



Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

via email: family.violence.reps@aph.gov.au

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Dear Secretary

Re: House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

Collective Shout: for a world free of exploitation appreciates the opportunity to contribute a submission to this very important inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence which will inform the next *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.

We commend the Committee for investigating this problem which has devastating consequences for large numbers of women and children in our nation each year.

As a 10-year-old movement against exploitation in all its forms, we wish to draw your attention to some of the broader issues which influence, drive, and reinforce violence against women and children.

Our focus in this submission is on the interrelated issues of objectification and sexualisation of women in advertising, media, marketing and popular culture and the socialising role of pornography in shaping attitudes and behaviours. We believe these issues warrant more attention as contributors to men's violence against women and children.

The very serious and distressing issue of family, domestic and sexual violence cannot be addressed without also addressing the cultural drivers which underpin and perpetuate inappropriate behaviours.

We hope our submission is helpful and wish the Committee well in its examination and deliberations.

Yours sincerely



Melinda Tankard Reist
Movement Director

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1. Introduction

Collective Shout supports the Federal Government's efforts to address violence against women and girls.

However, we believe it is inconsistent to aim to reduce men's violence through addressing gender inequality, while the objectification and sexualisation of women in advertising, marketing, media and pornography continue to undermine progress toward achieving desired goals.

The widespread objectification of women is both caused by, and contributes to, gender inequality. Evidence demonstrates that this in turn contributes to male violence against women. However this remains unaddressed by governments and regulatory bodies. Pornography is not mentioned as a factor in sexual violence in *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.

2. Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children and improve gender equality.

2.1 Addressing sexual objectification is a vital element of violence prevention

Efforts aimed at reducing men's violence against women and their children are limited by the sexual objectification of women in advertising, media and popular culture. Gender inequality is "the key underlying cause of violence against women" (Our Watch 2019). Research shows that sexually objectifying advertising directly contributes to gender inequality.

A hypersexualised culture conveys limited ideas of how men should behave, encouraging them to view women as inferior, and as sexualised objects existing merely or primarily for men's sexual gratification. A sexist culture grooms sexist men and boys; attitudes shape behaviours. Our view is underpinned by a vast body of research which verifies the harmful consequences of exposure to objectifying imagery. For example, a global meta-analysis of two decades of research verified that exposure to sexually objectifying portrayals of women leads viewers to have "a diminished view of women's competence, morality, and humanity" (Ward 2016).

The NSW Government in its 2016 report on the sexualisation of children and young people, and in line with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, stated: "such stereotyping contributes to attitudes that support or justify violence against women and girls."

In its *National Plan Fourth Action Consultation Summary Report*, the Department of Social Services (2019) noted the recommendation of "challenging and countering the objectification of women in the media and popular culture" to help prevent violence at its source.

A paper published by Women's Health Victoria (2018) documented the link between exposure to objectifying imagery and attitudes that were more tolerant of violence toward

women. Viewers were more likely to blame victims of violence. Women felt less safe in venues where objectifying images were displayed.

Our collaborative international #WakeUpInstagram campaign has exposed the way young girls are routinely sexualised, exploited and abused on social media platforms. We have also exposed how predators use Instagram to network, exchange, solicit and sell child sexual exploitation material. Global authorities have reported significant increases in online predatory activity - on both the standard and dark web and on social media platforms - as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns.

Australia's eSafety Office documented a 40 percent increase in reporting of child sexual abuse material from the same reporting period in the previous year, and reports of image-based abuse have almost doubled (Office of the eSafety Commissioner 2020).

2.1.1 Recommendations

2.1.1.1 Support education programs which address the cultural drivers of male violence against women and children including the harms of objectification in advertising, media and popular culture.

2.1.1.2 Support extended powers and increased resources for eSafety to broaden and strengthen its capacity to remove content which sexualises children.

2.2 Advertising industry self-regulation has failed to prevent sexual objectification and must be reformed

For 10 years we have documented the failure of the self-regulated advertising industry which comprises the Australian Association of National Advertisers (the industry's peak representative body and developer of the advertising industry Code of Ethics) and Ad Standards, the body which oversees the complaints-handling system.

Collective Shout Movement Director and Co-founder Melinda Tankard Reist has repeatedly drawn attention to the inconsistency of government investment in respectful relationship programs while failing to address the proliferation of objectifying representations of women in marketing and media which serve to undermine government efforts. We have also documented how violence against women is glamorised and eroticised in advertising and popular culture (Tankard Reist 2010).

Collective Shout campaigner Lyn Swanson Kennedy (2019) writes about the failures of Advertising Standards self-regulation:

Ad Standards is the agency entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring advertising content meets community standards and aligns with the AANA Code of Ethics. Part of its role is to administer a self-regulated complaint-handling process. However, Ad Standards has a years-long documented history of failure to do its job.

