged 16 to 17 years. Youths younger than 16 could not be interviewed for ethical reasons. The respondents were selected by means of a stratified random sample incorporating quotas set for age and sex. The survey was restricted to Sydney and Melbourne. Half of the respondents had part-time or full-time jobs and 86 per cent were at school. We first describe the results pertaining to X-rated videos, with an analysis of Internet pornography exposure following in Section 2.5.

Respondents were first asked whether they agree or disagree that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst girls and boys of their age. The responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Perceptions of exposure to X-rated videos among youth (%)

Respondent gender	Boys	Girls
Watching X-rated videos is widespread among ...		
Boys	84	84
Girls	15	4

Source: Newspoll

More than four out of five 16-17 year-old boys (84 per cent) believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread among boys of the same age, and girls have exactly the same perception of the extent to which boys watch X-rated videos. Among 16-17 year-old girls, only 4 per cent believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread among girls of the same age. But a substantially higher proportion of boys (15 per cent) believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst girls. Seventeen per cent said that they did not know.

The fact that most 16-17 year-old boys and girls believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread among boys of that age suggests that watching these videos is considered to be normal or at least common behaviour among boys. The normalising of this activity may give it a high degree of social tolerance or acceptability within youth culture.

Boys' over-estimation of girls' consumption of adult videos may reflect the assumption that, since use of pornography is common among boys, it is also common among girls. It may be one aspect of boys' routine over-estimations of levels of sexual activity among male and female peers; for example, many adolescent boys believe that most boys and girls around them are having sex and thus may also assume that most are also consuming pornography. Boys' over-estimation of girls' use of pornography may be a kind of 'wishful thinking' about girls' degree of interest in sexually explicit materials, or the projection of sexualised and even pornographically inspired fantasies about girls and women.

The next question asked in the Newspan survey was: ‘Have you ever watched X-rated videos yourself?’ If the respondent agreed they were then asked: ‘How often would that be?’ The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Exposure to X-rated videos among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	73	11
Every week	5	0
Every 3 to 4 weeks	16	0
Every 2 to 3 months	11	0
Less often	40	11

Source: Newspan. Totals may not add due to rounding.

Just under three-quarters (73 per cent) of boys report that they have watched an X-rated video themselves. One in twenty watch them on a weekly basis while more than a fifth watch an X-rated video at least once a month. Over half of those who watch these videos do so only occasionally. The perception that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst 16-17 year-old boys therefore proves to be accurate, although only around one third watch them on a regular basis (at least once every two to three months).

Among girls, only 11 per cent report that they have watched an X-rated video, all of them less often than once every two to three months. The 15 per cent of boys (and 4 per cent of girls) who believe that watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst 16-17 year old girls are clearly wrong in their assessment.

Our study suggests that of the one in ten 16-17-year-old girls who has ever seen an X-rated video, very few if any are regular consumers. This finding is similar to Canadian research among teenagers with an average age of 14. While 60 per cent of girls had watched pornography (defined in the Canadian study more broadly than in our study’s focus on X-rated videos), only two per cent of the girls watched pornography at least once a month. Typically, girls watched pornography only once, because a boyfriend or somebody wanted them to or because they were curious, and then did not watch again (Check 1995, pp. 89-90). While respondents were not asked how they had come to watch an X-rated video, other research finds that boys and girls follow different paths to exposure. An early American study notes that most females were introduced to X-rated materials by someone else, usually male and usually older. In contrast, while the majority of males were also exposed to pornography for the first time through the encouragement of others, in their case this was more likely to be by friends and other males (92 per cent) (Bryant & Brown 1989, p. 46).

2.5 New evidence: Internet sex sites

The survey asked young people about their exposure to ‘sex sites on the Internet’. Although ‘sex sites’ might be taken to include sites on sexual health and reproduction, the context of the question leaves little doubt that respondents were being asked about pornographic sites.

Access to the Internet either at home or elsewhere is now very widespread among children. Of the respondents to our survey, only two per cent of boys and girls said they never use the Internet. A third use it every day and 84 per cent use it at least once a week (81 per cent for boys and 87 per cent for girls).

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that ‘looking at sex sites on the Internet is widespread among girls/boys of your age’. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Perceptions of use of Internet sex sites among youth (%)

Respondent gender	Boys	Girls
Looking at Internet sex sites is widespread among ...		
Boys	88	83
Girls	16	7

Source: Newspoll

Nearly nine out of ten 16-17 year-old boys (88 per cent) believe that looking at sex sites on the Internet is widespread among boys of the same age, and girls have a similar perception of the extent to which boys look at Internet sex sites (83 per cent). Among 16-17 year-old girls, only seven per cent believe that looking at sex sites on the Internet is widespread among girls of the same age. As in the case of X-rated videos, a substantially higher proportion of boys (16 per cent) believe that looking at Internet sex sites is widespread amongst girls.

There is a little more uncertainty in perceptions about use of Internet sex sites than X-rated videos. While 17 per cent of boys did not know whether watching X-rated videos is widespread amongst girls, 22 per cent were unsure about girls’ use of the Internet. However, uncertainty by boys and girls about boys’ use of both X-rated videos and sex sites was low, as was uncertainty by girls of girls’ use (less than six per cent).

Children’s exposure to Internet pornography may be deliberate or accidental, as discussed above. It is important to distinguish between accidental viewing or inadvertent encountering of sexually explicit materials online and active searching for and looking at such material. Respondents to the survey were first asked, ‘When using the Internet yourself, have you ever seen sex sites accidentally or when you didn’t mean

to?’ They were then asked how often the accidental exposure had occurred. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Accidental exposure to Internet sex sites among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	84	60
Every week	24	7
Every 3 to 4 weeks	22	6
Every 2 to 3 months	11	11
Less often	27	36

Source: Newspann.

Eighty-four per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls say they have been exposed accidentally to sex sites on the Internet. Our results thus replicate other Australian and overseas research which finds that children, adolescents and indeed adults who use the Internet routinely encounter pornography. It is fair to conclude that anyone who uses the Internet extensively has a high probability of coming across sex sites when searching for something else or being sent pornographic links or images via e-mail.

As frequencies of Internet use are very similar for boys and girls, the greater accidental exposure to sex sites of boys may be explained in three ways. First, boys use the Internet deliberately for sex much more than girls do as our study and others document, and boys are therefore likely to have ‘cookies’⁹ stored on their hard-drives facilitating access to sex sites. Second, boys’ patterns of Internet use are different from those of girls: males are more likely than females to ‘surf’ the Internet and to visit games sites while females are more likely to visit communications sites (Aisbett 2001, pp. 28-29). This may bring boys into greater contact with sexually explicit websites. Third, some boys may be willing to admit to accidental exposure but not deliberate searching for sex sites and boys’ greater deliberate use of Internet sex sites may therefore feed into an over-reporting of accidental exposure.

Respondents were then asked, ‘Have you ever searched for or looked at sex sites on the Internet on purpose?’ Those who answered ‘yes’ were asked how often. The results are shown in Table 5.

⁹ Cookies are short-cuts to websites that, when accessed, are stored on a computer’s hard-drive for quicker subsequent access.

Table 5 Deliberate use of Internet sex sites among youth (%)

	Boys	Girls
<i>Total</i>	38	2
Every week	4	0
Every 3 to 4 weeks	7	0
Every 2 to 3 months	11	0
Less often	16	2

Source: Newspoll

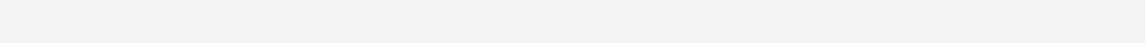
It is apparent that nearly four in ten (38 per cent) of 16-17 year-old boys admit to searching the Internet for sex sites. Only four per cent say they use the Internet for this purpose on a weekly basis, but nearly a quarter of boys (22 per cent) access Internet sex sites at least every two or three months.

Among girls, only two per cent say that they have deliberately sought out Internet sex sites, and these girls have done so only very occasionally. The figure of two per cent of girls who have *deliberately* sought out sex sites stands in stark contrast to the 60 per cent of girls who have had *accidental* exposure to explicit sex on the Internet. Internet users who have no interest in sex sites therefore find it difficult to avoid seeing the images displayed on these sites.

The survey did not explore the circumstances of boys' and girls' viewing of X-rated videos and Internet pornography. However, research among adults finds that men are much more likely than women to watch videos alone, while women are more likely to watch with a intimate male partner. Also, men are more likely than women to watch videos with same-sex friends, although most do not (Potter 1986, pp. 108-109). If children's deliberate use of pornography is similar to that among adults, then it will be more common for boys to view X-rated videos and sexually explicit websites either by themselves or in groups of male peers, and more common for the minority of girls who do look at pornographic videos and websites to do so with a boyfriend or occasionally with peers.

The survey results indicate that use of X-rated videos by 16-17 year-olds is more prevalent than use of sex sites on the Internet. While 73 per cent of boys say they have watched X-rated videos, 38 per cent admit to accessing Internet sex sites. Among girls, the figures are 11 per cent for videos and 2 per cent for Internet sex sites. This is surprising as access to the Internet is much easier than access to X-rated videos. There may be an element of self-censorship among young people as Internet sex is known to feature extreme and 'deviant' sexual practices which some young people may find disturbing or offensive. In addition, it may be felt that since X-rated videos are officially approved for adult use it is acceptable for those who see themselves as near adulthood to view them.

The figures in our study are likely to understate the true incidence of pornography consumption. Even though the telephone survey was anonymous and confidentiality was guaranteed to the participants, some respondents may have been reluctant to admit to these activities or concerned that their anonymity would not be protected.



3. What young people see: The content of pornography

When a 16-year-old boy or girl views a pornographic website or watches an X-rated video, what are they likely to see? This section provides a description and commentary on the content of X-rated videos and Internet sex sites. While this discussion concentrates on these two specific forms of pornographic media it has a broader applicability to pornography in general.

3.1 Softcore versus hardcore

One way to describe the content of pornography is to categorise it in terms of the degree of sexual explicitness involved, as evident in the common distinction between ‘softcore’ and ‘hardcore’ pornography. In Australia,¹⁰ ‘softcore’ typically refers to pictures of female (or male) nudity or semi-nudity (but not photos of labia or erect penises), and also to descriptions or implicit pictures of sexual activity. ‘Hardcore’ refers to pictures of sexual activity in which a sexual act (such as vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse or oral sex) is explicitly depicted, and erect penises, ejaculation or female labia are visible. This division is roughly similar to that used by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) for printed publications, films, and videos. Thus the lay description ‘softcore’ is similar to the OFLC classification ‘Category 1 restricted’ (for printed matter) and ‘R’ (for films), although some films showing nudity may be classified as ‘MA’ (restricted to viewing by persons 15 and older) or ‘M’ (not recommended for viewing by persons under 15). The lay description ‘hardcore’ is similar to the OFLC classification ‘Category 2 restricted’ (for printed matter) and ‘X’ (for films). However, the boundary between ‘softcore’ and ‘hardcore’ materials quickly breaks down, for both legal and practical reasons, once we turn our attention to the Internet. In addition, Internet pornography includes representations that would be classified by the OFLC as ‘RC’ or ‘Refused Classification’ and that therefore cannot be shown in commercially available adult videos and print publications in Australia. Both these points are addressed in the section below.

