

A man is shown in profile, looking at a screen that displays a grid of small, blurry images, likely pornography. The background is dark, and the screen is the primary light source.

Pornography regulation: The case for Parliamentary reform

An inquiry into the pornography trade by the All-Party
Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation



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ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
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All-Party Parliamentary Group on Commercial Sexual Exploitation



The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation brings together parliamentarians from across the political spectrum to work for an end to commercial sexual exploitation. We lead research and advocacy in Parliament to tackle all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

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Summary

This inquiry was conducted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation in order to:

1. Assess the scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry.
2. Identify the types and severity of harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography.
3. Establish what legal framework is needed in the UK to prevent and address the harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography.

The findings and recommendations are based on a series of oral evidence hearings, written submissions from witnesses, and a literature review.

Part 1: The scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry

The user base of pornography is highly gendered.

Significantly more men than women watch pornography, and significantly more men than women watch pornography with any frequency. This discrepancy is observed among adolescents and adults.

Violence against women is prolific in mainstream pornography.

Content analyses of popular, mainstream pornography reveal that a substantial proportion of films feature visible physical aggression. This aggression is predominantly perpetrated by men against women. Women are typically shown responding neutrally or with pleasure to this physical aggression.

Illegal content is freely accessible on mainstream pornography websites.

Evidence of illegal content has repeatedly

been detected on some of the UK's most popular pornography websites. This includes films featuring child sexual abuse, rape and victims of trafficking. The lawlessness that characterises the online sphere of the pornography trade is typified by the finding that popular pornography websites publish videos uploaded by members of the public without verifying that everyone in the video is an adult or that everyone in the video gave their consent for it to be uploaded. There is no UK legislation requiring websites to implement this basic safeguard, nor any regulator to hold them accountable.

The pornography industry is characterised by market dominance.

The dominant industry operator is Mindgeek, a pornography conglomerate that owns over 100 websites and production companies. One of the websites this company owns is Pornhub, which was visited by 50% of adult males in the UK in September 2020 alone.

Part 2: The types and severity of harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography

Pornography fuels sexual violence.

Extensive evidence from experimental, non-experimental, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies reveals that pornography consumption plays a significant role in fuelling sexual violence. Research indicates that pornography influences viewers' 'sexual scripts', shaping their understanding, expectations and decisions in relation to sexual behaviour. Pornography also serves to dehumanise and sexually objectify women, fostering attitudes that underpin violence against women and girls.

Pornography fuels social and political harms against women and girls.

Studies suggest that pornography consumption

is associated with higher levels of sexist attitudes, opposition to affirmative action for women, stronger endorsement of rape myths, and being less likely to intervene as a bystander to prevent sexual assault.

Mainstream pornography websites perpetuate racist stereotypes.

Popular pornography websites fuel racist stereotypes, including those relating to sexual aggression, through both the content and titles of videos.

Allowing or enabling children's access to online pornography is an egregious violation of child safeguarding.

Online platforms freely enable children to access pornographic content on their sites. As a result, the rate of exposure to pornography among young people is high, with consumption, particularly among boys, normalised. This is fuelling deeply harmful attitudes and behaviours among young people.

Sexual coercion is inherent to the commercial production of pornography.

Legal and financial obligations, constraints and pressures result in sexual coercion being inherent to commercial pornography production. Accordingly, pornography is recognised as commercial sexual exploitation and a form of violence against women by the Scottish Government.

Part 3: Recommendations: Legal measures to prevent and address the harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography

A multi-faceted legal and regulatory approach will be necessary to respond to and prevent the multiplicity of harms connected with the production, distribution and consumption of pornography. Legal reforms should be consistent with,

and integrated where relevant, with existing legislation, policy and statutes relating to other and connected forms of violence against women.

1. Make the regulation of pornography consistent across different online platforms, and between the online and offline spheres.
2. Criminalise the supply of pornography online to children, and legally require age verification for accessing pornography online.
3. Address pornography as commercial sexual exploitation, and a form of violence against women, in legislation and policy.
4. Legally require online platforms to verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform is an adult and gave permission for the content to be published there.
5. Give individuals who feature in pornographic material the legal right to withdraw their consent to material in which they feature being published and/or distributed.
6. Hold exploiters to account by making it a criminal offence to enable or profit from the commercial sexual exploitation of others.
7. Conduct a comprehensive review of laws on pornography and obscenity.

For too long, Governments have paid scant attention to the harms being perpetrated by the pornography trade – and the deleterious effect these are having on women and girls' lives. This must change. We urge the Government to heed the findings of this inquiry and enact urgent reforms to combat the abuses and harms perpetrated during the production, distribution and consumption of pornography.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of an inquiry on pornography, undertaken by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The inquiry was launched in November 2021. The objectives of the inquiry were to:

1. Assess the scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry.
2. Identify the types and severity of harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography.
3. Establish what legal framework is needed in the UK to prevent and address the harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography.

The findings and recommendations of this report are based on evidence provided to the inquiry during oral evidence hearings, written submissions from witnesses, and a literature review drawing on multiple research methodologies. Individuals who provided evidence to this inquiry included survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, academics, practitioners, and front-line service providers supporting victims of sexual exploitation.

Alongside the inquiry's main findings, this report details recommendations for Government and sets out essential future lines of parliamentary enquiry.

Current regulation of the pornography trade

A loose patchwork of criminal laws currently apply to the production, distribution and consumption of pornographic material. These include:

- Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016
- Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982
- Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (England and Wales)
- Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010
- Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016
- Obscene Publications Act 1857 (Northern Ireland)
- Obscene Publications Acts 1959 & 1964 (England and Wales)
- Protection of Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1978
- Protection of Children Act 1978 (England and Wales)
- Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008
- Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009
- Sexual Offences Act 2003 (England and Wales)

In summary, under existing legislation it is a criminal offence to publish work that is deemed ‘obscene’;¹ it is illegal to possess an ‘extreme’ pornographic image;² it is an offence to make, distribute, show or possess indecent photographs or other prohibited images of a child; it is an offence to supply pornography offline to anyone under the age of 18; it is illegal to disclose a private sexual film or photograph without the consent of any individual who appears in that material if the disclosure is done with the intention to cause that individual distress; and it is an offence to record the private act of another person without their consent if the intention of the recording is for sexual gratification.

The main statutory regulator of pornography is the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) – but their powers only extend to pornography distributed offline. The BBFC classifies pornographic content as either 18 or R18 before it can be published. Material that fails the classification system because, for example, it contains illegal content, cannot be published. It is a criminal offence to supply pornographic videos, DVDs and cinema screenings to anyone under the age of 18.³ Hard copy videos and video games containing ‘strong sexual content’ and rated R18⁴ by the BBFC can only be supplied in a

licensed sex shop, and R18 content is prohibited altogether on linear TV.⁵

However, the BBFC is not involved during the production stage of pornography, and it has no powers to retrospectively investigate production practices. Crucially, the BBFC has no regulatory or enforcement powers relating to pornography published online. The BBFC informed the inquiry: “Regrettably, equivalent protections do not currently exist on the internet, where hardcore pornography (including illegal content and content the BBFC would refuse to classify on harm grounds) is freely accessible to viewers of all ages.”

The Government’s Online Safety Bill proposes to give some powers to the communications regulator, Ofcom, to prevent children from accessing pornography online.

Disclaimer: This report contains examples of pornography film titles which include explicit and derogatory language, as well as explanations of terms used in pornography to denote particular acts. This language has been included to ensure that discussion and analysis of pornography regulation is grounded in the reality of the content hosted by mainstream pornography websites.

¹ Under the Obscene Publications Acts, material is obscene if, taken as a whole, it has a tendency to ‘deprave’ and ‘corrupt’ individuals exposed to it.

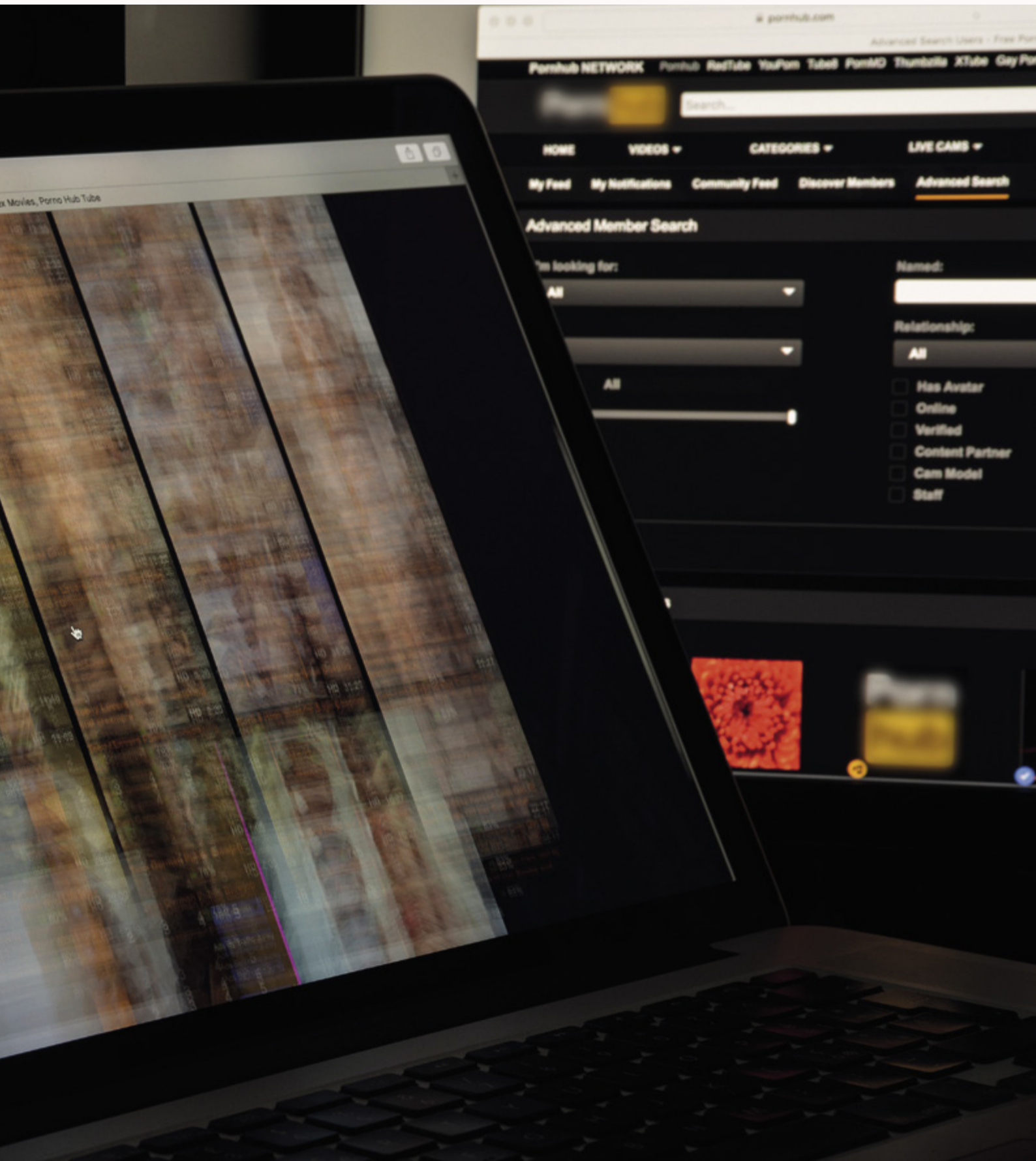
² Part 5 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 stipulates that an extreme pornographic image is pornographic, grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character, and portrays in an explicit and realistic way acts including those that threaten a person’s life, rape and bestiality. The Act defines an image as pornographic if it must reasonably be assumed to have been produced solely or principally for the purpose of sexual arousal.

³ Hard copy videos are subject to a mandatory classification regime by the BBFC under the Video Recordings Act, while cinema screenings are subject to a similar regime by the BBFC under the Licensing Act 2003. Where content is classified by the BBFC as only suitable for those aged 18 or over, it is a criminal offence to supply the content in breach of this classification.