For example, the sex industry has been free to promote porn and prostitution services to children. Oral sex and body-shaming slogans, and graphic porn-themed ads have

passed Community Panel scrutiny. The Community Panel has trivialised children's exposure to sex shop porn-themed advertising, stating that the audience - which includes children - sees a "woman posing in underwear". When complaints have been upheld, it is often long after the ad has run its course and been replaced with new ads. Ads can remain on display weeks and even months after a ruling has been made because, while Ad Standards can give a verdict that an ad breaches Code, it can do nothing to have the ad taken down.

As we pointed out in our documentation of the many failures of the self-regulated advertising industry (Collective Shout 2016):

There is little if any engagement with experts or research into the role of sexualised advertising in sexualising children and the impacts of such sexualisation on children's healthy development. There is also no evidence of engagement with research outlining the harms of sexual objectification of women or the well-established links between objectification and men's violence against women.

We further highlighted the fact that "the bombardment of sexualised imagery has the effect of normalising sexist attitudes" and that this in turn reinforces attitudes that condone violence against women.

We also exposed the weaknesses of a self-commissioned study which Ad Standards uses to defend self-regulation (Kennedy, 2019). Referencing the growing body of evidence drawn from global research which verifies harms of exposure to sexually objectifying imagery in advertising and media, we refuted its claims that advertising is a "low-risk problem" and that "advertising content that is not aligned with community standards is unlikely to put people in significant danger."

The failures of self-regulation have resulted in perpetual displays of porn-themed advertisements in the public space, including 'family-friendly' suburban shopping centres. For example, sex shop Honey Birdette is a repeat offender with an eight-year history of violating the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics. Ad Standards has upheld community complaints against 48 separate Honey Birdette ads to date. Most often Honey Birdette's ads were found to breach section 2.3 of the Code for failing to treat the matters of 'sex, sexuality and nudity' with sensitivity to the all-age shopping centre audience. But because Ad Standards lacks takedown powers and has no ability to issue penalties, Honey Birdette has been free to plaster floor-to-ceiling pornified portrayals of women in the public space with impunity.

Along with these public displays of porn-themed images has come a range of derogatory and harassing behaviours directed at women. For example, one of our supporters recounted an experience as she passed a Honey Birdette store in her local shopping centre:

I was at Westfield Carindale and was near the Honey Birdette shop. There were two older teenage boys out the front of the shop, smirking and pointing at the images in the window. I heard one say to the other 'I'd like to f#k that!' and there was a snigger*

of agreement from the other boy...I spoke up to both boys about objectifying women in this way and referring to a woman as 'that' and the implications this has for young girls in our culture - but also what it says about them as well. The main boy who said the original words told me to 'f off'. (Collective Shout, 2018)

Despite an increased understanding and awareness of the scourge of men's violence against women, and the relationship between the objectification of women and violence against them, advertisers like Honey Birdette continue to objectify women for profit, and to reinforce gender inequalities that harm women.

From sexualised images of women accompanied by words like "Cage" and "Bound", and advertising focussed on women's genitals, Honey Birdette advertising normalises female and eroticises submission with images of women bound, chained and with collars and leads accompanied by text "blissfully bound" and "cuff me up, baby".

If we want to address male against women we must begin to hold corporations accountable for their contribution to attitudes that are tolerant of violence against women as they wilfully objectify women in their marketing and advertising activities. As Collective Shout Movement Director and Co-founder Melinda Tankard Reist pointed out regarding harmful, sexist advertising (2017):

We need to address the power of corporations to shape this diminished view of women's competence, morality and humanity.

In our submission to the National Inquiry into Workplace Sexual Harassment (2019) we pointed out the ways sexualised advertising contributes to a culture normalising and condoning of sexual harassment. Multiple Honey Birdette employees have complained of sexual harassment while working in the store, alleging that management didn't just dismiss the behaviour but saw it as beneficial to sales. Comments from former employees include:

I saw workers sexually harassed and intimidated by customers - and when these women spoke up, management told them to suck it up.

Employees are nothing more than eye candy, made to exploit their sexuality for rewards.

One of the most troubling allegations is that management instructed employees to put up with sexual harassment from men and to "turn that into a sale."

These testimonies must not be taken lightly. They highlight the harmful attitudes men have towards women in environments where the objectification of women is the norm. Such attitudes in turn fuel male violence against women. As women's rights campaigner Jean Kilbourne said in *Killing Us Softly 4*, "Objectifying women creates a climate where there is widespread violence against women. Turning a human being into a 'thing' is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person."

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs 2011

inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising resulted in the report *Reclaiming Public Space: Inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising* (2011). Collective Shout welcomed the Committee's report, especially the recommendation that:

... industry bodies report to the Attorney-General's Department by 30 December 2011 detailing their responses and how the relevant recommendations will be implemented and that they provide a comprehensive report to the AG's Department by 30 December 2012 detailing how the recommendations have been implemented.

And further that:

[i]f the self-regulatory system is found lacking, the Committee recommends that the Attorney-General's Department impose a self-funded co-regulatory system on advertising with government input into advertising codes of practice.