The majority of X-rated videos are focused on heterosexual sex. A typical two- or four-hour video will show a series of scenarios, each lasting for anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour. In each scenario, the participants engage in a sequence of sexual acts, with common practices including kissing, sexual touching, masturbation, fellatio, vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and cunnilingus. In both heterosexual and gay male pornography, narrative and aesthetic content is minimised in favour of sexual explicitness, although there is said to be more kissing, caressing, and frottage (body rubbing) in gay male than heterosexual videos (Thomas 2000, pp. 53-56).

3.2 Female bodies and male viewers

One of the most obvious features of pornography, whether in print, on video, or online, is that the majority of images are of women or of male-female sexual activity. In pornography, women are ‘continually repositioned, passively, as object, icon and fetish

¹⁰ There are cultural differences in the framing of the division in that American and European popular accounts include depictions of oral and genital sex in ‘softcore’ while ‘hardcore’ refers to minority sexual practices such as anal sex (Thompson 1994, p. 3).

of male desire' (Segal 1998, p. 46). The majority of women photographed or filmed in pornography are young, slim and stereotypically attractive. Of course such norms of feminine beauty and youth, celebrated in Internet pornography's categorisations of 'pornstars', 'models', 'babes', and 'teens', are shared with mainstream media imagery. At the same time, female models in pornography often have larger breasts, buttocks and more 'curves' than the models typically featured in mainstream women's magazines or fashion modeling. While there are magazines, videos, and websites focused on larger or older women, these are marked by their deviation from powerful norms of beauty and youth. Such variations

generally serve to reinforce rather than to genuinely diversify the conventional range of patriarchal preferences being asserted, enacted, imagined, and fantasized in and through pornography (Chancer 1998, p. 78).

Pornography also fetishises large breasts and teenage women, with many Internet sites and other adult media focused on these.

Most pornographic imagery is directed at a heterosexual male audience as is evident in the subject matter, codes of representation and modes of address. The majority of pornography centres either on images of naked or semi-naked women or on images of women and men in heterosexual sexual activity. This is not contradicted by the fact that common representations in pornography include images of two or more men engaged in sexual activity with the one woman, sexual activity between two women and one man and other sexual interactions involving multiple participants. Thus, typical practices depicted in X-rated videos and in Internet pornography also include 'double penetration' (where two men simultaneously have vaginal and anal intercourse with the one woman), one woman kneeling between two or more men and practising fellatio on each in turn, and one woman engaged simultaneously in vaginal and/or anal intercourse with one man or two men and fellatio with a second or third man. Such representations are still typically aimed at a heterosexual male audience. For example, in images showing two or more men engaged in sexual activity with a woman or women, the men's sexual activity is exclusively heterosexual and never directed towards each other. Representations of female-female sex are common in pornographic videos aimed at heterosexual men, where two or more women are shown engaged in mutual sexual activity, either exclusively or prior to sex with men, but these are more accurately described as scenes of 'women performing for male viewing' rather than of 'lesbian' sex (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 73).

Pornography's typical codes of representation are further demonstration of its appeal to a male heterosexual audience. Despite much talk in the adult sex industry of a 'couples market' for heterosexual pornography, the typical viewer is assumed to be a man. In mainstream heterosexual X-rated videos, the

representational conventions of pornography are geared towards the presentation and maximum visibility of the female body, particularly the vagina, compared with an almost complete lack of concern for the male body (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 75).

The camera typically focuses on the display of the woman's breasts or vagina, her labia often are held open, and both the sexual activity and the camera positioning are

arranged to facilitate maximum visibility of the female body and genitals (Jensen & Dines 1998, pp. 75-76). Men's bodies are not presented, scrutinised or routinely objectified in this way, except of course in gay male pornography. Pornographic imagery focuses relentlessly on acts of penetration and on vaginal and anal intercourse and fellatio, and the camera often moves in to fill the screen with images of genitals in contact and then out again. Women are the focus and men are supporting characters, and in fact, men's lesser roles and lower salaries in heterosexual pornography have led some male performers to turn to gay videos (Thomas 2000, p. 61). Some camera angles place the viewer in the position of the male participant in the sex depicted, inviting identification with him, such as looking down his torso from head height at a woman performing fellatio or directly above the woman with whom he is having intercourse. Women's clothing is often fetishistic and serves to maximise the visibility of their bodies. Male-centered constructions of sex are also visible in the contrasting treatment of cunnilingus and fellatio in adult videos: scenes of the former are short and show unresponsive men, while scenes of fellatio are prolonged and show women who appear highly sexually aroused (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 77).

Two sexual practices, extravaginal ejaculation and anal intercourse, have become staples in heterosexual pornography. Both are depicted in nearly all X-rated videos and are important genres in Internet pornography. It is standard practice in heterosexual pornography for the male partner to withdraw from intercourse or fellatio before orgasm to ejaculate on to the body or face of his female partner (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 78-79; McClintock 1992, pp. 123-124; Monk-Turner & Purcell 1999, p. 64). Images of male ejaculation are commonly described as 'cumshots', while the sub-genre 'facials' refers to images of men ejaculating on to women's faces and women's faces covered in semen. Male-female anal intercourse is a second, almost mandatory, inclusion in pornographic depictions of heterosexual sex. Its depiction became increasingly common in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such that the majority of scenes in contemporary X-rated heterosexual videos now include it (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 80)

In mass-marketed heterosexual pornography,

sex is divorced from intimacy, loving affection, and human connection; all women are constantly available for sex and have insatiable sexual appetites; and all women are sexually satisfied by whatever the men in the film do (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 72).

X-rated videos are preoccupied with a 'narrative of female nymphomania and male sexual prowess'. Typically women are shown as constantly orgasmic, while the male participants show little reaction to sex (which is ironic given male orgasm is visible in the form of ejaculation while 'evidence' of female pleasure is unclear) (Jensen & Dines 1998, pp. 77-78). In more homemade-style videos, however, women may not always portray this orgasmic state and sometimes show apparent expressions of fear or pain (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 78).

In both adult videos and pornographic websites, one of the most common and substantial genres focuses on young women. Among X-rated videos available for rent in commercial adult stores in Canberra, common numbered series include 'Kinky Teens,' 'Teenerama,' 'Seventeen,' 'Barely Legal,' 'Schoolgirls,' 'Teen Vision,' and 'Teen Toys.' (See below for series focused on other topics.) Printed pornographic magazines

include similar specialisations.¹¹ An analysis of adult videos notes the sexualisation of gendered age differences in depictions of sexual relations between young women in their twenties and men over forty or fifty. In Max Hardcore's *Cherry Poppers* series, women who appear to be in their twenties are portrayed as children by means of clothing and hair styles (bows in hair, pigtails, knee socks, frilly dresses, school uniforms and so on), they are more slightly built with smaller breasts and they are depicted receiving sexual instruction and their first sexual experience from Max, in his forties (Jensen & Dines 1998: 88). On the Internet as well, pornographic websites focused on 'teens' are common. For example, one website lists pictures available under the categories 'Teen blowjobs, Teen facials, Teen hardcore, Teen blonde, Teen brunette, Teen latina, Teen fat, Teen lesbian, Teen redhead, Teen toys.' Some 'teen' websites emphasise themes of sexual predation such as the opening page for the site 'innocent.com':

Your neighbor's daughter uncensored! You are seconds away from watching true Amateur Teens totally nude and spreading their young Twats! Some even get fucked!

Other websites include photos taken of teenage girls and young women at parties or on the beach, 'drunk galleries' and other images seemingly procured without the subjects' consent.

There is diversity in the social standing of, and meanings applied to, the women pictured in pornography. Some adult video companies specialise in films starring pornography's 'celebrities', the female (and sometimes male) 'pornstars' known for their X-rated work and sought after by their fans. Other companies specialise in the depiction of diverse sexual practices such as fisting (the insertion of the hand into the vagina or anus) and bondage ('Maximum Perversions') or establish reputations for 'pushing the boundaries' of what is acceptable in pornography. On the Internet, the women pictured include 'celebrity nudes' (sexually explicit photos of female celebrities, typically pre-celebrity softcore photos, stills from nude scenes in movies, digitally faked pictures of celebrities having sex, and photos of accidental exposures of breasts), fashion models, centrefold and 'softcore' models, 'babes' (attractive women, whether famous or otherwise), 'porn stars', strippers and prostitutes and 'amateurs'.

Another significant genre is gay male pornography. This takes up about five to ten per cent of the shelf space in general adult video stores in Canberra, but there are also outlets dedicated exclusively to gay pornography.¹² Gay men are more avid consumers of pornography than heterosexual men in that gay male pornography makes up a disproportionately large share of the pornography market. By one estimate, gay pornography accounts for as much as one-third to one-half of sales and rentals (Thomas 2000, p. 49), although conversations with the staff of adult video stores suggest that the share is lower. Gay pornography plays an important role in the social and cultural life of gay communities and has been perceived as valuable in a homophobic society for its assertion of gay identity and positive depiction of gay sexuality. While pornography is

¹¹ Magazines focused on young women and available in adult stores in Canberra include *Schoolgirl*, *Teenagers*, *Young Stars*, *Finally Legal*, *Cherry Pop*, *Teeners from Holland*, *Barely 18*, *Only 18*, *Sweet 18*, *Just 18* and *Innocence*.

¹² In Canberra for example, there are 15 or so adult video stores, of which two are gay-focused.

often positioned as deviant and stigmatised in heterosexual circles, gay pornography has been integrated into and achieved a more or less respectable position in gay life (Thomas 2000, pp. 61-64).

Sexually explicit videos can be arranged on a continuum in terms of their cinematic and 'artistic' merit, the degree to which they show plot and character development, dialogue, soundtrack and other aspects of 'production value'. However, even videos with 'high' production values are distinguished only by better lighting and sound and more stereotypically attractive participants for they continue to display the bare minimum of plot and dialogue. This is not to argue that pornographic videos with high production values are necessarily more desirable or less objectionable than those with low production values, and viewers' judgements of the merits of such materials are shaped by individual and collective sexual and artistic preferences. Thus the selling point of some pornography is that the women (and men) pictured are 'amateurs', that these are 'real people' being photographed or filmed naked or having sex in everyday environments, while in contrast other pornography borrows from the visual codes of mainstream cinema and fashion photography. Most pornography uses photographic and filmic media but there are also 'anime' and 'hentai' (sexually explicit cartoons) and increasingly the entirely digital production of sexually explicit images.

3.3 Genres of content

Pornographic videos and websites demonstrate and document a striking range of sexual practices, desires and sexual orientations. This diversity reflects the same multiplicity of sexual practices, identities, relations and communities now well documented in sociological, psychological, historical and anthropological scholarship. In other words, pornographic diversity reflects sexual diversity. However, it does not reflect it exactly. For example, the frequency with which particular sexual practices or sexual orientations are represented pornographically does not match the prevalence of these practices or orientations in the general population. While anal intercourse is routine in representations of heterosexual sex in X-rated videos, Australian studies suggest that this is a minority practice. About 7 to 8 per cent of sexually active university students have practised anal intercourse (Moore & Rosenthal 1998, p. 48). The rates are higher in other groups; it is believed to be one-fifth among homeless youth (Hillier, Matthews & Dempsey 1997, p. 27) and one-third among a sample of single heterosexual adults aged 20 to 40 drawn from nightclubs and singles bars (Rosenthal, Fernbach & Moore 1997, p. 176). Similarly, depictions of extravaginal ejaculation (the 'cumshot') are almost compulsory in pornography and heterosexual sex involving multiple male partners with the one woman is common, while among heterosexual couples in general intravaginal ejaculation and monogamous sex are more common. Finally, the visual requirement that the genital detail of vaginal or anal intercourse be visible in the image or film means that participants typically adopt particular bodily positions to allow the camera access, rendering such practices as 'missionary position' intercourse less common than they are likely to be in the general population. Pornographic representations of sex are also highly skewed by the gendered and sexual preoccupations already described and there are very few portrayals which emphasise the sensuous or romantic aspects of sexual relations or which eroticise men's bodies in heterosexual depictions.