⁴ The R18 category is “primarily for explicit works of consenting sex or strong fetish material involving adults” – BBFC [Classification Guidelines](#). R18 films can only be shown to adults in specially licensed cinemas, and R18 videos can only be supplied to adults in licensed sex shops. R18 videos cannot be supplied by mail order.

⁵ ‘Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography’, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2016.

PART 1: The scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry



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1.1 The user base of pornography is highly gendered

In 2021, Ofcom reported that “Half (49%) of the UK adult population visited an adult content site and/or app in September 2020”.⁶ Pornhub was cited as the most popular ‘adult content’ website, which “was visited by a third of UK online adults (15 million) in September 2020, up by 1 million visitors since September 2019.” This report gave rise to media headlines such as ‘Half of adults in UK watched porn during pandemic, says Ofcom’ (the Guardian⁷) and ‘Porn: the ‘incredible’ number of UK adults watching content’ (BBC Newsbeat⁸). However,

this gender-neutral framing of the finding belies the highly gendered nature of pornography consumption. Where Ofcom did provide sex-disaggregated statistics, they revealed that substantially more men than women visited a pornography website. In September 2020, 50% of all UK adult males visited Pornhub, the most popular pornography website overall, compared to 16% of adult females.

In 2022, polling by YouGov revealed greater detail about the gendered nature of pornography consumption.⁹ It found that men are more likely than women to be frequent viewers of pornography at all ages. While young women are more likely to watch pornography than older women, this is still “nowhere near the same extent as men”.¹⁰ Over a third of men (36%) watch pornography at least once a week, compared to just 4% of women. The polling revealed, “only 15% of

⁶ Online Nation: 2021 report, Ofcom, 2021, p.100.

⁷ Half of adults in UK watched porn during pandemic, says Ofcom, the Guardian, 9 June 2021.

⁸ Porn: The ‘incredible’ number of UK adults watching content, BBC Newsbeat, 11 June 2021.

⁹ How often do Britons watch porn? YouGov, 1 July 2022.

¹⁰ How often do Britons watch porn? YouGov, 1 July 2022.

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women watch porn with any degree of frequency”, compared to 51% of men. 40% of women have never watched pornography, compared to just 8% of men. Men are significantly more likely to watch pornography, and to watch it frequently.

The gendered nature of pornography use is observable among adolescents. Dr Michael Flood, Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology, highlights, “The deliberate consumption of pornography is highly gendered among young people, as it is among adults. Males are more likely than females to use pornography, to do so repeatedly, to use it for sexual excitement and masturbation, to initiate its use (rather than be introduced to it by an intimate partner), to view it alone and in same-sex groups, and to view more types of images”.¹¹ Giving evidence to this inquiry, Dr Flood told the inquiry about an Australian study he was involved in, which uncovered that “by the age of 15, 60% of boys had seen pornography and 40% of girls, and over half of boys were watching pornography at least once a week and 16% were doing so daily. Among girls it was far less common, but among boys it was relatively routine.”

A review of 75 studies published between 1995 and 2015 on the use of pornography by adolescents concluded: “Adolescents who used pornography more frequently were male, at a more advanced pubertal stage, sensation seekers, and had weak or troubled family relations.”¹²

Research commissioned by the BBFC on young people and pornography reveals further gendered differences.¹³ The report observes, “Girls in particular reported watching pornography to meet the perceived

sexual expectations of boys, which they believed were in turn informed by the viewing of pornography.”¹⁴ When asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, ‘Sex in porn is very similar to what sex is like in real life’, 20% of boys agreed, in comparison to just 4% of girls.

1.2 **Violence against women is prolific in mainstream pornography**

Overt violence against women is commonplace in contemporary, mainstream pornography. Dr Gail Dines, Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women’s Studies at Wheelock College, Boston, told the inquiry: “The porn we are talking about today is not your father’s Playboy. In place of the sexist pin-ups of naked women smiling coyly in a cornfield, contemporary porn is violent, abusive, cruel, body-punishing and based on the debasement and degradation of women. It is free and a click away.”

The violence perpetrated against women in pornographic films has long been acknowledged by the industry itself. In 2003, a trade magazine called *Adult Video News* featured a cover story headlined “Harder, faster: can porn get any nastier?”¹⁵ The feature stated: “There’s no question there’s been a turn for the harder in the XXX in recent years. In the mid-1990s, double penetration seemed to be the bar for nasty. Then came the massive gangbangs, such as

¹¹ Flood, M. (2009) The Harms of Pornography Exposure Among Children and Young People, *Child Abuse Review*, 18: 384–400, p.386.

¹² Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2016) Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4-5, 509-531, p.509.

¹³ Young people, Pornography & Age-verification, BBFC & Revealing Reality, 2020.

¹⁴ Young people, Pornography & Age-verification, BBFC & Revealing Reality, 2020, p.6.

¹⁵ Tyler, M. (2010) ‘Now, that’s pornography!’: violence and domination in *Adult Video News*, in Boyle, K. (Ed), *Everyday Pornography*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 50-62, p.56.

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Houston 620 in 1999, bukkake vids (also 1999) and today ... throat fucking, ass to mouth, double-vaginal and double-anal penetration is [sic] not uncommon.”

A study that analysed heterosexual scenes published on two leading free pornographic websites, Pornhub and Xvideos, found that 45% of scenes from Pornhub and 35% of scenes from Xvideos contained at least one act of physical aggression.¹⁶ The five most common forms of physical aggression were gagging, choking, spanking, slapping and hair pulling. In 76% of the scenes, men were the perpetrators of aggression towards women, whereas women were the target of the aggression in 97% of the scenes. Importantly, the study found that women’s responses to the aggression were shown as either positive and neutral and “rarely negative”.¹⁷ The researchers concluded: “This study suggests aggression is common against women in online pornography, while repercussions to this aggression are rarely portrayed.”

A separate analysis of 172 popular videos on Pornhub, uploaded between 2000 – 2016, revealed that 43% of the videos included visible aggression.¹⁸ Forms of visible aggression included choking, forceful penetration, forced gagging and choking. 15% of the films were recorded as including nonconsensual aggression, wherein verbal and physical cues of lack of consent were observed. The researchers also found that where a video featured a female teenager, the title of the film was around three times more likely to

indicate aggression than titles of films featuring an adult female performer (although the levels of aggression actually experienced by teenage and non-teenage female performers during the films were similar). As in the study described above, this analysis revealed performers were likely to be depicted responding positively to aggressive acts. The researchers concluded, “these videos still reinforce the idea that women desire and derive pleasure from aggressive and degrading sexual practices, an idea that serves to perpetuate a rape culture.”¹⁹

A study of best-selling and most rented pornographic videos found that 88.2% of scenes contained physical aggression.²⁰ Again, perpetrators were predominantly male, while the targets were mostly female – and they were most often shown responding neutrally or with pleasure to the aggression.

Previous research has suggested that the sex of the film director makes little to no difference to the level of violence perpetrated against women performing in pornographic films. An analysis of scenes from top-renting pornography films revealed female-directed films were equally as violent as male-directed pornography films.²¹ Gagging, described by researchers as when “a penis or prosthetic [is] used to penetrate the actor’s throat deep enough to induce the gag reflex”,²² was present in over 50% of all scenes, while “anal-to-mouth” was present in 44% of male-directed scenes and 41% of female-directed scenes. The researchers explain that this latter act involves “a penis or dildo being

16 Fritz, N., Malic, V., Paul, B. & Zhou, Y. (2020) A Descriptive Analysis of the Types, Targets, and Relative Frequency of Aggression in Mainstream Pornography, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49:3041–3053.

17 Fritz, N., Malic, V., Paul, B. & Zhou, Y. (2020) A Descriptive Analysis of the Types, Targets, and Relative Frequency of Aggression in Mainstream Pornography, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49:3041–3053, p.3041.

18 Shor, E. (2019) Age, Aggression, and Pleasure in Popular Online Pornographic Videos, *Violence Against Women*, 25(8): 1018–1036.

19 Shor, E. (2019) Age, Aggression, and Pleasure in Popular Online Pornographic Videos, *Violence Against Women*, 25(8): 1018–1036, p.1031.

20 Bridges, A.J., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C. & Liberman, R. (2010) Aggression and Sexual Behavior in Best-Selling Pornography Videos: A Content Analysis Update, *Violence Against Women*, 16(10): 1065–1085.

21 Sun, C., Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E. & Liberman, R. (2008) A Comparison of Male and Female Directors in Popular Pornography: What Happens when Women are at the Helm? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32: 312–325.

22 Sun, C., Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E. & Liberman, R. (2008) A Comparison of Male and Female Directors in Popular Pornography: What Happens when Women are at the Helm? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32: 312–325, p.323, 322.

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inserted into a woman’s mouth immediately after it is penetrated in the anus of a woman. Male actors have jokingly referred to it as ‘eating her own shit’.”²³

Research on the titles of videos on the landing pages of the UK’s three most popular pornography websites revealed that one in eight titles described activity constituting sexual violence.²⁴ These are the videos shown to first-time visitors to the sites. The researchers report: “far from being represented as aberrant, sexual practices involving coercion, deception, non-consent and criminal activity are described in mainstream online pornography in ways that position them as permissible.”²⁵ The study used a definition of sexual violence provided by the World Health Organisation. The authors point out that this meant keywords in video titles denoting “degrading and/ or body punishing acts ... such as ‘Pissed on, fucked, and dripping with cum’ and ‘puking blood’” were excluded from the analysis.

Linda Thompson, National Coordinator at the Women’s Support Project, highlighted in her evidence to the inquiry how it is often overlooked that women featuring in pornography are experiencing real sexual abuse during the production process of a pornography film: “We know pornography is a form of violence against women. It is not just fantasy; it is the reality for the women involved. It is not just a representation of sex, it is actual sexual violence that is occurring to the women, and I think there’s a disconnect between consumers and the actual reality that is experienced by the women. The women are shown to either enjoy it or have no reaction.” Also giving evidence to the

inquiry, Dr Max Waltman, Assistant Professor at Stockholm University, pointed to one of the factors that may contribute to the scale and nature of violence in mainstream pornography. He stated: “research shows that consumers quickly become de-sensitised to the materials that show less violence and require more and more extreme and aggressive materials to be aroused.

1.3 **Illegal content is freely accessible on mainstream pornography websites**

Popular, freely accessible pornography websites have repeatedly been found hosting content that is illegal under existing legislation. Laila Mickelwait, founder of the Traffickinghub Movement and CEO of the Justice Defense Fund, told the inquiry: “Today any child or victim of rape or criminal image-based abuse could have their crime scene video freely uploaded anonymously to the world’s largest porn sites only to have that video screen recorded or downloaded and uploaded again and again for the rest of their lives”.

Also giving evidence to the inquiry, Haley McNamara, Director of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation, told the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation: “Cases of sex trafficking, child sexual abuse materials, and image-based sexual abuse on pornography platforms are

23 Sun, C., Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E. & Liberman, R. (2008) A Comparison of Male and Female Directors in Popular Pornography: What Happens when Women are at the Helm? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32: 312-325, p.323, 322.

24 Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260.

25 Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260, p. 1244, 1248.

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“These sites routinely feature sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, and trafficking victims. Repeatedly these sites have chosen profits over reasonable prevention and protection measures.”

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, cited in Online Safety Bill debate, 12 July 2022

not isolated incidents, they are evident world-wide”. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) concur with this assessment of the widespread nature of this material on pornography websites, reporting: “These sites routinely feature sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, and trafficking victims. Repeatedly these sites have chosen profits over reasonable prevention and protection measures.”²⁶ Linda Thompson, National Coordinator of the Women’s Support Project, reported: “We’ve worked with trafficked women whose rape and sexual abuse was recorded by their traffickers as another means to make profit and that their images end up on mainstream porn sites including Pornhub.”