However nothing has been done in the nine years since the Committee's report to fix the failed self-regulated advertising system.

Last year the Australian Association of National Advertisers invited submissions to its Code of Ethics review. In our submission we called for the expansion of the Code to prohibit objectification in advertisements on the basis of verified harms (Collective Shout, 2019). The Code is set for release this month. We await its release with interest. Without an overhaul of Ad Standards, including powers of enforcement and penalties for non-compliance, the revised Code will lack teeth and remain ineffective. We have since written to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs asking it to re-examine the matter and to consider implementing the 2011 recommendation for a co-regulated system.

2.2.1 Recommendations

2.2.1.1 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs revisit its 2011 report and recommendations which put the advertising industry on notice and hold it to account for nine years of non-action.

2.2.1.2 Support a co-regulatory advertising industry complaints-handling system with powers of enforcement and powers to issue appropriate financial penalties for any company which objectifies and sexualises women in advertising and marketing.

2.3 Violence prevention strategies are incomplete without addressing pornography

Investigative journalist Jess Hill wrote in her award-winning book *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control, and Domestic Abuse* (2019):

*There is something to be said about what happens to men and boys who frequently masturbate to the sight of women being aggressively fuc*ed sometimes to the point of tears and vomiting – when all the while those women are portrayed as liking it. If the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children sees increasing respect for women as a key strategy to end domestic abuse, the endless wave of misogynistic porn is a heavy tide to swim against.*

Yet pornography was not once mentioned as a factor in sexual violence in *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.

Dr Meagan Tyler (2011) found, on the basis of analysis of the pornography industry's leading trade magazine, that 'mainstream' pornography is becoming markedly more extreme and more openly degrading to women. *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry* (Tankard Reist and Bray 2011) revealed how the pornography industry has become mainstream, popularising new kinds of hardcore and violent misogyny.

Recent research shows that 35%-45% of pornography contains aggression, with women the targets of aggression in 97% of those scenes (Fritz et al. 2020). A systematic review confirmed that women are overwhelmingly the targets of violence in pornography (Carrotte et al. 2020).

2.3.1 Pornography is associated with increased sexual aggression and non-sexual violence

Following the horrific death of Eurydice Dixon in 2018, Collective Shout Movement Director Melinda Tankard Reist (2018) wrote:

*I noticed the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader in rare bi-partisan agreement following the death of Eurydice Dixon: saying that we must not tolerate violence against women, and that we must tackle the enablers of that violence. We are hearing pronouncements like this more and more. But while there are many enablers of violence against women, there is a particularly monstrous one that rarely rates a mention. It is the global industrialisation of the bodies of women - among them, the most powerless - as fodder for men's consumption. As Abigail Bray writes in *Misogyny Re-loaded*, porn and rape culture means "inhabiting a paradoxical space where the rape and murder of women is prohibited but everywhere eroticised and the object of laughter."*

Forensic expert Dr Scott Johnson (2014) expressed his frustration with the widespread ignorance of the role of pornography in sexually violent crimes:

Many professionals tend to minimize the important role pornography plays in physically and sexually violent offenses. This is frustrating given that the research literature has demonstrated time and time again how pornography supports sexual

offenders' fantasy which in turn encourages violent behavior. More recent research correlates pornography use to physical batterers as well. Pornography tends to influence the user to become numb to the victim's safety and well-being and offers a playground for fantasy and experimentation of violent, manipulative, and harmful sexual conduct towards both children and adults. Pornography is certainly a strong component that can inspire deviant behavior. In addition, there appears to be a strong correlation between engaging in domestic abuse and sexual abuse, often engaging in both types of violence against one's victim. The sexual offender utilizes pornography to fantasize about meeting their needs as well as to help define preferences that can often lead to more deviant and violent sexual offense behavior. Men are at high risk for engaging in forced sexual behavior when their use of pornographic material has instilled and reinforced attitudes involving women as sex objects. Importantly, Simons et al. found that messages in sexually explicit material are more powerful than lessons learned from the family or society, indicating that frequent use of pornographic material tends to taint appropriate moral and social development.

Wright, Tokunaga and Kraus (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 22 studies (n = 20,820), finding that consumption of pornography was associated with an increased likelihood of committing actual acts of sexual aggression. Violent pornography had a stronger association, but the difference was not significant. These researchers are also frustrated by ideological positions regarding pornography that disregard the facts:

Meta-analyses have now found that pornography consumption affects non-sexual aggression and ASV in laboratory studies and is correlated with ASV and sexually aggressive behavior in naturalistic studies. As with all behavior, sexual aggression is caused by a confluence of factors and many pornography consumers are not sexually aggressive. However, the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently. It is acknowledged that the results of the present meta-analysis will not change the minds of those committed to the position that pornography cannot affect sexual aggression. The field will have to accept a "weight of evidence" approach to evaluation as opposed to a "consensus among scholars" approach.