Across the vast and disparate array of pornographic images and texts, there are common schemes for classifying types or genres of content and common clusterings of content focused on a particular sexual practice, sexual participant or combination of participants, body part or other aspect of sexuality. Whether on the shelves of 'adult' video stores, across different sexually explicit websites or on websites offering links to multiple collections of images, one finds similar groupings. Among the fifteen or so adult video outlets in Canberra, most label their shelves using a combination of distributor names (including Private, one of the biggest labels, Triple XXX, and Axis Gold), general descriptors (two hour, four hour, series), and content-related groupings.¹³

Among X-rated videos themselves, there are numbered series focused on such areas as 'new' or 'amateur' female participants ('Nasty New Cummers,' 'Amateurs Exposed,' 'Freshman Fantasies,' 'Fresh Meat'), anal intercourse ('Butt Jammers,' 'Anal Virgins,' 'Pretty Anal Ladies,' 'Sodomania'), fellatio ('Favorite Blow Jobs,' 'Deep Oral Ladies'), male ejaculation ('101 Cumshots,' 'The Best of Cum,' 'SuperCum,' 'Girls Who Suck Cock and Eat Cum'), young women (see above for titles), breasts ('Nice Rack,' 'Big and Natural'), buttocks ('Assman,' 'Buttman'), 'lesbian' sex ('No Man's Land,' 'Where the Boys Aren't'), Asian women ('Hot Asians,' 'Awesome Asians,' 'Asia 18'), black women ('Ebony Love,' 'Booty Ho'), voyeurism ('The Voyeur,' 'Peeping Tom'), large penises ('Big Cocks,' 'Girls Who Crave Big Cocks'), multiple male partners ('The Gangbang Girl'), pregnant women ('Ready to Drop'), men over 50 with young women ('Sugar Daddy'), female underwear ('White Panty,' 'Wet Cotton Panties'), gay male sex, and a range of other categories – 'Kink-o-rama,' 'Aussie Couples,' 'Euro Angels,' 'Screw My Wife, Please,' (vaginal) 'Fisting,' 'Xtra Large Amateurs,' 'Vintage Hardcore Sex Cuts' and so on.

Alongside these series, individual videos may highlight that their content focuses for example on particular sexual practices such as fellatio, 'cumshots' and 'facials,' 'double penetration' (simultaneous vaginal and anal intercourse) or fisting; women with particular body shapes or conditions (for example, with large breasts, pregnant or lactating); or racial and ethnic categories (Asian, black, interracial sex). Judging from the sexual acts pictured on their back covers, many X-rated videos show a range of sexual acts, not just ones which may be the focus of the title such as anal sex or fellatio. 'Hardcore' pornographic magazines show similar forms of specialisation.¹⁴

Classificatory systems for genres of Internet pornography include similar categories to those described for videos above, including such 'meta-categories' as 'hardcore' and

¹³ Shelf labels in Canberra's adult video stores include 'European Hardcore,' 'Couples' or 'Videos with a storyline,' 'Teenage,' 'Gang Bang,' 'Anal,' 'All-girl' or 'Lesbian,' 'Asian,' 'Amateur,' 'Gay' or 'All male,' 'Special Interest,' 'Busty' and 'She-male.'

¹⁴ Magazines in Canberra adult stories include titles focused on teenagers (see above), breasts (*Stacked, D-Cup, Big Ones, Big Tits, Big Busty, Voluptuous*), particular sexual practices (*Fist Fucking, Anal Sex, Butt Bangers, Shave Me, Dildo Girls*), legs, feet, underwear and stockings (*Leg Love, At Her Feet, Hot Legs, Panty & Stocking Digest*), amateurs (*New Cunts*), older women (*Girls Over 40, Hot 'n' Older, Mature Nymphos, 40+*), black women (*Black Booty, Black Heat, Black Lust*), Asian women (*Asian Beauties, Girls of the Orient*), larger women (*Plumpers*), gay men (*Dude, Jock, Playgirl, Hot Male Review, Rump, Machismo*), sadomasochism (*Corporal Digest, Obedience*), bondage (*Bound and Gagged, Barefoot Bondage, Love Bondage Scenes, Bridled*), rubber and plastic (*Rubberist, Plastics Passion*), spanking (*Spankasm*), and transsexualism and transvestism (*Taffeta, Gender Gap*). Alongside these, there are literally hundreds of other hardcore titles focused on explicit depictions of heterosexual sex.

‘softcore’ and more specific labels. For example, the collection of ‘fetish’ sites listed on the very extensive adult site ‘Persian Kitty’ is grouped into the following categories: ‘voyeur, upskirt, & exhibitionism; bondage & domination; big beautiful women; feet, legs, nylons & stockings; latex & clothing; mature women; pregnant and/or lactating; transsexual.’ However, given the greater variety of images available on the Internet and the greater difficulty of legal regulation, there is far greater latitude for distinct genres to be offered and for more finely grained categorisations to be employed. Table 6 below demonstrates the extraordinary variety of subjects covered. It lists some of the kinds of Internet pornography available, grouped by classification, noting colloquial terms in quotation marks. The list was generated by four hours of Internet ‘surfing’ among pornographic sites and it is not exhaustive.

Table 6 A sample of types of Internet pornography

Content categories	Forms of content listed
General groupings	Hardcore Softcore Heterosexual (‘Straight’) Gay (gay male) Bisexual
Particular sexual practices	Fellatio (‘Blowjobs’) Anal intercourse Oral sex (‘Oral’) Male ejaculation (‘Cum Shots’) Sex involving multiple participants (‘Group Sex’, ‘Gang bangs’, ‘Threesome’, ‘Orgy’) ‘MMF’ (two men and one woman) ‘FFM’ (two women and one man) Cunnilingus (‘Muff dives’) Masturbation Sex toys and dildos (‘Toys’, ‘Strap on’, ‘Dildo’, ‘Vibrator’) Female ejaculation ‘Spanking’ ‘Tit Fucking’ Sexual activity involving urination (‘Golden Showers’, ‘Water Sports’, ‘Pee’, ‘Pissing’) Coprophilia or sexual activity involving faeces (‘Scat’) ‘Fisting’, ‘Finger/Fist’ Bondage and sadomasochism (‘SM’, ‘Sado maso’, ‘Femdom’, ‘Fem domination’, ‘Male domination’), Bondage and discipline (‘Bdsm’, ‘Domination’) ‘Leather’ Bestiality (‘Zoo Fetish’) ‘Smothering’ ‘Incest’

	'Rape'
Particular body parts or bodily features	Breasts ('Tits') Big breasts ('Busty') Small breasts ('Small Tits') Buttocks ('Butts', 'Ass') Vulvas ('Pussy'), 'Pussy Hole' Nipples ('Erect', 'Puffy', 'Abnormal', 'Oversized', 'Fetish', 'Bizarre') Shaved vulvas ('Shaved') 'Legs and feet' Hairy vulva ('Hairy Pussy') 'Huge cocks' (in heterosexual sex) 'Tattoo' Piercing, body modification Amputees, women in casts and braces Menstruation
Particular categories of women	Young women ('Teen', 'Lolita', 'Schoolgirl' and further sub-categories) 'Babes' 'Blondes,' 'Brunettes,' 'Redheads' Transsexual ('Shemale', e.g. with both breasts and penis) Older women ('Mature', 'Grannies') 'Drunk girl' 'Cheerleaders' 'Lesbian'
Ethnic categories of women pictured or of participants	'Asian' 'Latina' 'Ethnic' 'Black,' 'Ebony' 'Japanese' 'Indian' 'Interracial', 'BBW' (two black and one white participant)
Items of female clothing and underwear	Bikini Lingerie Thongs and g-strings Bras Underpants ('Panties') Stockings, Pantyhose Latex Leather Uniforms

Professional / occupational status of the women pictured	Celebrities ('Celebrity Nudes') 'Models' 'Softcore' and 'Centrefold' 'Babes' 'Pornstars' Strippers and prostitutes ('Whores', 'Hookers') 'Amateurs'
Women of particular body shapes (outside pornographic norms)	'Fat', 'Chubby Chicks' 'Anorexic', 'Skinny', 'Petite' 'Petite & Midgets' Amputees
How and where the image was taken	Voyeurism ('Voyeur', 'Upskirts', 'Spy') 'Exhibitionist', 'Nudists', 'Flashing', 'Public' 'Drunk', 'Bathing' Location (shower, bath, pool, office, outdoor, beach, dressing room)
General groupings of fetishistic or non-mainstream sexual practices	'Fetish' 'Bizarre' 'Xtreme'
Characteristics of the men pictured with women	Older men
Men (gay male pornography)	'Hunks' 'Bears' (larger, older and hairier men)
Type of image or electronic medium	Video clip / Movie Web cams 'Close Ups' (of genitals) Cartoons Anime and Hentai (Japanese-style pornographic cartoons) 'Vintage' (older pornography)
Other categories	'Teacher,' 'Nurse,' 'Secretary,' 'Maid,' 'Housewife'

Five points should be kept in mind when examining this pornographic diversity. First and most importantly, pornographic content centres mainly on women's bodies – either how they look or what can be done to and by them, as the above discussion details. Second, there are interrelationships among these categories. For example, depictions of male ejaculation on to women are further divided in various websites into such listings as 'facials,' 'amateur facials,' 'cumshot on tits,' 'bukkkake' (multiple men ejaculating on one woman), 'smiley girl facials,' 'first time facials,' 'hand on head,' and so on. Third,

because the majority of pornographic content is heterosexual, websites can list depictions of potentially gay male practices as ‘blowjobs’ or ‘anal’ when, in fact, they are specifically heterosexual. Heterosexual content is generic while depictions of male-male sex have to be labeled as such – for example, gay, gay black, gay blowjob, gay hardcore, gay jack (masturbation) and gay making out. Fourth, many pornographic websites include vast lists of the images available elsewhere and these lists may take the form of either the short labels listed below or of three-to-four word descriptions of the scenes depicted. For reasons of space, the latter are not included above. Finally, many sites offer both still images and ‘movies’, short downloadable video clips.

In Section 2.1 we discussed three distinct features of Internet pornography: sexually explicit material is widely available for free, there are few age-related barriers to access, and pornography is routinely delivered to Internet users in unsolicited, indiscriminate and coercive ways. There are four further ways in which Internet pornography is distinct from X-rated videos.

First, Internet pornography is available through diverse technologies and internet sources. Among the forms of pornography available there are written stories and text, still photographs, downloadable video clips (with sound or without), pornographic screensavers, ‘wallpaper’ (images which can be used as the background on one’s computer screen), and ‘web cams’ (web cameras which send live images of whatever is being filmed to the website). A single website frequently will offer several of these media.