In 2019, PayPal stopped processing payments for Pornhub, one of the most popular pornography websites in the world, after an investigation by The Sunday Times reported the site contained child abuse videos and other illegal content.²⁷ The article stated: “Pornhub is awash with secretly filmed

“creepshots”²⁸ of schoolgirls and clips of men performing sex acts in front of teenagers on buses. It has also hosted indecent images of children as young as three. The website says it bans content showing under-18s and removes it swiftly. But some of the videos identified by this newspaper’s investigation had 350,000 views and had been on the platform for more than three years.”

In 2020, the New York Times documented the presence of child abuse videos on Pornhub, prompting Mastercard, Visa and Discover to block the use of their cards for purchases on the site.²⁹ New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof wrote of Pornhub: “Its site is infested with rape videos. It monetizes child rapes, revenge pornography, spy cam videos of women showering, racist and misogynist content, and footage of women being asphyxiated in plastic bags.”³⁰

Mindgeek, the parent company of Pornhub, settled a lawsuit in 2021 brought against it by 50 women who reported they were victims of a sex trafficking operation run by GirlsDoPorn.³¹ GirlsDoPorn was a pornography production company that had a partnership with Pornhub, which hosted its videos. Victims of this pornography producer were coerced and deceived into having sex on camera without the knowledge that the videos would be posted online.³² The 50 women who sued Pornhub alleged the website was aware of the allegations against GirlsDoPorn yet continued its partnership with the company. The co-owner of GirlsDoPorn, Michael James Pratt, was charged with crimes including sex trafficking and the production of child sexual abuse materials and eventually captured by author-

²⁶ Hansard, Online Safety Bill, Volume 718: debated on Tuesday 12 July 2022.

²⁷ PayPal cuts off porn site that ran child abuse videos, The Sunday Times, 17 November 2019.

²⁸ Unilever and Heinz pay for ads on Pornhub, the world’s biggest porn site, The Sunday Times, 3 November 2019.

²⁹ Mastercard, Visa and Discover cut ties with Pornhub following allegations of child abuse, CNN Business, 14 December 2020.

³⁰ The Children of Pornhub, New York Times, 4 December 2020.

³¹ Pornhub owner settles with Girls Do Porn victims over videos, BBC News, 19 October 2021.

³² 22 women win \$13 million in suit against GirlsDoPorn videos, Los Angeles Times, 2 January 2020.

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ities in December 2022.³³

An extensive analysis of the titles of pornography videos on the UK's three most popular pornography websites concluded that "mainstream pornography websites are likely hosting material that is unlawful to distribute or download."³⁴ As highlighted in examples above, there are repeated reports of child abuse material being published on popular pornography websites. Possessing child abuse images is a serious criminal offence in the UK. Depending on how individual visitors to the websites engage with this material, they could be committing a criminal offence.³⁵ Furthermore, the researchers highlight, "Across the United Kingdom, e.g., it is a criminal offence to possess 'extreme pornography' which includes simulated images of non-consensual sexual penetration and life-threatening injury [references]. However we found on the landing pages descriptions of forced sexual activity that may meet the criteria of extreme pornography, titles such as 'again and again forced' and 'Sleeping anal drunk drugged fuck toy borracha drogada teen'.³⁶

It is sadly unsurprising that mainstream pornography websites have been found hosting illegal content, including child sexual abuse material, because these sites do not conduct even the most basic safeguarding measures. Currently, leading pornography websites allow members of the public to upload pornographic videos to these sites without verifying that every individual in the video is an adult, or that everyone in the video gave their permission for it to be uploaded to the pornography website – or, indeed, that they even know the video exists.

Laila Mickelwait told this inquiry: "All major user generated porn tube sites operate in the same exploitative and predatory way. Why? Because content is king. The more content that is uploaded to the sites, the more Google searches will turn up results, the more traffic is driven to the sites, and the more profit these companies will make. They are disincentivised to limit content even when it's illegal because to do so goes against their business model and the mode of profit, and until the financial risk of exploitation becomes greater than the benefit that these corporations get by maintaining the status quo, nothing will change."

1.4 **The pornography industry is characterised by market dominance**

Evidence submitted to this inquiry suggests that while there are a vast number of pornographic websites on the internet, there is not an equivalent number of corporate entities reaping profits from the content on these websites. Instead, the pornography industry today is characterised by market dominance. Haley McNamara, Director of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation, told the inquiry: "The people who are making the majority of the money are a small minority of monopolistic corporations ... So, when you look at the pornography industry it looks like there are

³³ Porn website owner Michael James Pratt, fugitive on FBI's most wanted list, captured in Spain, CBS News, 23 December 2022.

³⁴ Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260, p.1254.

³⁵ Downloading child abuse material from a pornography website would constitute 'possession', as would knowingly storing images in the computer's cache.

³⁶ Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260, p.1255.

PART 1: The scale and nature of the contemporary pornography industry

“The people who are making the majority of the money are a small minority of monopolistic corporations.”

Haley McNamara, Director of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation

hundreds, thousands of platforms that are unaffiliated. But actually, most of them are within one corporate structure or are affiliated within that corporate structure.”

Ofcom report that in September 2020 alone, 50% of adult males in the UK visited Pornhub.³⁷ Pornhub is owned by MindGeek, a sprawling pornography conglomerate that owns over 100 pornographic websites and production companies.³⁸ It is reported to be worth £1.2 billion,³⁹ with JPMorgan being one of its early lenders.⁴⁰ The billionaire majority owner of MindGeek is Bernd Bergmair.⁴¹ In 2019, Pornhub reported that it had received over 42 billion visits⁴² to its site globally. Mainstream multinational companies Kraft Heinz and Unilever have previously advertised on the website.⁴³

Research published by Ofcom reveals that in September 2020 the top 10 most popular ‘adult content sites’ in the UK were, in descending order of popularity: Pornhub, Xvideos, Bongacams, XNXX, Xhamster, LiveJasmin, Chaturbate, Xhamster Premium, RedTube and YouPorn.⁴⁴ Six companies

account for the ownership of these 10 websites: MindGeek, WGCZ Holding, Bongacams, Hammy Media Ltd, Duodecad IT Services, and Multi Media LLC. MindGeek accounts for the highest number of pornography websites in the top 10, owning Pornhub, RedTube and YouPorn.

The list of top 10 most popular pornographic websites in the UK is dominated by so-called ‘tube sites’. These websites host user-generated content and/or facilitate user-to-user interactions; for example, allowing members of the public to upload pornographic videos to the site. Pornhub reported that 6.8 million new videos were posted on its site in 2019 alone.⁴⁵ The websites can generate profits from advertising and subscriptions to ‘premium’ content. The Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) suggests that pornography websites are financially incentivised to keep the process of uploading videos to the sites “friction-free”.⁴⁶ They state: “This User Generated Content (UGC) business model, which has enabled Big Porn to explode in scale and profitability is inherently high risk. Video uploads appear on porn sites instantaneously, and there are no controls or verification procedures in place to check that those on camera are consenting adults. It is therefore unsurprising that mainstream porn platforms host vast, unknown quantities of illegal content”.

37 Online Nation: 2021 report, Ofcom, 2021.

38 Dozens of women are suing Pornhub alleging it shared nonconsensual sex videos, USA Today, 18 June 2021.

39 Think of the children! Pornhub tycoon Bernd Bergmair’s model wife issues extraordinary public putdown to her billionaire other half as he counts the money from sex site that is bigger than Netflix or Amazon, Daily Mail, 23 May 2021.

40 MindGeek: the secretive owner of Pornhub and RedTube, Financial Times, 17 December 2020.

41 Think of the children! Pornhub tycoon Bernd Bergmair’s model wife issues extraordinary public putdown to her billionaire other half as he counts the money from sex site that is bigger than Netflix or Amazon, Daily Mail, 23 May 2021.

42 The Children of Pornhub, New York Times, 4 December 2020.

43 Mindgeek Montreal’s answer to Netflix, National Post, 21 October 2020.

44 Online Nation: 2021 report, Ofcom, 2021.

45 Expose Big Porn: Uncovering the online commercial pornography industry and the urgent need for regulation, CEASE, 2021.

46 Expose Big Porn: Uncovering the online commercial pornography industry and the urgent need for regulation, CEASE, 2021, p.5, 10.

PART 2: The types and severity of harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography



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2.1

Pornography fuels sexual violence

The evidence that pornography plays an active role in fuelling sexual violence is overwhelming. Dr Michael Flood of Queensland University of Technology, who is a researcher on men, masculinities and violence prevention, told the inquiry: “Let me put this as bluntly as I can. The jury is in. There is a wealth of evidence that pornography exposure is shaping young people’s and adult’s sexual lives, in harmful and violent ways. So if anyone tells you that that’s not the case, they’re either ignorant

or lying.” Dr Michael Flood described pornography’s impact as being akin to a form of “rape education”, stating: “Pornography teaches sexually aggressive and violent supportive attitudes and behaviours. So, we start with correlational studies. Correlational studies find associations between pornography use and sexually aggressive, and violent supportive attitudes in both meta-analyses, so in statistical aggregations of multiple studies and various recent studies. They also find associations between pornography use and actual violent behaviour ... Experimental studies find that people shown pornography then show increases in their sexually violent attitudes and behaviours. Finally, the most powerful form of evidence comes from longitudinal studies that collect data from people over time. They find that

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“... the porn widely available today, especially that which is targeted at heterosexual men, by far the largest group of consumers, has normalised and sexualised men choking and strangling women during sex, verbally degrading them and spitting in their faces, among countless other acts of callousness and cruelty. It requires wilful naivety to pretend that this has no negative effects on generations of young people’s sexuality or has no connection to the ongoing pandemic of men’s violence against women.”

Dr Jackson Katz, educator and author of *The Macho Paradox*

pornography use predicts later sexually violent attitudes and behaviours”.

Dr Jackson Katz, an educator and author of *The Macho Paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*, told the inquiry: “the evidence is in. Hundreds of studies about the effects of porn over the past 30 years have established what many of us with basic media literacy skills, as well as common sense, have long known, which is that porn culture is a pervasive presence in the lives and sexual psyches of millions, and billions in fact, of boys, young men and men. Therefore, it’s impossible to understand or effectively work to end men’s violence against women without addressing the deeply misogynist porn that so many boys are exposed to from their earliest encounters with the genre ... the porn widely available today, especially that which is targeted at heterosexual men, by far the largest group of consumers, has normalised and sexualised men choking and strangling women during sex, verbally degrading them and spitting in their faces,

among countless other acts of callousness and cruelty. It requires wilful naivety to pretend that this has no negative effects on generations of young people’s sexuality or has no connection to the ongoing pandemic of men’s violence against women.”

In 2020, the Government Equalities Office published a literature review commissioned to assess evidence of a relationship between pornography and negative attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls. The authors concluded: “This review found evidence of an influential relationship between use of pornography and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours towards women ... Findings suggest that pornography, alongside a number of other factors, contributes to a conducive context for sexual harm towards women.”⁴⁷

The conclusion that pornography fuels harmful attitudes and behaviours is not new among researchers. For instance, in 2002 Professor Catherine Itzin wrote: “Scientifically the situation for pornography

⁴⁷ The relationship between pornography use and harmful sexual attitudes and behaviours, Government Equalities Office, February 2020, p.8.

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and harm effects is similar to that of smoking and lung cancer. It is not possible to prove that smoking is the sole cause of the cancer, but there is sufficient correlational data to conclude that it is highly likely that smoking is a causal factor in the aetiology of lung cancer ... Only the tobacco industry and its lobbyists still argue that there is no proof of a causal relationship.”⁴⁸

A meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven countries, including cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, revealed that pornography consumption was associated with sexual aggression.⁴⁹ Importantly, the researchers noted: “The significant average association in longitudinal research, along with the findings of individual longitudinal studies in the meta-analysis, does not support the position that pornography–sexual aggression associations are simply due to sexually aggressive individuals watching content that conforms to their already established aggressive sexual scripts [reference].”⁵⁰ The authors further note: “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.” Studies looking specifically at the effects of pornography on adolescents have also highlighted the association between pornography exposure and sexual violence.⁵¹

A meta-analysis of 30 papers documenting experimental studies, three of which reported two studies each, found that watching pornography depicting both ‘violent’ and ‘nonviolent’ sexual behaviour increases aggressive behaviour in the viewer.⁵² More recent scrutiny of a meta-analysis of non-experimental studies also found a positive association between exposure to pornography and endorsement of rape myths.⁵³ The researchers concluded: “the relationship between men’s pornography consumption and their attitudes supporting violence against women in nonexperimental studies are in fact fully consistent with those previously found in experimental studies focusing on the same association.”⁵⁴ A separate meta-analysis of 46 studies on the effects of viewing pornography, involving a total of 12,323 participants, found that exposure to pornography increases the risk of committing sexual offences.⁵⁵ The authors concluded that “the results of the meta-analysis are stable and generalizable” and “the research in this area can move beyond the question of

48 Itzin, C. (2002) Pornography and the construction of misogyny, *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 8 (3): 4-42, p.20.