In Australia, teen girls and young women are now enduring the effects of pornography on their relationships, as described by Melinda Tankard Reist (2016):

Many girls seem cut off from their own sense of pleasure or intimacy. That he enjoyed it is the main thing. Girls and young women are under a lot of pressure to give boys and men what they want, to adopt pornified roles and behaviours, with their bodies being merely sex aids. Growing up in a pornified landscape, girls learn that they are service stations for male gratification and pleasure.

Asked "How do you know a guy likes you?," a Year 8 replied: "He still wants to talk to you after you suck him off." A male high school student said to a girl: "If you suck my dick I'll give you a kiss." Girls are expected to provide sex acts for tokens of affection. A 15-year-old told me she didn't enjoy sex at all, but that getting it out of the way quickly was the only way her boyfriend would settle down and watch a movie with her.

I'm increasingly seeing Year 7 girls who seek help on what to do about requests for naked images. Being asked "send me a picture of your tits" is an almost daily occurrence for many. "How do I say 'no' without hurting his feelings"? girls ask... girls are tired of being pressured for images they don't want to send, but they seem resigned to how normal the practice has become. Boys use the images as a form of currency, to swap and share and to use to humiliate girls publicly.

Year 7 girls ask me questions about bondage and S&M. Many of them had seen 50 Shades of Grey (which was released on Valentine's Day). They ask, if he wants to hit me, tie me up and stalk me, does that mean he loves me? Girls are putting up with demeaning and disrespectful behaviours, and thereby internalizing pornography's messages about their submissive role.

More recently, Netflix film *365 Days* has been widely viewed by children and is another example of the normalisation and eroticisation of sexual violence against women, as Caitlin Roper (2020) explained: "The takeaway messages from the film are that male aggression against women is 'hot', that women secretly desire and enjoy violence and abuse, and that even 'no' really means 'yes'."

In a major study on teen dating violence, 1694 grade 10 high school students in the USA were surveyed. Pornography use was statistically significantly correlated with physical abuse (both victimisation and perpetration), sexual abuse (both victimisation and perpetration), rape myth acceptance, and negative gender equitable attitudes. Women who viewed violent pornography were more likely to experience sexual dating violence. Teen boys who were exposed to violent pornography were three times more likely to perpetrate sexual dating violence (Rostad et al., 2019).

Women themselves are clear about the connection between pornography and sexual violence in their own lives. DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez (2017) considered the lived experience of rural women in the USA, who are more likely to experience male intimate violence than suburban women. After in-depth interviews with 55 rural women in Ohio, they found that 24 of the women stated that pornography was involved in their sexual assaults. Women referred to 'gonzo' pornography in which women are characterized as subordinate to men and which "depicts hard core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased." This includes painful anal penetration, slapping, choking, gang rape and hair-pulling. They conclude that violent, degrading pornography is a major component of the problem of abuse of rural women.

As for men who have been arrested and imprisoned for acts of violence against women, pornography and its underlying messages are ubiquitous. Men arrested for domestic violence in Rhode Island were surveyed by Brem et al. (2018, n = 237). It was concluded

that men who self-reported higher levels of excessive, compulsive, and uncontrollable pornography use perpetrated more frequent physical and sexual intimate partner violence than did men with lower levels of such pornography use. A 2017 systematic review of the literature found convicted rapists have a high acceptance of rape myths compared to non-offenders (Johnson and Beech 2017), attitudes taught by pornography and a broader culture that objectifies and depersonalises women.

A 2018 study by the New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification reported that of young people (aged 14-17) who watched porn regularly, almost one-quarter often saw violence or aggression towards a woman and one-fifth of regular viewers often saw some form of non-consensual behaviour. A 2019 study also conducted by the same New Zealand Office showed that 35% of porn viewed in New Zealand contained some non-consensual behaviour. Notably, nearly half (46%) of viewed content was about 'step-family fantasy' or so-called 'incest porn'. This is concerning given the real-life statistics related to child sexual abuse by a family member. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) reported that more than 35 percent of persons who experienced childhood sexual abuse were first abused by a family member.¹

2.3.2 Exposing children and young people to pornography is associated with serious harms

Collective Shout previously summarised the literature on young people's viewing of pornography and its negative impacts, in our 2016 submission to the Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence and Gender Inequality.

Melinda Tankard Reist described the crisis in children's exposure to pornography from her perspective working with thousands of children and teens each year, supported by empirical research, in a 2016 article in which she describes the shocking statistics:

The average first age of exposure to pornography is 11 years, with 100% of 15-year-old males and 80% of 15-year-old females reporting that they have been exposed to violent, degrading online pornography.

Children are seeing violent depictions of sex, torture, rape and incest porn. Boys are having their sexual arousal conditioned by depictions of extreme cruelty, seeing women being assaulted in every orifice by groups of men. And all this before their first sexual experience – even their first kiss.