Second, the consumption of Internet pornography is more interactive. For example, by typing in instructions which she then follows, some pornography websites offer the consumer the ability to direct in real-time the poses shown by the woman being filmed.

Third, the lines between pornography consumers and pornography producers are more blurred on the Internet and there is far greater room for the domestic or amateur production of pornographic materials. Individuals produce their own pornographic websites by uploading sexually explicit images of themselves and others, set up web cams to provide live internet footage of their daily sexual lives and routinely exchange their favourite images or video clips. While printed pornographic magazines do include sections devoted to ‘readers’ wives’ and ‘amateurs’, the production and exchange described on the Internet is on a much greater scale. Finally, Internet pornography offers particular genres and highly specific categorisations of content which are not as evident in video or print pornography, as discussed above.

3.4 Violence in pornography

To what extent does pornography depict or involve violence? Addressing this question is important to our understanding of both the character of the material to which young people are exposed and its effects. Various studies of the content of pornography distinguish between depictions that are nonviolent and consenting and those that are violent and non-consenting (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss 2000, p. 29). The following discussion identifies the proportions of sexually violent content in pornography, describes genres of Internet pornography which are non-consenting by definition and canvasses the argument that pornography in general is violent or exploitative.

Recent quantitative analyses of X-rated videos in the USA find that one-fifth to one-quarter of scenes involve themes of sexual violence. In Monk-Turner and Purcell's (1999) content analysis of 40 randomly sampled X-rated videos from a national chain, 17 per cent of vignettes across the videos contained themes of sexual violence (a female is shown restrained against her will or she is hit, slapped, kicked or her hair is pulled). Thirty-nine per cent of scenes showed themes of subordination such as, in the words of Monk-Turner and Purcell (1999), 'male orders female to perform in a certain way. For example, female performs fellatio while on her knees or she initially refuses to participate in a sex act and later capitulates'. Monk-Turner and Purcell (p. 64) note the prevalence of other 'degrading or dehumanising' themes in the pornographic videos, including marked status inequality among the actors which favour males, such as a much older man or men in superior occupations (19 per cent); the use of crude names to call or address women (15 per cent); and ejaculation on the female actor's face or torso (85 per cent). There are issues of interpretation here; some would argue that male ejaculation on to a woman's face or torso is not necessarily a degrading act. Its meaning will be shaped by the way it is performed, the viewer's interpretation of the act and the wider cultural context. More widely, there are disagreements over what counts as 'violent' or 'degrading' in pornographic representations (Duggan, Hunter & Vance 1988, pp. 77-79; McNair 1996, p. 67).

A similar examination of sexually violent content in magazine, video, and Usenet (Internet newsgroup) pornography found significant differences between these media in the level of violence portrayed and the sex of victim and victimizer. Barron and Kimmel (2000) sampled 37 magazines, 50 videos and all the stories from the newsgroup alt.sex.stories of more than 250 words posted in one month. For all three media, they coded scenes (thematically uninterrupted sequences of activity in a given physical context) for sexual or violent content, recording whether any of a series of specific acts occurred, the sex of the participants, their power position (dominant, submissive, or ambiguous), and whether each appeared to be consenting or coerced.

Usenet pornography was found to contain significantly more violence (at 42.1 per cent) than videos (26.9 per cent) or magazines (24.8 per cent), and this held true for low-intensity violence (such as verbal aggression and being rough), medium intensity (pulling hair, slapping and threatening with a weapon), high intensity (choking, punching and bondage), and extreme intensity violence (using a weapon, torture and murder). Usenet stories were also more likely than video or magazine depictions to show coercive rather than consensual sex, and dominant and submissive participants with men in the dominant position and women as the victims (Barron & Kimmel 2000, pp. 164-165).

An analysis of one of the commonly accessible Usenet newsgroups, alt.sex.stories, examined 200 postings over two weeks. Like Barron and Kimmel's (2000) study, it found that 40.8 per cent of stories had themes of non-consent (including rape and child molestation), while 24 per cent had themes of bondage and discipline and 19.4 per cent concerned paedophilic sex (Harmon & Boeringer 1997). A third analysis of Internet newsgroups found that a wide range of forms of violent pornography (where acts of force and physical harm are depicted in explicit sexual contexts) are circulated on such networks and involve images of 'cruelty, extreme anti-sociality and sadism'. They include photographs of abuse of genitalia (such as the extreme widening of genitalia

using bottles and tongs or the use of clips, clamps and hooks), females tied up and gagged and subjected to physical torture, people wrapped in plastic or being strangled, child pornography, bestiality, defecation and urination and other violent acts in the sexual setting of the newsgroups (such as murder, dismemberment of bodies and mutilated and dead infants and embryos) (Bjornebekk & Evjen 2001).

A detailed analysis of commercially available adult videos finds that the use of violence to coerce women into sex is rare because the women are portrayed as always eager to engage in sex. However, violence is depicted as increasing the erotic charge of the scene, with common examples including the male participant slapping the woman's buttocks, slapping her face or vagina with his penis, pulling on her hair or thrusting deeply into her throat (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 82). While the 14 videos analysed were not focused on sadomasochism, some use of sadomasochistic conventions such as blindfolds and gagging was evident. Finally, the kind of vaginal or anal intercourse which is routine in these videos involves a hard, repetitious pounding for long periods which is likely to cause soreness if not pain (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 83).

There is little research on the extent of violent content in Internet pornography other than the three studies mentioned above. Nevertheless, in Internet pornography one can easily find portrayals that embody the forms of violence and themes of subordination and degradation described earlier. Perhaps the most pervasive form of degradation of women is the routine use of derogatory language to describe the women pictured and the sexual acts done to them. Some websites list groups of pictures as follows: 'Fatties getting fucked,' 'Pissing sluts and skanks,' 'Ethnic Asian whores,' 'Ethnic black bitches,' and so on. The pictures and text on some sites emphasise the coercive nature of the sex depicted. On the site 'Her First Gangbang,' captions accompanying the pictures state:

We knew we had to split her cunt like a log, so we stuffed 2 big cocks in her tight pussy until she was stuffed like a butter ball turkey!

I throat fucked her, while he split her cunt... Finishing with a brutal facial on her virgin face... Another girl, another first gangbang. It's all in a day's work, here at the office!

There are three genres of Internet pornography which one will not find among X-rated videos in an adult store in Australia and which centre on non-consenting sexual acts: 'rape,' bestiality and 'upskirts' websites. The first two genres are concerned with subjects that would be 'Refused Classification' by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC). Films and videos will be refused classification and thus cannot be shown if they 'contain gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of... sexual violence; sexual activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive and abhorrent' (OFLC 2000, p. 16).

Gossett and Byrne (2002) analyse 31 rape-focused websites, 14 with 'rape' in the title, containing images and text of women described as being raped. There is no way to tell if the sites show images of actual rapes or staged depictions. Four sites say that the images are 'real' while most do not address this. In the 113 images available free on the sites, the victims are usually tied with rope or other restraints, a weapon is shown being used and typically the victim's face is depicted as screaming or expressing pain. Half

the rape sites describe the victims as young, using such terms as ‘young’, ‘teen’, ‘schoolgirl’ and ‘lolita’. Accompanying text accentuates the violent nature of the images either on the screen or available for a fee, using such language as ‘rape’, ‘torture’, ‘abuse’, ‘brutal’ and ‘pain’ (Gossett and Byrne 2002, pp. 696-700). For example, one extended section of text, captioning an image of a young-looking naked woman tied up and wearing an expression of pain, reads:

These teenagers’ hell is your pleasure. They are stretched, whipped, raped, and beaten. Their tits are crushed, twisted, pierced, thrashed, and tortured. Their cunts are opened, whipped, entered with HUGE objects, sewn up, torn, and ripped. Their asses are beaten till bloody, stretched with baseball bats, used as target practice for darts... they scream, cry, and plead.

All these websites were accessible without paying for the images and without any verification of age other than, in some cases, clicking ‘yes’ to being 18 or older.

Bestiality refers to sexual activity between human beings and animals and it is easy to find at least a handful of sites which offer free photographs and movies of women (and occasionally men) engaged in masturbation, oral sex or intercourse with dogs, horses, snakes and other animals. Bestiality is non-consenting in the sense that other species’ consent to sex with human beings is unlikely if not impossible. In addition, many would argue that participation by women in such activity is likely to have been coerced and is degrading.

‘Upskirts’ refers to photographs taken such that the viewer can see ‘up the skirt’ of the woman pictured, as the text of one site emphasises:

Sexy Upskirts is a free site with sexy upskirt fetish showing panties pics. We have caught sexy upskirts of unexpected women. We have pics of sexy girls in hot panties and lingerie. Some of these women will be wearing short sexy dresses. ... We have nylon pics, leg pics, and even feet pics.

Some photographs on ‘upskirts’ sites are clearly posed, with the woman looking directly at the camera. However, other photographs appear to have been taken illicitly, without the woman’s knowledge. A similar ‘peeping Tom’ genre on the Internet centres on images of women undressing, showering, toileting, naked or having sex, again apparently taken illicitly through windows or using hidden cameras. Overlapping with the ‘upskirts’ genre are websites focused on voyeurism (although all pornography is in a sense voyeuristic), such as the pay site ‘Sex spy’, promising ‘over 100,000 voyeur images!, live hidden cams!, 50,000 movies!’.

The evidence is that race and ethnicity, and not just gender, shape patterns of violence and other aspects of representation in pornography. In X-rated videos, Monk-Turner and Purcell (1999, p. 66) found that black women are more likely than white women to be the targets of violent acts from both white and black men. Black men are stereotyped as bestial in nature (Jensen & Dines 1998, p. 86), while Asian women are stereotyped as subservient and passive and yet sexually voracious (Gossett & Byrne 2002, pp. 701-702). Earlier studies also document relationships between race and the treatment of female and male actors in pornography (Cowan & Campbell 1994; Mayall & Russell 1993; Nowrojee & Silliman 1997; Zia 1997). Collins (1990, pp. 169-170) argues that

the contemporary treatment of Black and Asian women's bodies in pornography, particularly their depiction in situations of bondage, slavery and torture, is founded on long histories of sexual exploitation and discourses on the sexuality of subordinate groups as animalistic and deviant. Thus pornography is an example of 'the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression.' Gossett and Byrne's (2002) study of Internet 'rape' sites finds that it is now Asian women who are most commonly depicted as victims of sexual aggression in contrast to Black women's victimisation in traditional pornographic media, suggesting that the intersection of the Internet and the global pornography market is producing new representations of race and violence.

One sexually explicit genre that has attracted perhaps more public attention and concern than any other, child pornography, is not visible on the 'public' domain of easily accessible websites. The genre of 'teen' pornography (boasting 'barely legal', 'youngest teens on the net') is an important and easily available one, but true child pornography is only accessible through highly secretive networks. On the other hand, the Internet has been critical in facilitating the distribution, consumption, and in turn the production, of child pornography (McCabe 2000, p. 73). While the existence of Internet child pornography has been dismissed by otherwise informed commentators, Jenkins (2001, pp. 3-12) notes that in fact thousands of pornographic images of children are freely available through newsgroups, bulletin boards and temporary web sites, and these show pre-pubescent children engaged in sex acts with adult men and others. A UK-based database on child pornography has amassed over 80,000 still pictures and over 400 video clips, collected from over 60 newsgroups, and over 1000 illegal photographs are posted per week (Taylor, Quayle & Holland 2001).