49 Wright, P.J., Tokunaga, R.S. & Kraus, A. (2016) A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies, *Journal of Communication*, 66:183–205.

50 Wright, P.J., Tokunaga, R.S. & Kraus, A. (2016) A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies, *Journal of Communication*, 66:183–205, p.199, 201.

51 See for example: Rostad, W.L., Gittins, Stone, D., Huntington, C., Rizzo, C.J., Pearlman, D. & Orchowski, L. (2019) The Association Between Exposure to Violent Pornography and Teen Dating Violence in Grade 10 High School Students, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48:2137–2147; Ybarra, M.L. & Thompson, R.E. (2018) Predicting the Emergence of Sexual Violence in Adolescence, *Prevention Science*, 19:403–415; Brown, J.D. & L’Engle, K. L. (2009) X-Rated: Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors Associated With U.S. Early Adolescents’ Exposure to Sexually Explicit Media, *Communication Research*, 36(1): 129-151.

52 Allen, M., D’Alessio, D. & Brezgel, K. (1995) ‘A Meta-Analysis Summarizing the Effects of Pornography II’, *Human Communication Research*, 22 (2): 258-283; See also: C. Itzin, A. Taket & L. Kelly, ‘The evidence of harm to adults relating to exposure to extreme pornographic material: a rapid evidence assessment (REA)’, report, Ministry of Justice, 2007.

53 Hald, G.M., Malamuth, N.M. & Yuen, C. (2010) Pornography and Attitudes Supporting Violence Against Women: Revisiting the Relationship in Nonexperimental Studies, *Aggressive Behaviour*, 36: 14-20.

54 Hald, G.M., Malamuth, N.M. & Yuen, C. (2010) Pornography and Attitudes Supporting Violence Against Women: Revisiting the Relationship in Nonexperimental Studies, *Aggressive Behaviour*, 36: 14-20, p.18.

55 Oddone-Paolucci, E., Genuis, M. & Violato, C. (2000) A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography, in C. Violato, E. Oddone-Paolucci & M. Genuis, *The Changing Family and Child Development* (Ashgate, 2000).

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whether pornography has an influence on violence”.⁵⁶

Assessing how pornography influences viewers’ attitudes and behaviours, many researchers have emphasised the role that pornography plays in shaping a viewer’s ‘sexual script’; that is, guiding individuals’ understanding, expectations and decisions in relation to sexual behaviour. A study of college men aged between 18-29 years old found that the more pornography men watched the more likely they were to use pornography during sex, request pornographic sex acts of their partner, and intentionally conjure images of pornography to maintain arousal during sex.⁵⁷ The authors explain: “Once acquired and activated [reference], consumers use pornographic sexual scripts to navigate real-world sexual experiences and guide sexual expectations. The cognitive processing of these sexual scripts takes place without forethought, done primarily through habit ... the more pornography is viewed, the more preference for and reliance on the pornographic sexual script users will exhibit during dyadic sexual encounters because it will be the easiest to cognitively activate and behaviorally enact. In other words, pornography is not simple fantasy; it is an easily accessible template for actual sexual behavior.”⁵⁸

Violence and aggression are commonplace in mainstream pornography. Consistent with the concept that pornography shapes viewers’ sexual script, researchers found that higher pornography use was significantly associated with a greater likelihood to have

“As we’ve seen throughout history, if you start viewing a group of people as objects instead of subjects, then violence against them is easier to justify.”

Gemma Aitchison, Founder of YES Matters

engaged in, or being interested in trying, sexual behaviours as an aggressor, a target or uncommon and/or degrading sexual acts.⁵⁹ The study’s authors state that aggressor behaviours included “hairpulling, spanking, or choking”, behaviours as the target included “being spanked or choked”, while uncommon and/or degrading sexual activity included “male ejaculation in female partner’s mouth, anal sex, double penetration, and ass-to-mouth”.⁶⁰ The authors concluded: “Taken together, results suggest higher pornography use is associated with higher engagement in or interest in trying sexual behavior consistent with pornographic scripts.”

Similarly, a separate study on men’s pornography use found that interest in watching pornographic movies, or more frequent viewing of pornography, was associated with already having engaged or desiring to engage in “dominant” behaviours such as “hair pulling, spanking a partner hard enough to leave a mark, facial ejaculation, confinement, double-penetration (i.e.

56 Oddone-Paolucci, E., Genuis, M. & Violato, C. (2000) A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography, in C. Violato, E. Oddone-Paolucci & M. Genuis, *The Changing Family and Child Development* (Ashgate, 2000), p.51, 48.

57 Sun, C., Bridges, A., Johnson, J.A. & Ezzell, M.B. (2014) ‘Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations’, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45:983-994.

58 Sun, C., Bridges, A., Johnson, J.A. & Ezzell, M.B. (2014) ‘Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations’, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45:983-994, p.985.

59 Bridges, A.J., Sun, C.F., Ezzell, M.B. & Johnson, J. (2016) Sexual Scripts and the Sexual Behavior of Men and Women Who Use Pornography, *Sexualization, Media, & Society*, October-December 2016: 1-14.

60 Bridges, A.J., Sun, C.F., Ezzell, M.B. & Johnson, J. (2016) Sexual Scripts and the Sexual Behavior of Men and Women Who Use Pornography, *Sexualization, Media, & Society*, October-December 2016: 1-14, p.1.

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penetrating a partner's anus or vagina simultaneously with another man), ass-to-mouth (i.e. anally penetrating a partner and then inserting the penis directly into her mouth), penile gagging, facial slapping, choking, and name-calling (e.g. "slut" or "whore")."⁶¹

A key dynamic in the relationship between pornography consumption and sexual violence is one of dehumanisation. Researchers have found that there is a correlation between the dehumanisation of women and men's proclivity to perpetrate rape.⁶² The 'denial of human uniqueness' was found to be a particularly influential aspect of the dehumanisation process. Reflecting on the findings, the study's authors state: "when a woman is dressed in everyday clothing, the role of dehumanization is negligible in whether men report interest in perpetrating sexual aggression against her. By sharp contrast, when women are sexualized, these factors—particularly attributions of human uniqueness—play a strong role in her being seen as a potential victim of sexual aggression. This pattern represents evidence of a relationship between the sexualization of a target and the likelihood that some men will show a proclivity to both dehumanize and sexually aggress against that women."⁶³ A study of men's consumption of media that sexually objectifies women found "frequency of exposure to men's lifestyle magazines that objectify women, reality TV programs that objectify women, and pornography predicted more objectified cognitions about women, which, in turn, predicted stronger attitudes supportive of violence against women."⁶⁴

Gemma Aitchison, Founder of YES Matters, told the inquiry: "As we've seen

"objectifying beliefs, i.e. notions of women as sex objects, activate dehumanizing ideas"

Maes, C., Schreurs, L., van Oosten, J.M.F. & Vandenbosch, L. (2019), *#(Me)too much?*

throughout history, if you start viewing a group of people as objects instead of subjects, then violence against them is easier to justify. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that sexually objectifies women and especially young women ... We need to recognise as adults as we've allowed pornography to go like this and sexualise girls younger and younger and younger. We need to take responsibility for the fact that we're putting targets on teenage girls' backs ... you cannot separate violence against women and girls from sexual objectification."

Like any aspect of human behaviour, individual perpetration of sexual violence is influenced by a range of factors. Similarly, the specific impact pornography consumption has on a particular individual is mediated by multiple factors. What is abundantly clear from extensive research, however, is that pornography consumption plays a real and substantial role in fuelling sexual violence by men. Therefore, societal efforts to prevent sexual violence must address the contributory role of pornography consumption.

61 Wright, P.J., Sun, C., Steffen, N.J. & Tokunaga, R.S. (2015) Pornography, Alcohol, and Male Sexual Dominance, *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 82, No. 2, June 2015, pp. 252–270, p. 252.

62 Bevens, C.L. & Loughnan, S. (2019) Insights into Men's Sexual Aggression Toward Women: Dehumanization and Objectification, *Sex Roles*, 81:713–730.

63 Bevens, C.L. & Loughnan, S. (2019) Insights into Men's Sexual Aggression Toward Women: Dehumanization and Objectification, *Sex Roles*, 81:713–730, p.724.

64 Wright, P.J. & Tokunaga, R.S. (2016) Men's Objectifying Media Consumption, Objectification of Women, and Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 45:955–964, p.955.

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“Pornography teaches sexist and sexually objectifying understandings. It shapes how boys and young men see girls and women, and how girls and young women see themselves. Studies find that young people’s use of pornography leads to higher levels of sexist attitudes among boys and girls”

Dr Michael Flood, Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology

2.2 Pornography fuels social and political harms against women and girls

Evidence provided to this inquiry reveals that the attitudes and behaviours fostered by pornography consumption fuel a range of social and political harms against women and girls, in addition to sexual violence.

Describing pornography as a form of “sexist education”, Dr Michael Flood told the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation: “Pornography teaches sexist and sexually objectifying understandings. It shapes how boys and young men see girls and women, and how girls and young women see themselves. Studies find that young people’s use of pornography leads to higher levels of sexist attitudes among boys and girls”. Similarly, Dr Gail Dines stated: “Porn normalises sexual harassment in the

workplace, makes women and girls more vulnerable to being sexually abused in public and private spaces, legitimises sex acts that debase women and girls, grooms girls into seeing themselves as nothing more than masturbation facilitators for men and boys, and robs them of their sexual agency. As well as causing sexual violence, we know from research that porn undermines the capacity for intimacy, connection and empathy in its users”.

A study published in 2019 involving 568 adolescents revealed that exposure to sexually explicit material online was related to individuals’ resistance towards the #metoo movement and increased acceptance of rape myths – which are stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rapists and rape victims.⁶⁵ The researchers concluded, “exposure to SEIM [sexually explicit internet material] seems to operate as an educator in the adoption of sexist beliefs and resistance towards a movement which condemns sexual assault.”⁶⁶ Crucially, the study’s authors found that the key mechanism linking exposure to sexually explicit internet material to sexist attitudes was sexual objectification. They explain:

65 Maes, C., Schreurs, L., van Oosten, J.M.F. & Vandenbosch, L. (2019) #(Me)too much? The role of sexualizing online media in adolescents’ resistance towards the metoo-movement and acceptance of rape myths, *Journal of Adolescence*, 77: 59–69.

66 Maes, C., Schreurs, L., van Oosten, J.M.F. & Vandenbosch, L. (2019) #(Me)too much? The role of sexualizing online media in adolescents’ resistance towards the metoo-movement and acceptance of rape myths, *Journal of Adolescence*, 77: 59–69, p.66.