Sarah Champion, the Labour MP for Rotherham, whose constituency was at the centre of a child sexual exploitation scandal, produced the 2016 Dare2Care Report in which she quotes one young boy who asked: "If I have a girlfriend, do I need to strangle her when I have sex with her?"

A systematic literature review by Owens et al. (2012) found that adolescent consumption of online pornography was linked to attitudinal changes such as

- more permissive sexual attitudes towards casual sex, including viewing sex as primarily physical and casual rather than affectionate and relational, and

¹ Family members refer to someone who is a father, mother, step-father, step-mother, adult brother/step brother, adult sister/step sister, other male relative/in-law or other female relative/in-law.

- acceptance of male dominance and female submission as the primary sexual paradigm, with women viewed as “sexual playthings eager to fulfill male sexual desires”.

Owens et al. concluded that adolescents who are intentionally exposed to violent sexually explicit material were six times more likely to be sexually aggressive than those who were not exposed.

Wright et al. (2016) concluded unequivocally on the link between pornography consumption and sexual aggression:

As with all behaviour, sexual aggression is caused by a confluence of factors and many pornography consumers are not sexually aggressive. However, the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.

Data provided to the recent Inquiry into Age Verification for Online Wagering and Online Pornography (Tankard Reist 2019) showed some of the evidence of the harms of children accessing pornography online:

- Researchers have found that sex offences by school-aged children have quadrupled in Australia in four years, and authorities attribute this to children’s exposure to pornography.
- Seventy-five per cent of 7 to 11-year-old boys and sixty-seven per cent of 7 to 11-year-old girls in treatment for PSB reported early sexualisation through online pornography (Etheredge and Lemon 2015).
- A meta-analysis involving 59 studies and around 17,000 adolescents found those who offended were significantly more likely to have had early exposure to pornography, and to report higher rates of exposure to pornography (Seto and Lalumiere 2010).
- The late Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO wrote a disturbing submission to the 2016 Senate Inquiry into the harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the internet, drawing links between pornography and child sex abuse, paedophilia and child-on-child sex abuse (Briggs 2015).

The Children’s Commissioner in England commissioned research into the effects of children’s exposure to pornography, and found such compelling evidence that the report was named “*Basically, Porn is Everywhere...*” (Horvath et al. 2013):

The use of and children’s access to pornography emerged as a key theme during the first year of the Inquiry. It was mentioned by boys in witness statements after being apprehended for the rape of a child, one of whom said it was “like being in a porn movie”; we had frequent accounts of both girls’ and boys’ expectations of sex being drawn from pornography they had seen; and professionals told us troubling stories of the extent to which teenagers and younger children routinely access pornography,

including extreme and violent images. We also found compelling evidence that too many boys believe that they have an absolute entitlement to sex at any time, in any place, in any way and with whomever they wish. Equally worryingly, we heard that too often girls feel they have no alternative but to submit to boys' demands, regardless of their own wishes.

In the foreword to the report, Deputy Children's Commissioner for England Sue Berelowitz highlights violence done to girls by porn-influenced boys. This porn-fuelled entitlement of boys to sex with girls unable to do much other than submit is echoed in stories received by Collective Shout Movement Director in the course of her work engaging with young people in schools throughout the country (Tankard Reist 2015).

While Collective Shout has worked over the past decade to help parents and caregivers protect young people in their care, we have also pointed out that an all-of-community response is needed to have any real effect, given the nature of the threat (Collective Shout 2019).

Global platforms - and too often government and regulatory bodies - have too often in the past offloaded their ethical responsibilities to vested interests, to the detriment of individuals, families and the community. Any new social policy measures must substantially raise the bar for corporate social responsibility.

2.3.3 Pornography contributes to violence against women and children

Victims of domestic violence often report that pornography played a role in their abuse (Sommers and Check 1987; Shope 2004). In a 2000 study of 100 women who presented at a rape crisis centre, 28% said that their abuser used pornography; of these, 40% said it was part of the abuse and 43% said it affected the nature of the abuse. Twenty-one per cent thought it increased the frequency of abuse and fourteen percent thought it increased the level of the violence. Twelve per cent believed the abuser imitated what he saw in pornography and fourteen per cent said he tried to force them to do something he had seen in pornography (Bergen and Bogle 2000).

This research is backed by the testimony of the director of a Queensland sexual violence counselling service:

In the past few years we have had a huge increase in intimate partner rape of women from 14 to 80+. The biggest common denominator is consumption of porn by the offender. With offenders not able to differentiate between fantasy and reality, believing women are "up for it" 24/7, ascribing to the myth that "no means yes and yes means anal", oblivious to injuries caused and never ever considering consent. We have seen a huge increase in deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, torture, drugging, filming and sharing footage without consent. I founded the centre 25 years ago and what is now considered to be the norm in 2015 is frightening. I wonder where we will be in another 10 years (McLeod, cited in Tankard Reist 2018).