While there are violent acts in, and violent genres of, pornography, some scholars go further to argue that pornography *per se* represents and encourages violence against women. For anti-pornography feminist writers, pornography 'sexualises and normalises inequalities' and 'makes violence sexy' (Russo 1998, p. 18; Russell 1993). What is objectionable is not pornography's sexual explicitness, but its abusive, hierarchical, objectifying and degrading portrayal of females and female sexuality (Jensen and Dines 1998, pp. 65-66; MacKinnon 1994, p. 87). Other feminist and non-feminist authors argue that there is great diversity in pornographic imagery and that the vast range of sexual images should not be characterised solely in terms of violence against women (Snitow 1988, p. 14). They also argue that male and female viewers interpret representations in complex, selective and ambiguous ways (Strossen 1995, pp. 145-154), that diverse meanings may be attributed to the same scenes and sexual acts, and that the usual criticisms of pornography cannot be applied simply to gay male pornography (Thomas 2000, pp. 63-64).

There are those who believe that, in three ways at least, pornography consumption can have *positive* effects and meanings. First, some feminist commentators argue that while pornography does exaggerate sexism, it has also challenged sexual repression and restrictive sexual norms and thus benefited women. Pornography

has served to flout conventional sexual mores, to ridicule sexual hypocrisy and to underscore the importance of sexual needs... it advocates sexual adventure, sex outside of marriage, sex for no reason other than pleasure (Duggan, Hunter & Vance 1988, p. 82)

Pornography has been identified as sexually and thus socially transgressive in its exploration of taboo sexual desires and fantasies (McNair 1996, p. 92). Women can and do use pornography to explore their sexualities and desires. Pornographic texts can be understood in diverse ways, such that women can even read male-orientated pornographic texts in pleasurable and beneficial ways (McNair 1996, pp. 90-99). However, others argue that this represents an overly optimistic and naïve estimation of pornography's contribution to sexual liberation.

Second, forms of pornography such as gay male and lesbian representations are defended as important positive expressions of non-heterosexual sexualities, an element in gay and lesbian struggles for social recognition and legitimation and as educational tools in eroticising safe sex (McNair 1996, p. 103). Third, some men argue that pornography has played a therapeutic role in helping them develop healthier sexualities (Kimmel 1990, p. 21). Pornography has allowed men to learn about female and male bodies and sexual techniques, to feel less shame about ejaculation and semen, and to accept themselves as sexual beings (Macdonald 1990). Others argue instead that while pornography harms women, it harms men as well: pornography has helped to homogenise men's sexual tastes, narrow the range of male sexual satisfaction, channel all men's intimate needs into genital sexual activity, and promote myths of perpetual male sexual readiness and penis size (Brod 1990).

Our own position regarding pornography's content is that while there certainly is pornographic diversity, there is also a dominant form of pornography, a cluster of repetitive themes characteristic of mass-marketed heterosexual pornography. This hegemonic pornography is in part the product of men's control of economic, political and cultural power, so that much pornography caters more to heterosexual men's desires and fantasies than it does to women's (Chancer 1998, p. 77). In other words, social inequalities are the context for the particular passions of much heterosexual pornography. Of course, heterosexual pornography does not cater for all men's desires, nor are its appeals exclusive to men, but it works in a symbiotic relationship with common constructions of masculine heterosexual sexuality.

We continue nevertheless to employ the term 'pornography' in a neutral manner, using it interchangeably with the phrase 'sexually explicit' representation. At the same time, in assessing the significance of exposure to pornography among children and young people, it is important to keep in mind the kinds of content that are common in mainstream sexually explicit representations.

4. Effects of exposure to pornography

In Section 2 we established that among children exposure to pornographic materials and especially to sexually explicit Internet sites is common, and that large numbers of young males in particular are active consumers of pornography. What is the likely effect of such exposure on young people's attitudes, values and behaviours? There is very little direct research evidence available to answer this question. However, two bodies of scholarship on related issues can help: a few studies on the impact on children of sexual content in the mass media and a much more substantial literature on the impact of sexually explicit (pornographic) media on young adults and adults in general. In short, a wide range of studies indicates that exposure to pornography, and particularly representations of sexual violence, may contribute to the formation of unhealthy attitudes to sex and sexuality which may in turn inhibit the formation of healthy intimate relationships.

4.1 Harm to minors

The notion that sexually explicit materials are 'harmful to minors' has been frequently invoked as a justification for the regulation and censorship of such materials when available to children or to both children and adults (Heins 2001; Levine 2002, p. 3). The principle of 'harm to minors' was central to the development of obscenity law, expressed in the idea that young and impressionable minds are vulnerable to harmful thoughts which can lead to harmful acts (Levine 2002, p. 9; Thompson 1994, pp. 13-19). This same principle receives particular emphasis in the guidelines of the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC).¹⁵ More generally, some discussions of children's exposure to 'offensive' material simply take such terms for granted, discussing exposure to 'normal' versus 'offensive' content without defining or explaining the terms (e.g. Stanley 2001, p. 5).

The 'harms' envisaged by minors' exposure to pornography include those which are broadly moral ('robbing children of their innocence'), developmental and psychological (fear, anxiety, and oversexualised behaviour), and specifically imitative (children will mimic what they see). Furthermore, the belief that pornography causes harm especially to children has grown into the notion that exposing children to *any* sexually explicit information can hurt them (Heins 2001, pp. 10-13). However, empirical research to substantiate most of these harms is sparse. Despite the lack of scholarly evidence, '[t]he moral wisdom of shielding minors from sexy materials is seen as self-evident' (Levine 2002, p. 13). On the other hand, recognition that the language of 'child protection' too often has been deployed either cynically or ignorantly (Heins 2001) should not blind us to the real harms which also inform concerns for youth (Grossberger 2002, p. 596).

¹⁵ The guidelines read in part;

Classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles;

- (a) adults should be able to read, hear and see what they want;
- (b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
- (c) everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive...

Particular attention is paid, when classification decisions are made, to the protection of minors from material that is disturbing or harmful. (OFLC 2000, pp. 2-3)

In Box 2 below, we summarise what the above two bodies of scholarship suggest are the likely effects on young people of exposure to sexual media content and pornography. There are important caveats which must accompany these hypothesised effects. In particular, few studies on pornography have been conducted on young people under 18 years of age; many studies can demonstrate only correlation and not causation; and, the impact of exposure is mediated by individual and cultural variables. Just as importantly, judgements of the significance of these effects are structured by ethical, political, and moral frameworks.

Box 2 Summary of the likely effects on young people of exposure to sexual media content and pornography

Sexual content

Greater acceptance of pre-, extra-, non-marital and recreational sexual relations

Greater factual knowledge

Increased belief that one's peers are sexually active

Pornography

Increased attitudinal support for sexual aggression (particularly in the context of use of violent pornography)

Increased likelihood of sexually aggressive, coercive or harassing behaviour (particularly in the context of high frequency consumption of pornography or exposure to violent pornography)

Emotional disturbance associated with premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content

Emotional disturbance associated with seeing non-mainstream sexual behaviours

Inappropriate acceptance of non-mainstream sexual practices

4.2 The effects of sexual content

The research evidence on the effects of sexual content in mainstream media on children and adolescents has been surveyed by Huston, Wartella, and Donnerstein (1998), with their overview providing the basis for Thornburgh and Lin's (2002) recent and comprehensive report. The 1998 survey finds only 15 relevant studies examining the impact of sexual content (verbal references to sexual activity, innuendo, implied sexual activity and visual presentation of sex) across such forms of media as prime time television, movies, TV soap operas, music videos and magazines. A more recent overview notes that there is not a single longitudinal study of teenagers' exposure to various media and resulting changes (if any) in their sexual behaviour, although four have just been funded (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 191).

Several experimental studies document changes in attitudes and knowledge among adolescents exposed to sexual media content when compared to a control group who are not shown the same material. They have found:

- adolescents who saw portrayals of pre-, extra- or non-marital sexual relations rate these portrayals as less bad than did peers who saw portrayals of marital sexual relations or non-sexual relations between adults;
- teenagers who saw TV scenes with sexual content learnt terms referring to such activities as homosexuality and prostitution;
- exposure to music videos is associated with greater acceptance of premarital sex; and,
- students shown programs containing information about pregnancy and menstruation, for example, knew more factual information than those who were not shown this material (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, p. 14).

The literature on the effects of sexual media content also includes correlational studies in which young people's naturally occurring exposure to the media is used to compare their attitudes and behaviours. Such studies do not allow the claim that high exposure to sexual content *causes* changes in attitudes and behaviours; other factors or variables may account for the correlations observed. Strasburger and Wilson (2002, p. 177) note that of six studies on the relationship between onset of sexual intercourse and amount of sexual content viewed on television, only one is longitudinal and four are more than a decade old. Nevertheless, most studies demonstrate measurable effects.

One study found that teenagers whose television diet includes higher proportions of sexual content were also more likely to have engaged in sexual intercourse. Another study found no relationship for young men between virginity and exposure to R-rated or X-rated films, popular music or music videos, but found a correlation between young women's exposure to music videos and their premarital sex (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, p. 14, 27). On the other hand, a longitudinal study found no strong or consistent evidence of links between the amount or sexual content of television watched by children and their initiation of sexual activity (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 154).

A recent US study of 18 to 20 year old students concluded that greater exposure to sexual content on television correlated with a belief that one's peers are sexually active and a more favourable attitude towards recreational sex (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 159). Given that such studies are correlational, it is equally plausible that sexual content on television teaches such attitudes, that individuals with such attitudes are drawn to watching programs with sexual content, or that both patterns are caused by other external factors.

One can conclude from the small body of research evidence described that exposure to sexual media content such as on television can change young viewers' attitudes and knowledge, and there is weak evidence of a relationship between television viewing and sexual behaviour and beliefs (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, p. 16). However, it is only a set of ethical, moral or political values which allows us to determine whether

these effects are good, bad or neutral (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 175). For example, moral conservatives may judge young women's premarital sex as negative given their belief in the desirability of sex only within marriage, while advocates of comprehensive sexuality education may be more concerned with whether this sex was consenting and safe or coerced and risky. North American research on children's exposure to sexual content in mainstream media shows a preoccupation with the desirability of abstinence (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 150), and this is mirrored in the exclusive funding of abstinence-only sex education in schools in a majority of U.S. states. Australian advocates of sexuality education are less concerned with earlier or premarital sex *per se*, and more with minimisation of the potential harms (transmission of infections, unwanted pregnancy and sexual violence) which may accompany sexual activity (Ollis *et al.* 2000).

The likely effects of viewing sexual content on young people's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour are moderated by such variables as age, gender, sexual experience, parental involvement and the nature of the media presentation. Age influences 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. Correlations between adolescent viewing of sexual media and sexual behaviour are moderated by parental involvement, including such factors as discussions of television content, communication patterns and satisfactory home environments. Finally, media messages have more influence if young people perceive them to be accurate, realistic and high quality (Huston, Wartella, & Donnerstein 1998, pp. 15-16).