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“objectifying beliefs, i.e. notions of women as sex objects, activate dehumanizing ideas.”⁶⁷

A study of adults in the United States analysed the impact of consuming pornography on support for affirmative action for women, which involves programmes to redress historical discrimination.⁶⁸ The researchers discovered, “Prior pornography viewing predicted subsequent opposition to affirmative action for women.”⁶⁹ Prior opposition to affirmative action did not, however, predict subsequent pornography consumption. The association between pornography use and affirmative action opposition was observed among both women and men. The study’s authors concluded that the results “align with the view that sexual media activate abstract social scripts which may then be used to inform opinions about social issues that extend beyond the specific interaction dynamics portrayed.”⁷⁰

Another study of young Danish adults found that, among men, increased past consumption of pornography was associated with more hostile sexism⁷¹. The researchers proposed that the sexual arousal experienced when viewing pornography may play an important role in subsequently activating sexist sexual scripts in the viewer. They state: “affective activation (herein sexual arousal) may serve as an important mediator of significant exposure-attitudinal relationships and be central to the priming of “associative

networks” of emotions, cognitions, and attitudes which in content or feeling tone correspond to the attitudes investigated (i.e., herein sexist attitudes).”⁷²

Consistent with the findings above, a review of research conducted between 1995 and 2015 on adolescents’ use of pornography found that the typical adolescent pornography user is male, and the use of pornography “tended to be linked with stronger gender-stereotypical sexual beliefs”.⁷³ A longitudinal analysis of adolescents’ exposure to sexually explicit content, which included pornographic magazines, movies and online content, found that early exposure to sexually explicit content predicted less progressive gender role attitudes among both males and females, as well as predicting sexual harassment perpetration among males.⁷⁴

Regarding the association between pornography and attitudes to violence against women, a study of men at a US university found that those who watched pornography were significantly less likely to intervene as a bystander in a potential incidence of rape.⁷⁵ They were also more likely to report an increased intent to commit rape. A separate study of US college students showed that participants had various reasons for using pornography. Several of these were associated with a lower willingness to intervene as a bystander to prevent a sexual assault.⁷⁶ The study’s authors reflected, “If the knowledge

67 Maes, C., Schreurs, L., van Oosten, J.M.F. & Vandenbosch, L. (2019) #((Me)too much? The role of sexualizing online media in adolescents’ resistance towards the metoo-movement and acceptance of rape myths, *Journal of Adolescence*, 77: 59–69, p.66.

68 Wright, P.J. & Funk, M. (2014) Pornography Consumption and Opposition to Affirmative Action for Women: A Prospective Study, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38 (2): 208-221.

69 Wright, P.J. & Funk, M. (2014) Pornography Consumption and Opposition to Affirmative Action for Women: A Prospective Study, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38 (2): 208-221, p.215.

70 Wright, P.J. & Funk, M. (2014) Pornography Consumption and Opposition to Affirmative Action for Women: A Prospective Study, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38 (2): 208-221, p.218.

71 Hald, G.M., Malamuth, N.N. & Lange, T. (2013) Pornography and Sexist Attitudes Among Heterosexuals, *Journal of Communication*, 63: 638–660.

72 Hald, G.M., Malamuth, N.N. & Lange, T. (2013) Pornography and Sexist Attitudes Among Heterosexuals, *Journal of Communication*, 63: 638–660, p.654.

73 Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2016) Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4-5, 509-531, p.509.

74 Brown, J.D. & L’Engle, K.L. (2009) X-Rated: Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors Associated With U.S. Early Adolescents’ Exposure to Sexually Explicit Media, *Communication Research*, 36(1): 129-151.

75 Foubert, J.D., Brosi, M.W. & Bannon, R.S. (2011) Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance and Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault, *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 18:4, 212-231.

76 Foubert, J.D. & Bridges, A.J. (2017) What Is the Attraction? Pornography Use Motives in Relation to Bystander Intervention, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(20): 3071–3089.

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about sex that college students gain through pornography includes the very common theme of violence [reference], it comes as no surprise that these students would report being less likely to intervene to prevent similar behavior in their daily lives.”⁷⁷

When researchers reviewed the results of five meta-analyses (involving 124 separate studies), as well as a further 32 studies, to determine the effects of using extreme pornography, they found that using this material produces ‘psychological desensitisation’, leading to a lack of empathy for rape victims and the belief that women enjoy or desire rape.⁷⁸ The researchers concluded that the meta-analyses “constitute a substantial body of mutually corroborative evidence of the harm effects of extreme – and other – pornographic material.”⁷⁹ In line with this assessment, an experimental study revealed that after watching scenes from R-rated films⁸⁰ that contained sexual content and portrayed women in a sexually objectified way, male participants were significantly more likely to judge that a victim of rape by an acquaintance “got what she wanted” and experienced pleasure from the rape.⁸¹ Consistent with the theory that pornography shapes and activates sexist psychological ‘scripts’ in the viewer, the authors interpreted their results “in terms of the activation of culturally stereotypic gender-role schemas resulting from exposure to objectifying images of women.”⁸²

2.3 **Mainstream pornography websites perpetuate racist stereotypes**

Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, told this inquiry: “it is key to note that the business model for pornographers and the internet service providers that distribute pornography rests not just on systemic sex-based discrimination, sexual violence, and exploitation, but also on systemic racism and ethnic discrimination. No other commerce could advertise its product on the pervasive dehumanisation of human beings based on race or ethnicity, and yet governments allow, in violation of national and international law, the sale and distribution of pornographic materials segregated by the worst forms of race- and ethnicity-based negative stereotypes.”

Haley McNamara, of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation, highlighted that “pornography platforms also facilitate content glamorizing or normalizing socially harmful and illegal themes, such as incest, hate speech, racist aggression, and anti-Semitic slander are rampant on porn sites. One of the largest and most mainstream pornography websites includes channels entitled: Exploited Black Teens, SisLovesMe, Exploited

77 Foubert, J.D. & Bridges, A.J. (2017) What Is the Attraction? Pornography Use Motives in Relation to Bystander Intervention, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(20): 3071–3089, p.3084.

78 Itzin, C., Taket, A. & Kelly, L. (2007) The evidence of harm to adults relating to exposure to extreme pornographic material: a rapid evidence assessment (REA), Ministry of Justice.

79 Itzin, C., Taket, A. & Kelly, L. (2007) The evidence of harm to adults relating to exposure to extreme pornographic material: a rapid evidence assessment (REA), Ministry of Justice, p.20.

80 R-rated films are judged as having content that may not be suitable for a person under the age of 18 under the US film rating system. (Source: Film ratings, The Classification & Rating Administration. Accessed online, 20/1/23: www.filmratings.com)

81 Milburn, M.A., Mather, R. & Conrad, S.D. (2000) The Effects of Viewing R-rated Movie Scenes That Objectify Women on Perceptions of Date Rape, Sex Roles, 43 (9/10): 645–664, p.655.

82 Milburn, M.A., Mather, R. & Conrad, S.D. (2000) The Effects of Viewing R-rated Movie Scenes That Objectify Women on Perceptions of Date Rape, Sex Roles, 43 (9/10): 645–664, p.661.

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“The nature of porn... is racialised, it is misogynistic and now what we find is that it is cutting across countries and cultures to target using technology the most poor and vulnerable girls in countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal.”

Professor Ruchira Gupta, Professor at New York University and Founder-President of Apne Aap Women Worldwide

African Immigrants, PervMoM, and African Sex Slaves.”

A study analysing the depiction of black women and men in pornographic scenes on Xvideos and Pornhub concluded: “Findings suggest black women are still more often the target of aggression when compared to white women. In addition, black men are more often portrayed as the perpetrators of aggression against women and are depicted as significantly less intimate with their partners in comparison to white men.”⁸³ A separate

analysis of 172 popular pornography films on Pornhub (most of which were produced professionally) found that Latino and black men were more likely to be shown using aggression than white men.⁸⁴ It also found that videos featuring Asian men were more likely to depict men using aggression. The analysis found that Asian and Latina women experienced a higher rate of aggression against them than white or black female performers.

An analysis of video titles displayed on the home pages of the three most popular pornography websites in the UK revealed that one in eight titles described sexual violence.⁸⁵ The second most frequent form of sexual violence described in the video titles was physical aggression and sexual assault. When the researchers analysed word frequency within the titles, they found that the word

83 Fritz, N., Malic, V., Paul, B. & Zhou, Y. (2021) Worse Than Objects: The Depiction of Black Women and Men and Their Sexual Relationship in Pornography, *Gender Issues*, 38:100–120, p.100.

84 Shor, E. & Golriz, G. (2019) Gender, Race, and Aggression in Mainstream Pornography, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48: 739–751.

85 Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260.

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‘black’ was among the top twenty most frequent words used among titles in this category of sexual violence, with the authors reflecting that the finding suggests “another connection between scripts of physical aggression and sexual assault and racialised descriptions of black performers.”⁸⁶

In a 2020 article about Mindgeek, the company that owns Pornhub, journalist Martin Patriquin reported, “there remains an enormous gap between Mindgeek’s forward-facing image and what goes on just behind it. Consider Pornhub’s stance on racism. Its terms of service specifically prohibit the posting of “racially or ethnically offensive” content. Pornhub “stands in solidarity against racism and social injustice,” the company tweeted in the wake of George Floyd’s killing in May, pledging US\$ 100,000 to various social-justice organizations. A simple Google search belies these lofty sentiments, with a few choice keywords bringing up hundreds of videos depicting a litany of racist sexual tropes, nearly all involving Black men preying on white women.”⁸⁷

Also highlighting that sex inequality intersects with racism in the pornography industry, Ruchira Gupta, Founder-President of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, told this inquiry: “The nature of porn ... is racialised, it is misogynistic and now what we find is that it is cutting across countries and cultures to target using technology the most poor and vulnerable girls in countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal. I call the girls who are

being portrayed in these porn videos ‘the last girls’. The reason I call them the last girls is because not only are they girls, normally between the ages of nine and thirteen, but they are poor, they are female and very often in India, they are from very oppressed castes. The most marginalised of groups in India, they are already cut off from proper food, from housing, from education and sometimes often from child protection. Nobody will know if they go missing”.

2.4 Allowing or enabling children’s access to online pornography is an egregious violation of child safeguarding

At the time of writing this inquiry report, it remains legal to supply pornographic content to a child via a website. In stark contrast, it is illegal to supply pornographic videos, DVDs and cinema screenings to anyone under the age of 18.⁸⁸ Hard copy videos and video games containing ‘strong sexual content’ and rated R18⁸⁹ by the BBFC can only be supplied in a licensed sex shop,⁹⁰ and R18 content is prohibited altogether on linear TV.⁹¹

86 Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., Kureshi, I. & Butterby, K. (2021) Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61, 1243–1260, p.1251.

87 Mindgeek Montreal’s answer to Netflix, National Post, 21 October 2020.

88 Hard copy videos are subject to a mandatory classification regime by the BBFC under the Video Recordings Act 1984, while cinema screenings are subject to a similar regime by the BBFC under the Licensing Act 2003. Where content is classified by the BBFC as only suitable for those aged 18 or over, it is a criminal offence to supply the content in breach of this classification. See: Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016.

89 The R18 category is “a special and legally-restricted classification primarily for explicit works of consenting sex or strong fetish material involving adults.” (Source: Classification Guidelines, BBFC, p.28. Accessed online, 8/1/23: <https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-classification/classification-guidelines>.) R18 films can only be shown to adults in specially licensed cinemas, and R18 videos can only be supplied to adults in licensed sex shops. R18 videos cannot be supplied by mail order.

90 Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2016.

91 The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, Section one: Protecting the under-eighteens. Accessed online, 8/1/23: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/section-one-protecting-under-eighteens>

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“viewing pornography which is often extreme and violent really distorts children and young people’s understanding of healthy relationships and runs the risk of normalising what is abusive, sexual behaviour.”

Lynn Perry MBE, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s

As a result of this online regulation gap, the scale of children’s exposure to online pornography is alarmingly high. Research by the BBFC found that 51% of children aged 11-13 years old reported they had seen pornography at some point.⁹² Research commissioned by NSPCC and the Children’s Commissioner found that 65% of 15-16 year olds report having seen online pornography,⁹³ and government analysis of statistics from 2015 also revealed that in a single month, 1.4 million children visited pornographic websites from their desktop.⁹⁴ UK Feminista and the National Education Union’s 2017 research found that children are also being exposed to pornography on a significant scale within the school environment, with 38% of secondary school teachers in mixed-sex schools reporting students being sent or exposed to pornography at school.⁹⁵

Giving evidence to this inquiry, Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children’s Commissioner

for England, said: “Young people have told us that pornography consumption is utterly normalised. Even if they know it’s wrong, boys tell us that they feel unable to say ‘no’ to friends for fear of social isolation. They say that viewing pornography is no longer a choice. As one boy told me in answer to my Big Ask survey that got over half-a-million responses from England’s children from every single local authority area ... ‘I was pressured into watching horrific pornography that affects how young boys behave towards and think they can treat women. As a boy myself, I was unable to understand the everyday struggle of the girls in my class. Then one day I did, and I was ostracised for not cat-calling girls in the class, watching pornography, or sexually assaulting any girls.’ That’s a boy aged 16.”