2.3.4 Violence and sexualised violence against women and children are normalised by depictions in media and pop culture

In our submission to the Review of Australian Classification Regulation (2020) we noted shortcomings in the classification system which resulted in computer games depicting violence, sexual violence and sexual objectification being inappropriately classified and accessed. We also expressed concern about the discovery of illegal animated child sexual abuse material which the Classification Board had classified as 'M' and therefore unrestricted and accessible to viewers of any age. Other illegal anime content has been classified as 'MA', suitable for people 15 years and over.

We pointed to Senator Griff's exposure of the Board's disturbing failure to exercise its responsibilities under Australian law in this most recent example of systemic failure by this government agency. Senator Griff cited a number of anime series that feature the sexual abuse of children. One of these, *Sword Art Online*, which depicts rape and sexual assault of children, was given an unrestricted M rating by the Classifications Board, despite the fact it constitutes illegal child exploitation material. In this series, the character Asuna is raped by her captor Sugu, who threatens to also rape her in the real world, where she is lying in a hospital room in a catatonic state. Sugu also states that he'll make a recording of the virtual rape to shame her.

On July 30, 2020, *The Age* reported that the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) had pulled a film depicting child exploitation which the Board had previously approved for screening at the festival (Quinn 2020). The MIFF made the decision to withdraw *The Trouble with Being Born* after receiving expert advice from forensic psychologist Dr Karen Owen who warned the film "normalises sexual interest in children" and that it would without doubt "be used as a source of arousal for men interested in child abuse material." We are deeply concerned by the report that the Australian Classification Board approved this child exploitation-themed film for viewing in Australia. We believe this approval warrants an investigation.

Collective Shout recently successfully campaigned against the sale of child sex abuse dolls on the global shopping platform Alibaba (Liszewski 2020). Our campaigns manager Caitlin Roper has written and spoken extensively on the threats posed by the rise of sex dolls and robots to women and girls in real life (Roper 2020).

Strategies to address and combat violence against women and their children must also address depictions of violence and sexual violence against women and children which are presented in media and pop culture as entertainment, and the failing government systems which serve to endorse and normalise this violence.

2.3.5 Where are we now?

Researchers Mead and Sharpe (2020) outline the state of the field of research into pornography use and point to future research directions with regard to problematic usage of pornography (PUP), a key aspect of the 2018 *Manifesto for a European research network into Problematic Use of the Internet*, a programme of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology which will direct research funding priorities over the next decade:

Research over the past decade has shown that pornography viewing correlates with higher levels of sexual assaults and dating violence, pathways into domestic violence and reduced levels of bystander intervention. ...

The authors frequently train social workers and criminal justice professionals who report that consumption of pornography, particularly violent pornography, is a consistent negative factor in the out-of-control domestic situations they encounter in their work. Unlike mainstream television where intimate partner violence in programmes tends to be simulated, most violence depicted in pornography is real.

We propose ... that the development of a PUP (problematic use of pornography) comes from the ideas it introduces into a viewer's mind and life. These can range across a whole spectrum from requiring to replay sexual scripts from pornography in your head to get aroused during partnered sex, to learning to ignore the need for consent in sexual activities, to promoting rape myths, the diminution of bystander intervention and the promotion of practicing dangerous activities such as autoerotic asphyxiation.

Other problematic uses can encompass escalation to criminal activities around viewing or creating images of child sexual abuse. It can also lead individuals to engage in sextortion, 'capping', and other illegal activities towards minors. Other new populations are the technology-enabled voyeurs whose illegal activities are also directed at adults, encompassing upskirting, hidden cameras, revenge porn and sharing sexual material without permission. Pornography has also appeared that was secretly recorded on baby monitors lacking password protection.

2.3.6 Recommendations

We recommend the following measures:

2.3.6.1 Acknowledge the role of pornography and sexual objectification in violence against women and children.

2.3.5.2 Address supply factors. For example, support the international efforts to shut down mega pornography platform Pornhub for profiteering from child exploitation and sex trafficking. Over 300 child protection, anti-trafficking, and women's rights organisations are supporting this campaign (TraffickingHub 2020) and a change.org petition has attracted 1.7 million signatures at time of writing.

2.3.6.3 Support age verification as a strategy to minimise porn exposure to children (see submissions by Collective Shout 2019; Tankard Reist 2019).

2.3.6.4 Support an investigation the Classification Board assigning M or MA15+ ratings to anime and manga genres and classification of other movies featuring Child Sexual Abuse Material contrary to Australian law, and support a robust classification system which takes into account evidence of the harms of sexual objectification, ensures computer games are classified appropriately and ensures compliance.

2.3.6.5 Address demand: provide comprehensive education about the harms of pornography for school communities.

2.3.6.6 Provide and fund specialist treatment clinics for anyone harmed by the pornography consumption of another person.

3. All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse.

3.1 Image-based abuse is increasingly common

Collective Shout has previously advocated for stronger legislative measures to address image-based abuse (Collective Shout 2020). Image-based abuse is on the increase in Australia and globally, with severe consequences for victims and little public understanding of the criminal nature of these actions (Powell et al. 2020).