The research base described so far is not concerned with pornography (explicit depictions of nudity and sexual activity), and focuses instead on the impact of public television, movies and other media legally available to children. There is almost no research evidence available concerning the impact on children of viewing pornography. There are obvious legal, ethical and practical restrictions on such research. One cannot conduct an experimental study on the impact of pornography on individuals under 18 as it is illegal to show such material to minors, and it is unethical to conduct studies which may place participants 'at risk'. Moreover, parents are likely to refuse consent for empirical investigations into pornography use among children. Some researchers have measured the impact of media content for which there is more social tolerance and which participants are likely to watch as part of normal viewing patterns, but this research too faces ethical and funding constraints (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 144-145).

In one of the few studies examining naturalistic pornographic consumption among minors, a survey of 522 African-American females aged 14 to 18 found correlations between viewing X-rated movies and having more negative attitudes towards using condoms, having multiple sex partners, having sex more frequently and testing positive for chlamydia (Wingwood *et al.* 2001). A study of 275 Canadian teenagers with an average age of 14 found that nine out of ten boys (90 per cent) had 'watched pornography' and one-third of boys did so at least once a month. There was a significant correlation between boys' frequent consumption of pornography and their

agreement with the idea that it is acceptable to hold a girl down and force her to have intercourse (Check 1995, p. 91).

4.3 Pornography's impact on adults

There is a more substantial body of research evidence on the impact of sexual content and pornography among young adults and adults in general. A wide range of studies has been conducted among young people aged 18 to 25, often populations of American college youth. In terms of the impact of pornography, one of the most important areas of social concern has been its impact on men's sexual behaviour towards women, and particularly male sexual aggression or rape. This concern is expressed neatly in the now-famous slogan advanced by some feminist anti-pornography advocates in the 1980s: 'Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice' (Morgan 1980, p. 139). In other words, for these advocates, pornography plays a causal role in sexual violence against women, although other feminist (and non-feminist) commentators dispute this. Thus many empirical studies on pornography's impact concern the question of sexual aggression. Most focus on the attitudes and behaviours of males, driven in part by the recognition that it is males who are responsible for the majority of sexual assaults, whether against females or other males. If exposure to pornography does shape sexually violent attitudes and behaviours, then this is an important inclusion in our assessment of the impact of pornography on young people.

Empirical research among adults on pornography and sexual aggression can be divided into four types, according to two dimensions of the study. First, some studies are experimental, often in laboratory conditions, and involve testing the impact of exposure to pornography on participants' attitudes or aggressive behaviour; other studies are correlational and involve the investigation of possible relationships between 'naturalistic' pornography use (in everyday life) and attitudes or aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, among correlational studies, some compare the use of pornography by people convicted of sexually violent crimes with that by non-criminals, while others compare pornography use and reported sexual aggression among non-criminals.

The second dimension concerns the dependent variable. Some studies focus on factors believed to affect sexual aggression, particularly attitudes supportive of rape, while others focus on sexually aggressive behaviours themselves (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, pp. 41-42). The types of studies are represented in Table 7 below.

There is considerable disagreement in the literature on pornography regarding the significance of the existing body of empirical evidence, with some authors arguing for a clear relationship between exposure to pornography and sexual aggression and others saying there is no effect. However, the application to existing empirical studies of summary techniques or 'meta-analysis' *does* find consistent relationships. Meta-analyses average the findings documented across different investigations, thus increasing the available sample size on which statistical tests can be conducted and from which conclusions can be drawn (providing that variables are carefully related) (Allen, Emmers et al. 1995, p. 12). Malamuth, Addison and Koss (2000) integrate the findings of meta-analytic summaries of experimental and naturalistic research. They find that there is consistent and reliable evidence that exposure to or consumption of pornography is related to male sexual aggression against women. This association is

strongest for violent pornography and still reliable for nonviolent pornography, particularly by frequent users (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 53). The authors also rebut claims, for example by Fisher and Grenier (1994), that there have not been any reliable connections found between the use of pornography and sexual aggression.

Table 7 Types of pornography studies

	Experimental studies	Correlational Studies
Attitudes	Experiments on attitudes	Naturalistic studies of correlations between pornography and attitudes
Aggressive behaviour	Experiments on aggression as shown in laboratory settings	Comparing criminals vs. non-criminals on pornography use Amongst non-criminals Comparing availability of pornography and rates of sexual offences

Source: Modified from Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 41

In arguing that there is an association between the use of pornography and sexual aggression, there are two caveats to note. First, pornography is not the sole determinant of men's violence against women. Contemporary scholarship shows a growing emphasis on multivariate explanations of men's violence against women in which it is assumed that violence is 'a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors' (Heise 1998, pp. 263–264). Violence against women is more likely in cultures where manhood is culturally defined as linked to dominance, toughness or male honour (Connell 1985, p. 6; Heise 1998, p. 277). It is more likely to be practised by men who identify with traditional images of masculinity and male gender role privilege, have hostile and negative sexual attitudes towards women, believe in rape stereotypes, see violence as manly and desirable, and are attached to male peers who legitimate abuse of women (Alder 1992, p. 269; Heise 1998, p. 277; O'Neil & Harway 1997, p. 192; Scully 1990). Nevertheless, pornography clearly plays a role in helping foster the kinds of attitudes and values which may predispose some men to rape women. Second, pornography is not the only important source of sexist and violence-supportive discourses and representations (Segal 1998, pp. 49-51). Other media such as television and film are also effective teachers of gender-stereotyped and rape-supportive attitudes (Strasburger & Wilson 2002, p. 164).

4.3.1 Experimental studies on attitudes

In experimental studies, adults show significant strengthening of attitudes supportive of sexual aggression following exposure to pornography. These attitudes are measured by scales designed to assess 'rape myth acceptance', 'sexual callousness', 'adversarial sexual beliefs' and 'acceptance of interpersonal violence against women'. These centre on beliefs that blame the female victim for rape and justify sexual assault (Allen,

Emmers et al. 1995, p. 6). Such attitudes correlate with behavioural sexual aggression and possess other anti-social effects such as failure to report rape and unwillingness to support victims. 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, p. 19). Exposure to sexually violent material desensitises male viewers to sexual violence, diminishing their emotional response to the stimulus, eroding their empathy for victims of violence, and informing more callous attitudes towards female victims of rape. Female viewers show desensitisation but also an increase in fear (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 152).

Experimental studies of exposure to pornography also document further changes in attitudes and values. According to Thornburgh and Lin's (2002, p. 153) overview,

In some studies youth exposed to explicit sexual content that did not involve violence did not become desensitized, while in others, large amounts of experimental exposure to such material led men (and to some extent women) to be more callous towards gender relationships, more likely to overestimate the prevalence of certain kinds of non-mainstream sexual behavior such as sadomasochism and bestiality, less likely to be offended by sexually explicit material, less likely to support restrictions on the distribution of sexually explicit materials, and more likely to support lighter sentences for convicted rapists.

4.3.2 *Experimental studies on 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. In these studies, aggression is measured by participants' use of apparently injurious behaviour to another person, such as delivering electric shocks in a laboratory setting. Exposure to nudity alone (where a single person is depicted with minimal or no clothing but not engaged in a sexual activity) reduces aggression. However, 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 & Brezgel 1995, p. 271). Of course, behavioural aggression in these studies may not correlate with sexual aggression in everyday life, as the authors themselves acknowledge (p. 276).

Laboratory-based experimental studies on pornography have been criticised as excessively artificial and formal (Boyle 2000, p. 188; McNair 1996, pp. 65-67). 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 (Jensen 1998b, p. 104). While masturbation and orgasm as powerful physical and emotional experiences are central to the pornographic experience, and influence the interpretation and effect of the material, they are excluded from laboratory research. It is therefore possible that experimental studies in fact *underestimate* the effect of

pornography (Jensen 1998b, p. 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 1998b, p. 104) and their time scales may be only weeks long (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 156).

4.3.3 *Correlational studies on attitudes*

Are men who use pornography in everyday life also more likely to show violence-supportive attitudes or behaviours? The second cluster of empirical studies on pornography and sexual aggression examines correlations between pornography use in everyday life (outside the laboratory) and aggressive attitudes or behaviours. The existing correlational data on pornography and attitudes do not reveal an effect similar to the experimental studies. A meta-analysis of eight studies involving 2020 participants found that there was *not* a significant, reliable relationship between the amount of naturalistic pornography use and attitudes supporting sexual aggression (Allen, Emmers et al. 1995, p. 18). Unfortunately, analysis of the differences between nonviolent and violent pornography was not possible in meta-analysis of these studies (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, pp. 47, 53). There may be associations between consumption of violent pornography and rape-supportive attitudes but they cannot be determined from this meta-analysis.

4.3.4 *Correlational studies on behaviour*

What about correlations between pornography use and actual sexually aggressive behaviour? 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. A study of 488 college males found that the more frequently they used pornography and the more violent the pornography they used, the more likely they were to be involved in various types of coercive sex, including rape (Crossman 1995, cited in Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 50). Another study among 477 undergraduate men examined exposure to softcore pornography, hardcore pornography, violent pornography (portrayals of bondage, whipping and spanking but without an explicit lack of consent), and rape pornography (sexually explicit depictions of rape in which force is used with obvious lack of consent). It found that ‘the strongest correlates of sexual coercion and aggression, as well as rape proclivity, were exposure to hardcore violent and rape pornography’ (Boeringer 1994, cited in Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 50).

Finally, several studies have investigated potential relationships between men’s pornography consumption and men’s self-reported likelihood of raping or sexually harassing a woman if they were assured of not being caught or punished. This is a measure of attraction to sexual aggression rather than of sexual aggression itself. These studies find that men who use hardcore, violent, or rape pornography, and men who are high-frequency users of pornography, are also significantly more likely than non-users or low-frequency users to report that they would rape or sexually harass a woman if they knew they could get away with it (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, pp. 51-52).

Early arguments for pornography's causal role in rape cited as one form of proof the fact that some convicted rapists had pornography in their possession or claimed that 'porn made me do it' (Strossen 1995, p. 256). However, analysis of the 13 comparative studies on this question finds that convicted sex offenders do not use pornography more frequently than men from the noncriminal general population, and their age of first exposure is not significantly lower (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, pp. 47-48). One complexity here is that the noncriminal general population includes individuals who have committed sexual offences but have not been convicted. Given the very low rates of reporting, prosecution and conviction of sexual assaults relative to other crimes, one may be comparing a population of known sex offenders with another population which includes unknown sex offenders. However, some differences are evident between offenders and non-offenders in their relationships to pornography. Compared to non-offenders, convicted rapists are more likely to perform a sexual act (such as masturbation, consensual sex, or criminal sex) after viewing pornography, are more aroused by portrayals of nonconsenting sex and are less aroused by portrayals of consenting sex (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 47-48). Jensen (1998b) examines men's detailed personal narratives to argue that pornography can

- (1) be an important factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality; (2) contribute to a user's difficulty in separating sexual fantasy and reality; (3) be used to initiate victims and break down their resistance to sexual activity; and (4) provide a training manual for abusers.