There is extensive evidence that young peoples’ exposure to pornography fuels deeply harmful attitudes and behaviours. Lynn Perry MBE, Chief Executive of Barnardo’s, told the inquiry: “viewing pornography which is often extreme and violent really distorts children and young people’s understanding of healthy relationships and runs the risk of normalising what is abusive, sexual behaviour. Our frontline workers are supporting children every single day who have watched harmful online pornography and been negatively impacted by it in a range of ways.”

A review of research conducted between 1995 and 2015 on adolescents’ use of pornography found that the studies tended to show that use of pornography was related to a higher likelihood to engage in and experience sexual aggression.⁹⁶ The authors report:

⁹² Young people, ‘Pornography & Age-verification’, January 2020, British Board of Film Classification.

⁹³ Martellozzo, E., Monaghan, A., Adler, J.R., Davidson, J., Leyva, R. and Horvath, M.A.H. (2016, revised 2017) ‘I wasn’t sure it was normal to watch it...’ A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people. London: Middlesex University.

⁹⁴ Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2016.

⁹⁵ ‘It’s Just Everywhere’: A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it, UK Feminista, 2017.

⁹⁶ Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2016) Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4-5, 509-531.

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“The relation between pornography use and sexual aggression was stronger for boys, while that between pornography use and sexual victimization was demonstrated mainly for girls.”⁹⁷ Research published by the BBFC found that 29% of children who said that most of the pornography they had seen was intentionally viewed, believed that consent wasn’t needed if “you knew the person really fancies you”. In comparison, only 5% of children whose interaction with pornography had mostly been by accident believed the same.⁹⁸ The UK Government’s Department for Culture, Media and Sport has also highlighted a longitudinal study that found “male adolescents’ pornography use predicted their perpetration of sexual harassment two years later”.⁹⁹

The desire to learn about sex is sometimes cited as a reason that young people seek out and watch pornography.¹⁰⁰ However, a study of US adolescents found that adolescents who had viewed pornography were more likely to hold erroneous sexual beliefs than those who had not watched pornography.¹⁰¹ The authors further found that “pornography consumption frequency and dependency independently increase adolescents’ sexual illiteracy” and “adolescents who are dependent on pornography for sexual learning are more likely to precociously enact sexual scripts they have observed in pornography, which reinforces the erroneous sexual beliefs they acquired from pornography in the first place”.¹⁰²

A significant proportion of young people are aware of the harmful effect that

pornography use can have. A survey by the Institute for Public Policy Research found that 70% of 18-year-olds felt that pornography can have a damaging impact on young people’s views of sex and relationships.¹⁰³ The continued ability of pornography websites and other online platforms to enable and profit from children’s access to pornography, and the failure of the UK Government to implement legislative and regulatory measures to prevent this, constitutes a profound, national failure in child safeguarding.

2.5 Sexual coercion is inherent to the commercial production of pornography

Aside from pornographic content that is uploaded by members of the public, often referred to as ‘amateur’ pornography, pornography websites and other distributors rely on the commercial production of pornography. That is, pornographic content in which individuals are paid to take part. Evidence provided to this inquiry highlights that sexual coercion and abuse are inherent to the commercial production of pornography.

Alia Dewees was 20 years old when she first took part in a pornography film. She told this inquiry: “Within the first five minutes of my first shoot I felt unsafe ... I called my

97 Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P.M. (2016) Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 53:4-5, 509-531, p.523.

98 Young people, Pornography & Age-verification, January 2020, British Board of Film Classification.

99 Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2016, p.40.

100 See: Online porn: Advice to help you understand the risks and talk to your child about online porn, NSPCC. Accessed online, 8/1/23: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/online-porn/>

101 Wright, P.J., Tokunaga, R.S., Herbenick, D. & Paul, B. (2021) Pornography vs. sexual science: The role of pornography use and dependency in U.S. teenagers’ sexual illiteracy, *Communication Monographs*.

102 Wright, P.J., Tokunaga, R.S., Herbenick, D. & Paul, B. (2021) Pornography vs. sexual science: The role of pornography use and dependency in U.S. teenagers’ sexual illiteracy, *Communication Monographs*, p.14, 16.

103 Child Safety Online: Age Verification for Pornography, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2016.

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manager to convey that I wanted to leave, as I had been told that I would be free to do. However, I was told that I was being unreasonable and that this behaviour would not be tolerated, that I had signed a contract and that I was expected to perform, or that I would be in violation of that contract. When I arrived at my second shoot, I discovered that I was expected to do extreme acts of violence against myself and to allow acts of violence against myself; something that, again, I had never agreed to and which my manager had withheld from me before arriving to that pornography shoot. I tried to leave again and it was reiterated that I had signed a contract, that I had been given a signing bonus, and that leaving or not participating would mean that I was again breaking my contract.” At this second shoot, Alia Dewees was raped and assaulted. She said: “when I did not want to consent, when I was feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, or unwilling, I did not have the freedom to leave that shoot without repercussions. I didn’t have the freedom to leave and know that I wasn’t going to be sued for breach of contract.”

Alia Dewees experienced immense pressure to participate in filmed sex acts because on a previous date she had previously signed a legal contract to do so. This contract was used by her manager, who stood to benefit financially from her participation in filmed sex acts, to threaten her with legal repercussions if she refused to participate. In addition, as Alia Dewees pointed out, she had been paid a ‘signing bonus’ when she initially signed the contract to take part in filmed sex acts. Dewees reported: “That’s something that’s really common in the porn industry, is that somebody will be in a really desperate financial situation before they sign their contract, and that is an incentive, that they

“when I did not want to consent, when I was feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, or unwilling, I did not have the freedom to leave that shoot without repercussions. I didn’t have the freedom to leave and know that I wasn’t going to be sued for breach of contract.”

Alia Dewees, Director of Aftercare at Safe House
Project and survivor of pornography and trafficking

will give, say, a \$5,000 sign-on bonus. But it’s not really a bonus, it’s an advance, and you’re expected to then work these shoots in order to pay off the advance that was given. I do believe there would have been legal action against me if I hadn’t cooperated or partaken in the shoots that they gave me.” As a result of this so-called ‘bonus’, Alia Dewees was indebted to an individual in the porn production process before she had even started. This added to the pressure that she experienced to take part in filmed sex acts.

As Rape Crisis England and Wales state, “Someone doesn’t have the freedom and capacity to agree to sexual activity by choice if: ... They are being pressured, bullied, manipulated, tricked or scared into saying ‘yes’ ... Consent does not look like: Feeling like you have to agree to sex or other sexual activity because you’re worried about the other person’s reaction if you say ‘no’.”¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on her experiences, Alia Dewees

104 What is sexual consent? Rape Crisis England and Wales, <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/sexual-consent/> [website accessed 7 September 2022]

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“An agent is nothing more than a glorified pimp. They certainly don’t warn the people what they’re getting themselves into...”

Grudzen, C.R., Ryan, G., Margold, W., Torres, J. & Gelberg, L. (2008), *Pathways to Health Risk Exposure in Adult Film Performers*

told the inquiry: “Coercion does not seem like something out of the ordinary. In my experience it was very difficult for me to understand coercion. Now when I look back, that’s really all I see happening.”

The systemic and inherent nature of sexual coercion within the pornography production industry has been detailed by author Kat Banyard: “When you watch standard porn industry produce, you are watching someone who had to be paid to be there; someone who wouldn’t have got paid unless she turned up that day and unless she kept going until the scene was deemed ‘finished’ by the director; someone who is being instructed to perform particular sex acts; someone who is paid to respond during sex not according to how she really feels, but according to how the director and consumers want her to respond. You are watching documented evidence of a profit-driven industry that simply couldn’t operate if the basic tenets of non-abusive sex were realised.”¹⁰⁵ Haley McNamara, Director of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation, also told this inquiry: “The pornography

industry routinely inflicts psychological and physical trauma on those used in the course of its production. Research shows that pornography performers suffer serious psychological and physical harms as a result of their involvement in pornography.”

A qualitative study on health risk exposure in the pornography industry, which involved 28 individuals who had performed in the Los Angeles¹⁰⁶ heterosexual pornography industry, found the following: “Performers engaged in risky health behaviors that included high-risk sexual acts that are unprotected, substance abuse, and body enhancement. They are exposed to physical trauma on the film set. Many entered and left the industry with financial insecurity and suffered from mental health problems. Women were more likely than men to be exposed to health risks.”¹⁰⁷ In relation to physical injuries, one performer taking part in the study reported, “I know lots of girls get hurt. You have anal tears a lot. One of them I let it go for a week but then my stomach started distending and I got a really bad infection in my abdomen.”¹⁰⁸ Sharing her experiences of the mental health consequences of involvement in the pornography industry, a female performer stated, “They try and break you and get you to the point where you just don’t care and you’ll just do whatever ... I wasn’t a depressed person before I got into the industry. Now I’m considered bipolar.”

Female performers were reported in the above study to use drugs to cope with their experiences of performing in pornography films. One male performer reflected, “If they were completely sober, no alcohol, no

¹⁰⁵ Banyard, K. (2016) *Pimp State*, Faber and Faber, p.105.

¹⁰⁶ At the time of the study, the authors reported that Los Angeles produced more pornography films than any other city worldwide.

¹⁰⁷ Grudzen, C.R., Ryan, G., Margold, W., Torres, J. & Gelberg, L. (2008) *Pathways to Health Risk Exposure in Adult Film Performers*, *Journalist of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 86 (1): 67-78, p.67.

¹⁰⁸ Grudzen, C.R., Ryan, G., Margold, W., Torres, J. & Gelberg, L. (2008) *Pathways to Health Risk Exposure in Adult Film Performers*, *Journalist of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 86 (1): 67-78, p.74.

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drugs, I guarantee you most of them would probably have mental breakdowns.”¹⁰⁹ Abusive and coercive actions by agents were also highlighted by performers. One female performer said: “The agents want girls to stay there at their place, and they provide everything for them. They expect you obviously to sleep with them or their friends. And then if you don’t, they just pass you off to another person. That’s what happened to me in the first three agents I had.” Another female performer stated: “An agent is nothing more than a glorified pimp. They certainly don’t warn the people what they’re getting themselves into because the people are nothing more than sides of beef that they’re going to shear off and send out almost unprepared to be slaughtered.”

In a 2022 report, the French Senate Women’s Rights Delegation also highlighted that producers commonly adopt abusive and exploitative tactics to coerce women into featuring in pornography films: “These producers have no compunction in exploiting the economic and psychological vulnerability of young – often very young – women, and shooting content in deplorable conditions”.¹¹⁰ The report highlights recent cases in France, ‘French Bukkake’ and ‘Jacquie et Michel’, which evidenced “methods of ‘recruitment’, which target women in precarious circumstances”, and a modus operandi involving “a first rape to put the woman in a situation of “submission”, a process of dehumanisation, manipulation, blackmail, control, forced sex acts, imposition of multiple partners, rapes, etc.”¹¹¹

A quantitative study compared the mental health of female performers in pornographic films with other young women in California, as measured by the California Women’s Health Survey (CWHHS).¹¹² It found that performers in pornography were more likely to meet the criteria for current depression: 33% of performers met the criteria compared to 13% of CWHHS respondents. In the previous 12 months, performers were also more likely to report living in poverty (50% compared to 36%) and experiencing domestic violence (34% compared to 6%). In addition, as children, performers were more likely to have been raped (37% compared to 13%) and more likely to have been placed in foster care (21% compared to 4%). The authors concluded: “female adult film performers were more likely than other young women in California to be depressed and to have significantly worse mental health.”¹¹³ They point out, “Although we cannot determine causation, the association between adult performer status and poor mental health was consistent and highly significant.”