A new research paper focusing on the perpetrators of image-based abuse, as well as front-line workers engaging with perpetrators on a professional basis, published these disturbing findings (Mortreux et al. 2019):

- Perpetrators demonstrated little remorse and downplayed their actions through minimisation, tending to blame the victim or even deny responsibility.
- With the exception of those involved in taking images of strangers and the taking and sharing of child exploitation images, few were aware that their behaviour was against the law.
- There was a strong sense that on-sharing intimate images without consent was fairly commonplace and becoming somewhat normalised. Some perpetrators highlighted that they were aware of “numerous people” getting away with similar actions.
- The research also highlights the need to see more action to disrupt the normalising culture around image-based abuse.
- The mainstreaming of pornography reduces the public understanding of sexual images as harmful and inappropriate.

We note the effect of COVID-19 on these trends, with the eSafety Office reporting an increase of 200% of reports of image based abuse during the lockdown period.

3.2 Recommendations

3.2.1 Support school and community education programs which address the harms of technology-facilitated abuse.

3.2.2 Support extensions of power and resources to eSafety which broaden, strengthen and quicken its capacity to remove harmful images, and to address the growing problem of Deepnudes (Roper 2020).

3.2.3 Support the shut-down of Pornhub (and other platforms) which hosts and profits from image-based abuse.

4. The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour.

4.1 Recommendations

4.1.1 Address pornography use in intervention programs and support services for men who perpetrate violence or who desire help to prevent them acting out.

5. The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionate levels of violence, often more severe. The impacts on women and children are complex and devastating. Our Watch (2018) describes:

- Indigenous women experience 3.1 times the rate of violence compared with non-Indigenous women;
- 3 in 5 ATSI women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a male partner;
- They are 11 times more likely to die from assault;
- They experience 32 times the rate of hospitalisation from family violence compared with non-indigenous women, and three times more likely than indigenous men;
- Alcohol is a contributing factor and sometimes a trigger, but not the 'cause'.

In 2009 a major new initiative was underway to address what was then acknowledged as a serious pornography problem in some Indigenous communities, closely connected to sexual violence. From the report's background:

Numerous government inquiries and commentaries indicate that there are unacceptable levels of pornography exposure among children in some Indigenous communities (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002; Mullighan 2008; Robertson 1999). Widespread exposure to pornography, particularly in childhood, has been linked to the overt sexualisation of children, a breakdown in sexual norms and the manifestation of problematic sexual behaviours, including sexual violence, sex between minors and

promiscuity (Wild & Anderson 2007). A number of high profile court cases in recent years involved sexual offences against children linked to the use of pornography.

In March – April 2007, Syd Stirling, then Northern Territory Attorney-General, approached NT Justice about developing an education campaign aimed at increasing understanding among Indigenous people about the Australian film and literature classification system. He proposed that the campaign would educate Indigenous people in the Northern Territory about the symbols used to classify media (eg X18+, R18+, MA15+ etc) and the factors that determine how film and literature is classified. His proposed education campaign would also carry the message that pornography can be harmful to young people who do not recognise that pornography is not ‘real life behaviour’ for most people. (Bryant and Willis 2009)

Since then, pornography has barely been mentioned in major reports or initiatives over the past ten years. In the Northern Territory’s *Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework 2020-2028* (2020a), pornography was identified as a problem only for children, and no solutions or strategies were proposed. And the *Gender Equality: Statement of Commitment* (Northern Territory Government 2020b) failed to mention pornography at all.

Dr Carolyn West, a domestic violence expert with a focus on gender-based violence in the lives of Black women in the USA, writes: “In porn, so many things are normalized that wouldn’t ever be tolerated in any other scenario or industry, especially in our society today” (2020).

Pornhub is the most popular pornography website in the world and hosts extreme racist and violent pornography.

As a platform, Pornhub hosts both amateur and professional porn, and while it’s largely user- or studio-generated and not produced by the site, Pornhub’s leaders like to boast that a human curator monitors every video uploaded. These curators make no discernible attempt to filter for racism, hate, and content that could incite violence. (They can barely stop porn featuring minors.)

The porn industry has a long history of depicting Black men as hypersexualized predators of white women, a trope that has its roots in the terrorism and lynching of Black men on trumped-up charges of rape, or even just for looking at white women. This has long been neatly distilled in the porn category “interracial.” That might seem to imply performers of different races having sex, but in reality, interracial porn features mainly Black men and white (often blond) women...

One producer has said his most popular movies are those where “the purity of the sacred white women is compromised.” Another pornographer told Adult Video News, “My customers seem to enjoy black men ‘taking advantage’ of white women: seducing their white daughters and wives. The more ‘wrong’ a title is, the more appealing it is.” This explains why interracial porn geared toward white men is more dominated by Black male porn performers than any other ethnic group.” (Dines and West 2020)

Black women featured in pornography endure degrading comments about their skin and appearance. They are more likely to be targets of physical aggression, and less likely to receive acts of intimacy such as kissing, compared with white women. They are depicted as

having excessive and uncontrollable sexuality. Such material perpetuates the myth that black women are hypersexual and animalistic (Dines and West 2020).