Similar evidence of a relationship between pornography and sexual aggression comes from studies of women. Russell and Trocki's (1993) early survey found that ten per cent of women had been upset by a person wanting them to enact a situation seen in pornographic pictures, movies or books, and that rates of unwanted requests to pose for pornography or upsetting requests to enact sexual acts inspired by pornography were significantly higher among women who were also the victims of domestic violence and marital rape. More recently, a representative survey of 4446 college women in the USA found that 6.1 per cent of the young women had been exposed to pornographic pictures or materials by someone when they did not wish to see them (Fisher, Cullen & Turner 2000, p. 31). Drawing on five collections of women's accounts, Jensen (1998b, pp. 108-119) further documents women's experiences of being coerced by sexual partners and others into looking at pornography and being disturbed not because of 'prudishness' about sex but because of discomfort with the objectification and abuse pictured. They also report being pressured or forced into unwanted sexual acts inspired by the man's use of pornography. There is no doubt that some women freely choose to consume pornography and some consider pornography a positive force in their lives, as Jensen (1998b, pp. 118-119) acknowledges. Yet this should not be used to discount the voices of other women whose experiences of pornography are more abusive.

4.3.5 Correlational studies on sexual assault

A fifth type of research on the potential relationship between pornography and sexual aggression looks for correlations over time between the increased availability of pornography in a particular country or context and rates of criminal sexual acts. Studies in Denmark, Japan and elsewhere do not find positive correlations (Strossen 1995, pp. 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, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 83). Positive correlations between the availability of pornography and rates of violence against women in particular regions may be the product of a third factor shaping both, such as a high population of younger men (who commit a higher proportion of sexual assaults) or a 'hypermasculated or macho culture' (Strossen 1995, p. 253).

4.4 Mediating the impact of exposure

We noted above that the effect of sexual content on young people's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour is mediated by a range of other variables such as age, gender, parental involvement and the nature of the presentation. The same holds for the impact of pornography in particular. Thus, in assessing the likely meaning and impact of young people's exposure to pornography, one needs to consider the nature of this 'exposure': the type of material involved, the duration and intensity of viewing, and the context (whether voluntary or involuntary, and whether solitary or collective) (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, pp. 159-160).

When a boy or 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 1998b, pp. 104-105). 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.

The effect of viewing pornography is also influenced by the characteristics of the young viewer himself or herself: their age, personal development, level and nature of sexual experience, as well as their sexual, emotional and cognitive responses to the material (Jensen 1998b, pp. 157-159; Fisher & Barak 2001, pp. 317-320). There are complex interactions between the viewer or reader, pornographic 'texts' and the context of consumption (Attwood 2002, pp. 102-103; Brown 2000).

Not a great deal is known about adolescent or adult observers of pornography, their preferences for different types of sexual content or the forms of consumption they practise (Boyle 2000, p. 193). However, there is a growing empirical investigation of the variables that moderate the impact of pornography. Important variables include the individual's cultural background (emphasis on gender equality or inequality), their home background (sexually permissive or restricted), their personality characteristics and dispositions, the content of the pornography (sexually violent or not), the viewer's current emotional state (angered or not), and the environment in which exposure occurs (Malamuth, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 55). In particular, 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, Addison & Koss 2000, p. 55)

As a further test of these findings, 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, Addison & Koss 2000, pp. 79-80).

Several other studies find that people with aggressive sexual inclinations can be 'primed' such that exposure to pornography activates and reinforces coercive inclinations and acts, while people with non-aggressive inclinations may find non-coercive tendencies reinforced instead by the same materials. Malamuth, Addison and Koss (2000, p. 85) stress that among males with the highest risk levels of sexual aggression, those who were very frequent pornography users had levels four times higher than their counterparts who used pornography less frequently. They argue for an understanding of pornography's influence in terms of multiple forces interacting in a 'synergistic' manner, some reinforcing and others counteracting innate tendencies. This research therefore extends our argument for the relationship between pornography consumption and sexual aggression, by highlighting what Malamuth, Addison and Koss describe as 'a circular relationship between highly coercive tendencies and interest in certain content in pornography' (2000, p. 85).

4.5 Effects among young people

To what extent can these findings regarding pornography and sexual aggression be applied to the 16 and 17-year olds in our study, and to children and adolescents in general? It is difficult to draw conclusions from the findings of surveys among adults, even young adults in their early twenties, that can be applied to people under 18, given that age, personal development and sexual experience mediate the meaning and influence of pornography on the viewer. In addition, while our study and others document the extent of children's exposure to pornography, they do not document the kinds of pornography viewed (deliberately or inadvertently). There may be differences for example between younger and older males' deliberate consumption of hardcore, violent and rape pornographies.

Nevertheless, the documentation in the research literature of significant associations between adult pornography use and sexual aggression is of real concern. It is likely that a similar relationship exists among teenagers, namely, that consumption of pornography, particularly high frequency use or consumption of violent portrayals, is

associated with sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviours. This association may be particularly strong for the four to five per cent of 16 and 17 year old boys in our study who watch X-rated videos and view Internet sex sites every week.

Regular consumption of pornography, and particularly violent pornography, therefore is a risk factor in boys' and young men's perpetration of sexual assault. More generally, such consumption is likely to intensify attitudes among young men that support rape and erode both males' and females' empathy for women who are the victims of sexual violence. Male peer support — attachment to male peers who encourage and legitimate woman abuse — is a significant predictor of sexual, physical and psychological abuse by men in dating relationships (Heise 1998, pp. 276-277). Hence, pornography consumption among boys and young men may feed indirectly into perpetration of abuse in some instances and the condoning of abusive behaviour in others. This is particularly important given that young women are three to four times more likely to be subject to sexual and physical violence than older women (Young, Byles & Dobson 2000, p. 1; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, p. 5), and young men aged 15 to 25 are responsible for more sexual assaults than older males (Australian Institute of Criminology 2002).

The consumption of pornography influences the prevalence of sexual and physical violence in young people's sexual and social relationships and is one factor sustaining their adherence to sexist and unhealthy notions of sex and relationships.

4.6 Other effects on young people

There are three other aspects to the possible impact on children and adolescents of consumption of or exposure to pornography, the first concerning sexual explicitness *per se*, and the next two concerning the range of sexual behaviours depicted.

4.6.1 Premature or inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit content

Depictions of sexual behaviour may be emotionally disturbing to the individual who encounters them. In the first place, 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.

A recent Australian survey found that 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. Many had found pornographic and other offensive content unexpectedly via a search or been sent the material by persons unknown. The young people said that they felt 'sick', 'yuck', 'disgusted', 'repulsed' and 'upset', some were annoyed because the material was unexpected and difficult to remove from the screen, and others reported feeling 'uncomfortable', 'shocked', 'embarrassed' or 'degraded' by the experience (Aisbett 2001, p. 41).

One should not conclude from this study however that children and adolescents necessarily are disturbed by sexually explicit depictions. Two recent American studies found that 25 to 30 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 have had at least one unwanted exposure to sexual pictures on the Internet in the last year, but also found that the majority of children were not distressed by these. In a 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 & Lin 2002, pp. 133-135). The second study finds a higher proportion of distressed viewers, but they are still in the minority. 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. However, 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, p. 3, 12).

Finally, 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. In turn, some parents are less concerned by the sexual explicitness *per se* of the material to which their children are exposed but more worried by the fact that exposure occurs in settings without parental guidance and the opportunity to explain how such material is inappropriate and to place it in a context (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 168).

4.6.2 *Being disturbed by seeing 'extreme' behaviours*

Second, children may be troubled or disgusted by images or accounts of non-mainstream behaviours, just as adults may be, given that the range of sexual activity found on the Internet, for example, is broader than the range found in 'mainstream' society (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 170). Videos and Internet pornography particularly depict a wide range of sexual practices and relations, including behaviours that may be seen as 'non-mainstream', 'deviant' or 'extreme' such as anal intercourse, multiple partners, bondage and sadomasochism, transsexual sex, sexual activities involving urination or defecation, bestiality and rape. As with other sexual practices, for example pre-marital and non-marital sex, homosexual sex, fellatio, cunnilingus and the use of 'sex toys' or 'marital aids' such as vibrators and dildos, the social acceptability of these

practices and their legal or criminal status varies in different countries and has varied across history.

The arena of sexuality has been characterised by conflicts over the definition and evaluation of sexual conduct and identities, persecution and criminalisation of particular behaviours and communities, and moral panics over such issues as prostitution, teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, AIDS and paedophilia (Rubin 1984). While male-male sex and various heterosexual sexual practices such as oral sex have progressively been decriminalised or granted greater social legitimacy in Western countries over the past three decades, sexual practices involving bondage, sadomasochism, transsexuality, urination, defecation, bestiality and rape remain socially highly unacceptable or criminal offences in most contexts. At the same time, some of the latter behaviours are accepted and indeed celebrated in particular sexual sub-cultures or communities. For the sake of convenience, hereafter the latter sexual practices are referred to collectively as ‘non-mainstream’ sexual behaviours.

While the committee of authors of the US National Research Council report *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet* disagree on many things, they state that there is some sexually explicit material which they unanimously regard as inappropriate and objectionable for children, namely depictions of ‘extreme’ sexual behaviour (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 180). They are not able to state this on the basis of scientific evidence as there is not a substantial body of empirical research covering the harmful impact of such depictions on minors. But they do so on the basis of their own moral and ethical sensibilities (Thornburgh & Lin 2002, p. 176). Implicit in this position is the belief that ‘extreme’ sexual practices are unethical in and of themselves.

The most commonly identified potential negative effects on young people are emotional discomfort or disturbance and the inappropriate acceptance of non-mainstream sexual practices. (We deal with the latter below.) While there is little academic documentation of young people being upset by depictions of non-mainstream sexual practices in particular, there is no reason to think that this does not occur. Children may also be alienated, as many adult women (Chancer 1998, pp. 74-78) and some adult men are, by the subordinating and degrading representations of women common in pornography.

Portrayals of non-mainstream sexual practices are disturbing to some young people precisely because the practices are ‘deviant’ — they are outside common cultural norms and positioned socially as taboo. If one were to adopt a single-minded cultural relativist position, one could then argue that if such representations are disturbing because the practices they show are widely understood to be ‘deviant’, the solution is to encourage social acceptance of the sexual behaviours so that their portrayal causes no more offence than a depiction of heterosexual intercourse in the ‘missionary’ position. This begs the question however: are these sexual behaviours acceptable in an ethical, moral, or political sense? This leads us to the third negative effect of pornography exposure among young people.

4.6.3 The inappropriate acceptance and adoption of non-mainstream sexual practices

In the case of the third type of potential negative effect, the harm is seen to be associated with the practice itself. Sexual behaviours involving bondage,

sadomasochism, transsexuality, urination, defecation, bestiality and rape are widely regarded as harmful, immoral or unethical in and of themselves, and indeed some are criminal offences. At the same time, cultural judgements of their acceptability can be internally complex. For example, while the majority of individuals in Australia condemn rape or sexual assault, one in seven young people expresses support for beliefs that condone or legitimate rape and sexual coercion.¹⁶

Because behaviours such as sadomasochism, bestiality and rape are judged by many commentators to be offensive by their nature, portrayals of these behaviours are also seen as harmful. In the first place, such portrayals involve enacting the behaviour in the sense that the act has to be practised if it is to be photographed or filmed. Moreover, portrayals of 'extreme' sexual behaviour may incite, eroticise and give legitimacy to it. Thus, the argument goes, it is inappropriate for anyone to see or indeed produce such portrayals, whether adult or child. And it is particularly harmful for minors to view such portrayals because they are still in the process of emotional and sexual development, are impressionable and are therefore more vulnerable to influence. In viewing images of non-mainstream sexual behaviour, children and adolescents may come to see such abhorrent practices as acceptable or desirable and may adopt them themselves. This argument therefore depends on two claims regarding the likely impact of exposure and the ethical status of the sexual practices at stake.