Sexual coercion is inherent to the commercial production of pornography. It is a form of commercial sexual exploitation. Scottish Government policy already recognises pornography as a form of commercial sexual exploitation, and it is vital that government policy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland does the same.

109 Grudzen, C.R., Ryan, G., Margold, W., Torres, J. & Gelberg, L. (2008) Pathways to Health Risk Exposure in Adult Film Performers, *Journalist of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 86 (1): 67-78, p.73, 75.

110 Women’s Rights Delegation, French Senate (2022) Porn: Hell behind the scenes, summary report. Available here: http://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/delegation/femmes/L_Essentiel_Porno_ENGLISH.pdf

111 Women’s Rights Delegation, French Senate (2022) Porn: Hell behind the scenes, summary report. Available here: http://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/delegation/femmes/L_Essentiel_Porno_ENGLISH.pdf

112 Grudzen, C.R., Meeker, D., Torres, J.M., Du, Q., Morrison, R.S., Andersen, R.M. & Gelberg, L. (2011) Comparison of the Mental Health of Female Adult Film Performers and Other Young Women in California, *Psychiatric Services*, 62(6): 639-645.

113 Grudzen, C.R., Meeker, D., Torres, J.M., Du, Q., Morrison, R.S., Andersen, R.M. & Gelberg, L. (2011) Comparison of the Mental Health of Female Adult Film Performers and Other Young Women in California, *Psychiatric Services*, 62(6): 639-645, p.643.

PART 3: Recommendations: Legal measures to prevent and address the harms associated with the production and consumption of pornography



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3.1 Introduction

The online pornography trade is largely unregulated. In the context of this absence of regulation, some of the most popular pornography websites accessed by individuals in the UK have freely hosted pornographic material that violates current UK laws, including laws against child sexual exploitation, with impunity. Such sites have also freely hosted pornographic material without first verifying that everyone featured in the material is an adult, that they

consented to it being filmed, and that they consented to it being uploaded to the pornography website. As highlighted in Part 1, this has resulted in pornography websites profiting from, and users viewing, filmed footage of rape, trafficking victims, image-based sexual abuse and child sexual abuse.

It is deeply disturbing that the online pornography industry has been left free to operate in the absence of meaningful regulation for so long. This represents nothing short of a failure by the state to confront and address the violence against women and girls embodied in, and fuelled

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80% of women said they would back tougher regulation of pornography online, compared to 46% of men.

YouGov and Sky News poll, October 2021

by, pornography. Urgent legal reforms are required to combat the multiple serious harms caused during the production, distribution and consumption of pornography in the UK.

Polling by YouGov and Sky News in October 2021 revealed that most UK adults support tighter restrictions on internet pornography.¹¹⁴ The polling also revealed a substantial difference in the level of support among women and men which, given the gender differences in pornography consumption highlighted in Part 1, is perhaps of little surprise. 80% of women said they would back tougher regulation of pornography online, compared to 46% of men.

Given the expansive scale and international nature of the pornography industry, and the multiple means through which it is produced, disseminated and accessed, a multi-faceted legal and regulatory approach will be necessary to respond to and prevent the multiplicity of harms connected with the production, distribution and consumption of pornography.

Legal reforms should also be consistent with and integrated where relevant with existing legislation, policy and statutes relating to other and connected forms of violence against women. For instance, Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, told this

inquiry: “The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, also known as the Palermo Protocol, provides the internationally recognised definition of human trafficking. The act, purpose, and means to traffic individuals for purposes of sexual exploitation also apply to most aspects of the production and distribution of pornography.” Similarly, Ruchira Gupta, Founder-President of Apne Aap Women Worldwide, said: “very often the trafficker takes advantage of the intersecting inequalities of women and girls to gain their consent. That is very true also for the porn producers who are using the intersecting inequalities of little girls and their family members, to make these porn videos. To recognise this vulnerability is very important, and to see porn as a form of online trafficking is equally important as we draft laws”.

Purna Sen, Visiting Professor at the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University, also emphasised the need to address demand for pornography. She told the inquiry: “There are legal frameworks that we can lean on; for example, the Palermo Protocol. Where we talk about sexual exploitation, violence against women, it’s also about trafficking. The word ‘demand’ has to be mentioned, and that there is an obligation to deal with demand in our legal international standards.”

Detailed in the following sections are legal reforms necessary to prevent some of the most egregious abuses and harms perpetrated in the pornography trade, as well as the identification of areas requiring further review and scrutiny by Parliament.

¹¹⁴ Most Britons support tighter restrictions on pornography - but men and women are divided, poll suggests, Sky News, 4 October 2021.

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3.2 Key recommendations

3.2.1 Make the regulation of pornography consistent across different online platforms, and between the online and offline spheres

Current regulations relating to pornography do not apply consistently to both offline and online pornography. The reforms currently contained in the Online Safety Bill not only fail to remedy this, they introduce further inconsistencies in how different online platforms hosting pornography are regulated.

The BBFC told this inquiry that in relation to pornography distributed offline, “there are certain types of pornographic content that the BBFC will refuse to classify on the basis of harm. Content of this nature is currently freely accessible online, in abundance, to children and adults alike. While the proposals set out in the draft Online Safety Bill will go some way to limiting children’s exposure to pornographic content, it does not address the widespread availability of potentially harmful types of pornographic content to adult consumers. The BBFC recommends that further consideration be given to the extent to which online and offline standards can be aligned in relation to harmful pornographic content, to ensure

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that the protections that exist offline are replicated online.” CEASE have echoed this recommendation, insisting that the Online Safety Bill “must end the disparity between online/offline standards for pornography, introducing robust standards that end the proliferation of harmful content on mainstream porn sites. Part 5 of the Bill should prohibit online content that would be refused R18 classification by the BBFC in the offline world.”¹¹⁵

Moreover, important reforms contained in the Online Safety Bill do not apply to all online platforms hosting pornography. Under current proposals, pornography websites that facilitate the sharing of user generated content or user interactions will have a legal duty to tackle and remove illegal material and will be regulated accordingly by Ofcom. The legal duty and associated regulation will not apply, however, to pornography websites that do not facilitate user generated content or user interactions. CEASE warns that the Online Safety Bill “effectively opens up a loophole that allows porn sites to change their business model in order to evade scrutiny, allowing them to host, distribute or even actively promote illegal content with impunity. These sites will not be required to prevent the presence of such content, or even to quickly remove it.”¹¹⁶

It is critical that reforms are introduced ensuring that pornography is regulated consistently across all online platforms, and across the online and offline spheres.

3.2.2

Criminalise the supply of pornography online to children, and legally require age verification for accessing pornography online

Online platforms that host pornography must be legally required to verify that every individual who accesses this content is 18 years old or above. Failure to comply with this should be an offence, with individuals held criminally liable. This would bring the online sphere in line with the offline sphere, where it is illegal to supply pornographic videos, DVDs and cinema screenings to anyone under the age of 18.

The damaging consequences of Governments’ failure to hitherto introduce compulsory age verification for pornography websites was repeatedly raised by witnesses during this inquiry. Dr Gail Dines, Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women’s Studies at Wheelock College, Boston, stated: “Our children grow up in a culture awash with porn because of the mass dereliction of duty by those tasked with taking care of the next generation. The porn industry has one goal - and one goal only: to maximise profits. The goal of government, on the other hand, is to provide a society where its citizens, especially young people, can thrive and not be undermined by a multi-billion-dollar predatory industry. One powerful way for the government to keep its promise to the people

¹¹⁵ CEASE Briefing re. the Regulation of Online Pornography, In advance of the Online Safety Bill Second Reading, 19 April 2022, p.2.

¹¹⁶ CEASE Briefing re. the Regulation of Online Pornography, In advance of the Online Safety Bill Second Reading, 19 April 2022, p.1.

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is to enact age verification legislation at the point of porn production and consumption. All porn performers and consumers should be third-party verified that they are 18 or over.”

Gemma Aitchison, founder of YES Matters, told the inquiry: “I have heard many times that, ‘We don’t have the resources to address this stuff.’ I can tell you, if I did a Facebook video and there was [music] in the background, they would take it down within five minutes because it belongs to someone. It’s corporately owned. So we do have the tools to do it if we want to; we just have to have the will ... I also think that we need to treat places like Pornhub, corporations like Pornhub and stuff, the same way we would a dodgy guy in a park. If an individual shows a young person two pornographic images they can get done for child grooming. Yet Pornhub and OnlyFans don’t get those same rules applied to them.”

David Austin, Chief Executive of the BBFC, rebuffed suggestions that age verification on pornography would be ineffective because children could simply make use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network) to visit pornography sites anonymously. He told the inquiry, “it is quite possible technically for adult sites to apply age verification to any VPN traffic they receive or to block access via VPNs entirely.”

It should be the legal responsibility of pornography websites to prevent children accessing their content. If children are in fact able to access their content via VPNs, then a pornography website can and should block the use of VPNs on their site. Ultimately, if a commercial pornography website cannot or will not prevent children accessing its content, then it cannot operate legally and therefore must not operate at all.

In 2017, legislation enabling the

“it is quite possible technically for adult sites to apply age verification to any VPN traffic they receive or to block access via VPNs entirely.”

David Austin, Chief Executive of BBFC

Secretary of State to prohibit pornography websites from making their content available to anyone under the age of 18 was introduced in the Digital Economy Act. However, the Government decided not to implement it,¹¹⁷ and subsequently announced it would repeal the legislation. The Online Safety Bill, which is currently being scrutinised by Parliament, contains provisions that would require pornography websites and platforms hosting user generated content to ensure anyone accessing pornographic content is an adult. Ofcom would be tasked with regulating online platforms and ensuring compliance with the provisions. It is vital that these provisions are not only passed but implemented in full without delay.

The BBFC told this inquiry that active investigation and swift enforcement by Ofcom will be vital to the effectiveness of the legislation. They stated: “All the big players [pornography companies] will have contingency plans to avoid regulation if they see their commercial interests being damaged, so it is vital that enforcement processes not be slow or cumbersome. We were confident of securing a high degree of compliance under the DEA [Digital Economy Act] (upwards of 80% from day one was realistic and achievable) based on the adult industry being convinced that our investigations would

117 Online Harms, Written Ministerial Statement by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture Media and Sport, 16 October 2019.

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lead to swift enforcement. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to whether any delays in enforcement, for example arising from the need for Ofcom to obtain a court order to use its business disruption powers, could impact compliance by the adult industry.” Similarly, Professor Clare McGlynn, Professor of Law at the University of Durham, stated: “If we let the porn companies, again, write their own homework, mark their own homework, and just fill out some forms, we won’t see any particularly change. So we have to make sure that there’s proactive regulation of what those porn companies are actually doing.”

3.2.3 Address pornography as commercial sexual exploitation, and a form of violence against women, in legislation and policy

Pornography must be addressed in law and policy as commercial sexual exploitation and, thereby, a form of violence against women. As highlighted in Part 2, sexual consent requires the absence of pressure. Yet the very nature of commercial pornography production clearly encompasses multiple substantial pressures that can act on an individual’s decision making at the point of engaging in (filmed) sex acts. This can include legal contracts, financial implications for multiple stakeholders - including agents, producers and distributors - and

financial repercussions for the individual due to perform sex acts.

Pornography is already addressed through national policy as commercial sexual exploitation in Scotland. The Scottish Government recognises pornography as commercial sexual exploitation in *Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls*¹¹⁸. This approach must be extended through England, Wales and Northern Ireland – and it should underpin all legislative reforms on pornography.

3.2.4 Legally require online platforms to verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform is an adult and gave permission for the content to be published there

All online platforms accessed from the UK must be legally required to reliably verify that every individual featured in pornographic content on their platform is at least 18 years old. They must also verify that each individual featured in the content has given their permission for the content to be uploaded to the platform in question, before it is published. Verification information must be provided by each individual featured in the content, not by any other person. Failure

¹¹⁸ *Equally Safe: Scotland’s strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls*, Scottish Government and COSLA, 2018.