In the context of current events in the USA, Laila Mickelwait (2020) writes:

While the rest of the country grapples with race and racism, Pornhub enables, monetizes and promotes content involving racism in its most extreme forms. The sexualized hatred Pornhub dishes out as masturbation material should alarm a nation that otherwise claims to condemn bigotry.

Our investigations of Pornhub uncovered abhorrent, degrading content featuring Aboriginal women. A search of 'Aboriginal' on pornhub.com returned a search-term compilation which included 'Aboriginal Teen', 'Aboriginal Sluts', 'Aboriginal Girl', 'Aboriginal Pussy', 'Hot Aboriginal' and 'Half Caste Aboriginal'. Video titles included 'Aboriginal teen slut' and 'Aboriginal Koori cheating on her man' (Collective Shout 2020).

These terms and titles are representative of a genre of porn which specifically degrades and dehumanises Aboriginal women and fuels attitudes that tolerate violence against them and their children. As we previously stated, the issue of violence against women and their children - an issue which affects Aboriginal women at significantly higher rates than other Australian women - cannot be adequately addressed without also addressing pornography: how it is consumed in Aboriginal communities and how pornography depicts Aboriginal women.

We are also deeply concerned about the way in which women of Asian ethnicities are depicted in pornography and the impact these depictions have on Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women. Our investigations of Pornhub (Collective Shout, 2019) and even mainstream social media platform Instagram (Collective Shout, 2020) exposed the fetishisation of Asian women and the way in which the porn and sex industries routinely present Asian women as sexually subservient and perpetually available for male sexual gratification, and normalise violence against them. Such stereotypes are harmful to Australian CALD women, and place them at increased risk of male violence.

Journalist Shona Yang (2019) highlighted the vulnerabilities of women in Asian-Australian communities to domestic violence, arguing that cultural expectations such as 'saving face' heighten the risk for women in these groups and prevent victims from seeking help. Yang rightfully argued that consideration of women from Asian-Australian communities in strategies to combat domestic violence must go beyond 'translated pamphlets'.

Yang pointed to research by Sydney University's Ghafournia et al. (2018) which examined the representation (or lack thereof) of immigrant women in a sample of Australian government documents aimed at providing information about family violence. Ghafournia concluded that Government reports aimed at informing policy tended to "minimize the diverse experiences of domestic violence and position CALD women's experiences of abuse as marginal concerns." They wrote:

The visibility of CALD women in Australian policy is a doomed enterprise unless the lived experiences of marginalised women are integrated into these reports and ultimately into policy development.

We believe that consideration of Australian CALD women in policy development should include addressing the fetishisation of Asian women in pornography and strategies to prevent access to pornographic content which is demeaning and degrading to women of Asian and other CALD communities. Supporting a shutdown of Pornhub, and supporting an age verification system to access online porn to prevent childhood exposure to this type of content would serve this end.

5.1 Recommendations

5.1.1 Acknowledge that pornography is a driver of violence in Indigenous and CALD communities, as it is in the broader Australian community, and culturally appropriate strategies be developed and funded to tackle it.

5.1.2 Support a shutdown of Pornhub, and the eradication of genres of porn which target, degrade and dehumanise women.

5.1.3 Support an age verification system to access online pornography to prevent childhood exposure to pornography which degrades and dehumanises Aboriginal women, and women of Asian and other distinctly culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

6. The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have coincided with the beginning of, or an increase in, physical and/or sexual violence against many women, according to their own reports (Boxall, Morgan and Brown 2020). Plan International Australia and Save the Children released a report showing a disturbing increase in sexual violence and online abuse during COVID-19 pandemic (Handley 2020).

Dr Kristin Diemer, senior research fellow at University of Melbourne, noted an increase in pornography use during lockdown, leading to an increase in demand for pornography, which could lead to an increase in child exploitation for the purpose of pornography. During the COVID-19 period several incidences of familial child sexual abuse and/or violence were reported in the media. The links to online child exploitation were clear in each case. Australian law enforcement authorities reported that child abuse websites were 'crashing' during COVID-19 because of increased use, and reports to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) increased by 123% in twelve months (Dillon 2020).

Pornography and online child sexual exploitation are clearly implicated in women's and children's experiences of abuse during COVID-19, providing further evidence that pornography is a driver of sexual abuse.

6.1 Recommendations

6.1.1 That the Committee acknowledge the increased role of pornography in harming women and children during the COVID-19 lockdown and consider measures to prevent further harms given likelihood of further pandemic-related lockdowns.

Conclusion

We commend our submission to the Committee and urge that the role of pornography as a driver and contributor to violence against women and their children will be acknowledged and included in the updated *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.

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