One version of this argument has been around for a long time, the notion of the 'recruitment' of children into homosexuality. A longstanding concern among conservative religious advocates has been that children are recruited into homosexuality through its 'promotion', including sexually explicit homosexual imagery. In addition, some parents may be concerned for example that their adolescent son or daughter, 'confused' about their developing sexuality, will adopt a gay or lesbian identity following exposure to homosexual materials. However, there is no evidence that being exposed to sexually explicit materials, or indeed any kind of representation, can change a person's overall sexual orientation, their attraction to one sex or the other. Indeed, systematic efforts to convert individuals from homosexual to heterosexual using therapy, electric shock treatment and other 'treatments' have a long record of failure (Allgeier & Allgeier 1995, pp. 506-508). Thus, the adolescent son's or daughter's likelihood of developing a homosexual identity is no more (or less) likely following exposure to homosexual representations. On the other hand, if the son or daughter does have access to information which is supportive of sexual diversity, they are more likely to accept their own fluctuating desires regardless of their final sexual orientation.

¹⁶ From an Australian survey of 5000 persons aged 12-20, 14 per cent of males agreed with the statement that 'It's okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on', and 15 per cent of males agreed that 'It is okay to put pressure on a girl to have sex but not to physically force her' (National Crime Prevention 2001, pp. 64-66). Males were significantly more likely than females to agree with these and other statements supporting or condoning violence in relationships. Two earlier Australian studies found that close to a third of boys and young men agreed that it was 'okay for a male to force a female to have sex' in one or more of a range of situations (Domestic Violence Resource Centre 1992; Golding & Friedman 1997).

Same-sex-attracted young people¹⁷ in Australia find the Internet very important in contacting gay and lesbian others, reducing isolation, developing self-acceptance, providing sexual health information, assisting with the courage to ‘come out’ in ‘real life’, offering friendship and relationship support, and helping in dealing with depression and suicidal thoughts (Hillier, Kurdas & Horsley 2001). Internet pornography has played a role here as ‘one way to address the invisibility of same sex desire, sexual performance and behaviour in Real Life’ (Hillier, Kurdas & Horsley 2001, p. 20). In the context of a silence about homosexuality in their everyday lives, young men and women 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, Kurdas & Horsley 2001, pp. 19-20). While this may be seen as a positive role for pornography, it does not diminish concerns about the negative impact on attitudes and behaviours of pornography, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

We have already argued that consumption of pornography depicting rape or other forms of violence by young men enhances their violence-supportive attitudes and their aggressive behaviours. Therefore, while we do not believe that exposure to pornography is likely to change an individual’s entire sexual orientation, we do accept that exposure can influence young people’s attitudes about and adoption of particular sexual behaviours. It has already been established that when adults engage in prolonged consumption of pornography showing non-mainstream sexual practices such as bestiality, their estimation of the prevalence of such practices in the population increases (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, p. 153; Zillmann 1989, p. 135). There is not yet a body of evidence with which to assess with any certainty whether young people exposed to eroticised images or accounts of anal intercourse, bondage, bestiality and so on are more likely to adopt these than young people who have not viewed such material. Nor is there a research base from which to judge whether children are more susceptible to the potential influence of such materials than are adults. Nevertheless, both claims are highly plausible.

Young people’s adoption and acceptance of particular sexual practices is of concern only if these practices are undesirable in some way — if they are unhealthy, immoral, unethical or oppressive. Ethical and moral frameworks with which to judge the acceptability of different forms of sexuality are diverse, historically and culturally variable, and at times hotly contested. Whereas some Christian commentators argue that homosexuality, pre- and non-marital sex, casual sex, sex with multiple partners and heterosexual anal intercourse are sinful and unnatural, others argue that these are normal, acceptable and morally neutral options.

It is straightforward to judge rape and bestiality as unacceptable given even a minimalist ethic of consent. It is particularly troubling therefore that children have easy access to images of rape and bestiality in Internet pornography. But the requirement that sexual behaviours be consenting does not rule out sex involving urination or defecation between consenting adults. Depictions of sex involving transsexual participants (such as individuals with both a penis and breasts) certainly can be consenting, but they may be

¹⁷ ‘Same-sex-attracted’ means that a young person reports sexual attraction either to the same sex only or to both sexes, so their desires are not exclusively heterosexual. Some such individuals will go on to develop stable lesbian, gay, or bisexual identities, while others will develop heterosexual identities.

disturbing to some. Nor does an ethic of consent necessarily exclude bondage and sadomasochism. Sadomasochism has been defended by some as a consensual sex act that enhances mutual pleasure through the enactment of fantasies of relational dominance and submission (Seidman 1992, pp. 118-119). Others argue that sadomasochism in fact represents the harmful eroticisation of power inequalities and the reproduction of patriarchal values (Jeffreys 1993, p. 26). Such critiques go beyond a minimalist formal ethic of consent (Seidman 1992, p. 132) to more substantive ethics concerned with the qualitative dimensions of sex, such as the framework proposed by Belliotti (1994).

In this report we do not propose to resolve these debates over the moral status of different sexualities. Nevertheless, Thornburgh and Lin (2002, p. 172) are right to state that there is likely to be a community consensus on ‘extreme sexually explicit imagery’, while much more disagreement is likely on ‘less extreme’ material. Our contribution is to indicate children’s exposure to pornography and the potential significance of this exposure. In the conclusion to this section, we articulate the broader principles which should guide responses to the question of young people and pornography.

4.7 Conclusion

Our study and others document the extensive deliberate and inadvertent viewing by children of sexually explicit materials. Little is known definitively about the meaning of such experiences or their impacts on young people’s attitudes, values, and behaviours in the short or long term. Alongside the need for more empirical data, there is a pressing need for the clearer articulation of the objectives to be served in addressing children’s relationships to sexually explicit media and to sexuality in general.

While further research is needed to draw definitive conclusions about the impacts on young people of exposure to pornography, in our view the evidence available provides grounds for serious concern about exposure of young people to particular types of pornography; more concerted action to minimise exposure of young people is warranted. Presently, as Zillman (2000) notes, ‘broad consensus exists only for the disapproval and condemnation of sexual coercion’ (p. 43). At the same time, on the basis of existing scholarship, there are some broad goals which should guide responses to the issue of young people and pornography.

The starting point should be the minimisation of involuntary exposure. As Thornburgh and Lin (2002, p. 178) state, there is a ‘reasonably strong social consensus ... that involuntary exposure to sexually explicit material is clearly inappropriate and undesirable.’ This is especially important for both legal and ethical reasons when it is minors who are viewing pornography without consent. At the same time, there is no scientific research consensus that exposure to sexually explicit material *per se* does, or does *not*, have a negative impact on children, nor is there a consensus regarding a causal relationship between exposure and long-term behavioural outcomes (Thornburgh and Lin 2002, p. 179). Inadvertent exposure to pornography on the Internet is far more likely to occur than accidental exposure to X-rated videos.

A second goal is the minimisation of young people’s consumption of violent pornography and pornography showing non-consenting sexual depictions (such as rape,

bestiality, ‘upskirts’ and sex with children). Use of pornography, particularly high frequency consumption and the viewing of violent pornography, is associated with increased attitudinal support for sexual aggression and an increased likelihood of sexually aggressive, coercive or harassing behaviour. Strategies are needed to minimise children’s (and adults’) consumption of violent pornography in particular, and to lessen the extent to which pornography’s content is violent, sexist or degrading. This may involve strategies for decreasing people’s desire to consume violent pornography in the first place, teaching media literacy skills with which to view pornography critically, and minimising access to violent pornography.

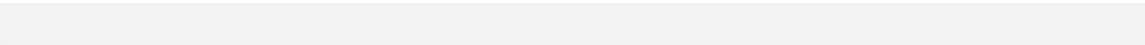
What about children’s exposure to depictions of ‘non-mainstream’ sexual practices such as sex involving multiple partners, bondage and sadomasochism, transsexuality, urination and defecation? If Australia’s classification system worked perfectly, minors would not see these or any other sexually explicit depictions. If minors gain illegal access to X-rated videos legal for Australian adults (as 73 per cent of boys and 11 per cent of girls in our survey have), they can view pornography that includes images of sex with multiple partners and sex with transsexual participants but not images of the other non-mainstream practices listed. The guidelines of the OFLC currently prohibit in films and videos the depiction of ‘sexual activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive and abhorrent,’ where ‘offensive’ is defined as ‘material which causes outrage or extreme disgust to most people’ (OFLC 2000, pp. 16, 19). The discussion of the ‘X’ category gives more detail, noting that ‘[f]etishes such as body piercing, application of substances such as candle wax, ‘golden showers’ [urination], bondage, spanking or fisting are not permitted’ (OFLC 2000, p. 14).¹⁸ Finally, if children are exposed particularly to Internet pornography (as 84 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls in our survey were), they are able to view images of virtually any sexual practice imaginable.

In supporting the maintenance of current age-related barriers to access to sexually explicit materials, by default we also endorse restrictions on children’s access to depictions of particular sexual practices. There are debates over the legitimacy of the OFLC’s prohibitions on sexual ‘fetishes’. Albury (1999, 2000) criticises the assumption that bondage, spanking, golden showers and so on are necessarily violent or demeaning, and points to the common depiction of such practices in the romance novels and erotic fiction of mainstream popular culture. Yet no one is arguing that it is desirable for minors to observe representations of such fetishes and we believe that measures are called for to minimise exposure to these non-mainstream sexual practices.

Finally, we support the provision of information and resources on sexual health, sexuality, and relationships to children and adolescents as valuable in its own right, and as reducing young people’s exposure to pornography. While some parents and teachers are concerned about sexuality education leading to earlier or increased sexual activity,

¹⁸ The situation is slightly more complex in practice. Videos classified after May or June 2001 by the OFLC have scenes of fisting and urination either removed or pixilated. Videos classified before this date can still have such scenes in them, and are available for rent or purchase. In addition, there is a thriving illegal trade in videos from adult outlets in Sydney, Melbourne and elsewhere, although these videos are not classified and thus contain a wider range of depictions than the OFLC allows. Customs prevents the importation into Australia of pornographic materials depicting children and bestiality where it finds them, but does not enforce OFLC guidelines in general.

recent and comprehensive literature reviews find instead that sexuality education leads to a delay in the onset of sexual activity, reduced numbers of sexual partners, reduced numbers of unplanned pregnancies, reduced rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and greater adoption of safer sex practices by those young people who are already sexually active (Grunseit et al. 1997; Roker and Coleman 1998, p. 15). Sexual understanding enhances young people's personal development, self-esteem, maturity, personal decision-making skills and self-management. And sexuality education among school-age children benefits the community, through lowered STI rates, fewer unplanned and unwanted pregnancies and sexuality-related health problems, lower health costs, less personal depression and less sexual violence (Goldman 2000, p. 17). The provision of information and resources to children, particularly on the Internet, means that they are less likely to stumble across pornography while searching for answers to their questions on sexuality and relationships.



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