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The Scottish Government recognises pornography as commercial sexual exploitation in *Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls*.

to comply with this requirement must result in robust sanctions by Ofcom, which should include the option of preventing the website in question from operating in the UK.

In relation to this recommendation, Haley McNamara, Director of the International Centre on Sexual Exploitation, told the inquiry, “Responsibility and liability to verify this information must be held by the platform hosting the content, not only the person uploading the content. The uploader and the person depicted in the content may not be the same person, especially in cases of abuse or sex trafficking ... These standards should be applied to any platform allowing pornographic or sexually explicit content.”

The urgent need to enforce age and permission verification has been movingly highlighted by Crystal Palace footballer, Leigh Nicol. Nicol’s phone was hacked and private content uploaded to Pornhub without her knowledge. She has stated: “The damage is done for me so this is about the next generation. I feel like prevention is better than someone having to react to this. I cannot change it alone but if I can raise awareness to stop it happening to others then that is what I want to do ... The more that you dig into this, the more traumatising it is because there are 14-year-old kids on these websites and

they don’t even know about it. The fact that you can publish videos that have neither party’s consent is something that has to be changed by law, for sure.”¹¹⁹

Evidence provided by Linda Thompson, National Coordinator of the Women’s Support Project, also highlighted the urgent need to require online platforms to verify that individuals featured in pornographic material know about the material and gave their permission for it to be uploaded online. She told the inquiry: “I have worked directly with women in prostitution whose rape has been filmed and shared on pornography sites. I’ve worked with vulnerable women who agreed that they could be filmed with punters but didn’t know what was going to happen with that. They agreed that they could be filmed meanwhile somebody else sold their images on, meanwhile other people are profiting, and women will say, ‘I don’t know who’s watching that anymore.’”

Verifying the age and permission of every individual featured in pornographic content represents a ‘rock-bottom’ safeguard against pornography companies publishing and profiting from material featuring child sexual exploitation and image-based sexual abuse.

It is also important to recognise the limits of these necessary verification procedures. Haley McNamara points out: “it is impossible for the pornography industry to judge from the content of a video or image whether force, fraud, psychological coercion, social manipulation, etc, were used to instigate it. This is especially true considering many sex traffickers and abusers will groom victims to claim that they are operating of their own free will.” The fact that an individual has completed a short, administrative verification procedure does not preclude the

119 Leigh Nicol exclusive interview: How phone hack traumatised Crystal Palace player and her inspiring recovery, Sky Sports, 4 February 2021.

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possibility that she has been forced or coerced into doing so.

Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, states: “While age verification and verification of consent are critical first steps for the UK Government to legislate, it is equally important to remember that under the Palermo Protocol, consent to one’s exploitation is irrelevant. We know from our collective decades of working with sex trafficking and sex trade survivors that their traffickers and even the purchasers of sexual acts had a camera in the room to document and distribute the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of women. In these circumstances, consent is an illusion that puts the onus on the victim instead of the course of perpetrators.”

3.2.5 Give individuals who feature in pornographic material the legal right to withdraw their consent to material in which they feature being published and/or distributed

UK law must guarantee that every individual who features in pornographic material accessible from the UK has the legal right to withdraw their consent at any time to that material remaining on a particular online platform or being otherwise distributed. As highlighted in this report, the material may

have been produced under sexually coercive circumstances. Furthermore, regardless of the conditions under which the material was produced, its ongoing publication may cause serious emotional distress and a range of other harms to an individual who features in the material. As such, online platforms and other distributors must have a legal obligation to remove and cease distributing pornographic material when an individual who features in that material withdraws their consent. Failure to comply with this requirement should result in robust sanctions by Ofcom, which should include the option of blocking the website in question from operating in the UK.

The urgent need to legally enshrine an individual’s right to withdraw consent to pornography in which they feature remaining on an online platform, and continuing to be monetised by a pornography company, is highlighted by the experiences of Alia Dewees, who was 20 years old when she first performed in a pornography film in the US. Prior to performing, Alia had signed a contract with an agent to participate in pornographic films in exchange for money. She told the inquiry: “no one held a gun to my head to sign that contract, however I was not given an accurate representation of what was contained within that contract. So, although I willingly consented to sign something, I didn’t know what I was signing. I had no legal counsel to really understand the consent that I was giving, and so right off the bat, where is the consent there if it isn’t informed consent? Secondly, in my experiences of actual production shoots where I was performing, like I stated earlier, when I did not want to consent, when I was feeling uncomfortable, unsafe, or unwilling, I did not have the freedom to leave that shoot without repercussions. I didn’t have the freedom to leave and know that I wasn’t going to be sued for breach of contract.”

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“my abuse, my pornography is still available for consumption ... The fear that I have that someone recognises me, or not only just that they recognise me, but to know that it’s very likely that they’ve seen me at some of my most broken, and that there’s likely someone sitting at their computer right now watching me be assaulted. That’s a pretty heavy burden that I carry.”

Alia Dewees, Director of Aftercare at Safe House Project and survivor of pornography and trafficking

Alia Dewees was 26 years old when she left the pornography industry, and she now works in a professional capacity supporting other survivors of sexual exploitation. However, Alia’s experiences continue to impact on her today: “my abuse, my pornography is still available for consumption ... The fear that I have that someone recognises me, or not only just that they recognise me, but to know that it’s very likely that they’ve seen me at some of my most broken, and that there’s likely someone sitting at their computer right now watching me be assaulted. That’s a pretty heavy burden that I carry.”

A study featuring nine women with experiences in pornography production in Sweden revealed how the absence of a legal right to withdraw consent to pornography in which they feature remaining on an online platform can act as a barrier to leaving the pornography trade. The study’s author reported, “the difficulty of exiting [the pornography trade] is magnified when one’s exploitation is documented. The fact that there is a record of what occurred creates a strong barrier to exiting the industry.

Participants discussed the anxiety over anyone—employers, friends, future partners, or their children—stumbling upon and viewing their images ... The knowledge that anyone could stumble across those images, and fear of the ensuing victim-blaming, was a reality that left many feeling trapped and unable to exit the pornography industry.”¹²⁰ One woman participating in the study said: “There may come a day when you really want to leave this life. The problem is that all the images are still online. You want them removed, but you have absolutely no power to do so. That’s when it feels really difficult.”¹²¹

A recent report by the French Senate Women’s Rights Delegation found evidence of French ‘professional-amateur’ pornography producers pressurising women to sign contracts giving producers unlimited rights to their image. Moreover, producers exploited women’s requests to have content of them removed as another method of generating income: “To take a video down from their site, they are said to demand, generally, between €3,000 and €5,000, or ten times the amount paid to shoot the scene.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Donevan, M. (2021) “In This Industry, You’re No Longer Human”: An Exploratory Study of Women’s Experiences in Pornography Production in Sweden, *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*, 6(3): Article 1., p.18, 22.

¹²¹ Leigh Nicol exclusive interview: How phone hack traumatised Crystal Palace player and her inspiring recovery, *Sky Sports*, 4 February 2021; Leigh Nicol interview: Taking control after intimate image abuse, educating others and the need for change, *Sky Sports*, 3 February 2022

¹²² Women’s Rights Delegation, French Senate (2022) *Porn: Hell behind the scenes*, summary report. Available here: http://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/delegation/femmes/L_Essentiel_Porno_ENGLISH.pdf

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3.2.6

Hold exploiters to account by making it a criminal offence to enable or profit from the commercial sexual exploitation of others

Considering the evidence obtained by this inquiry, it is our view that pornography must be addressed through public policy as a form of commercial sexual exploitation – which constitutes violence against women and girls. Individuals and companies are currently making large profits from individuals being paid to engage in sex acts under highly coercive circumstances. They also continue to profit freely from these acts of sexual exploitation while the individuals who feature in the recordings typically have no rights over their continued distribution. This is unacceptable.

Public policy must function to deter and prevent commercial sexual exploitation. As a form of violence against women, commercial sexual exploitation is incompatible with a humane society that protects and upholds the human rights of all citizens. It is also a barrier to equality between women and men. As part of national efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation, legislation must hold individuals and companies that enable and/or profit from the sexual exploitation of others to account.

The Government must also ensure the provision of support and exiting services for individuals who experience commercial

sexual exploitation. The provision of such services can be critical to enabling individuals to leave the sexual exploitation trade. Esther,¹²³ who gave evidence about her own experiences of exploitation through pornography, told this inquiry that current provision of support services for victims of commercial sexual exploitation is inadequate. She said: “I don’t think that there is enough ... There isn’t a focus on resources. I was very fortunate [when exiting] with where I happened to be at the time in terms of the postcode lottery”.

3.2.7

Conduct a comprehensive review of laws on pornography and obscenity

As highlighted in this report, a loose patchwork of criminal laws currently apply to the production, distribution and consumption of pornographic material. The legislation is piecemeal and incomplete, rather than comprehensively addressing all relevant aspects of pornography production, distribution and consumption. Furthermore, some of the legislation relating to pornography is archaic, with low levels of associated convictions, and fails to focus on the serious harms caused, in particular, to women and girls.

Professor Clare McGlynn wrote to this inquiry: “Despite empirical, technological and theoretical advances, criminal laws targeting producers, distributors and users of

¹²³ ‘Esther’ is a pseudonym.

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pornography remain steeped in outdated assumptions, concepts and regulations. They focus largely on offence to the public and moral corruption of the viewer, with little regard to harm, particularly harms experienced by women.” Professor McGlynn highlights that laws regulating pornography remain largely based on the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The definition of obscenity is opaque and produces uncertainty as to what constitutes an ‘obscene’ material. In 2015, there were just two convictions under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. Professor McGlynn further states: “While the low number of prosecutions and convictions may suggest a law that has limited effect, this is not the case. The concept of ‘obscenity’ casts a shadow over this whole area of law, influencing the activities of police and other authorities, as well as individuals. In addition, it provides the foundation for a range of other criminal laws, including communications offences, extreme pornography and image-based sexual abuse. This means that how the obscenity provisions are conceptualized (offence/disgust) and interpreted – or assumed to be interpreted – dominates the ways in which those other laws are interpreted and prosecuted.”

Current legislation prohibits the possession of what is categorised as ‘extreme pornography’, which includes pornography featuring actual or realistic portrayals of rape or life-threatening injury. However, between 2009-2014, 85% of the convictions for extreme pornography were for possessing bestiality images. In 2016, just one person was convicted for the possession of pornography featuring rape.¹²⁴ Linda Thompson, National Coordinator of the Women’s Support Project, remarked to the inquiry: “that would suggest that we’re more concerned about animal

rights and lack of consent in pornography than we are women.”

There is a need for the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of all existing laws governing pornography production, distribution and consumption. The aim of such a review should be to identify gaps, weaknesses and inconsistencies in existing criminal and civil laws relating to pornography, and to provide options for reform. At the heart of this review must be the clear objective of preventing the multiple serious harms, as identified in this inquiry, that occur during the production, distribution and consumption of pornography.

The review should address pornography first and foremost as a form of commercial sexual exploitation within a violence against women framework. A comprehensive review must include an assessment of:

- Potential civil routes to redress for those harmed by pornography;
- How all third-party facilitators of commercial sexual exploitation can be held accountable through civil and criminal law; and
- What funding and development is required to ensure victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and others harmed by pornography, can access necessary support services.

This comprehensive review must not preclude, or be used as justification for delaying, the urgent legal reforms contained in this report’s other recommendations to stop some of the most egregious abuses and legal violations in the pornography industry.

¹²⁴ Written evidence submitted by Professor Clare McGlynn QC (Hon) to the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, 3 November 2021.

Conclusion

The findings of this inquiry demonstrate that urgent legal reforms are necessary to combat the multiple serious harms and abuses perpetrated during the production, dissemination and consumption stages of the pornography trade.

Existing legislation relating to pornography is piecemeal and wholly inadequate with respect to preventing and providing redress for serious harms perpetrated as part of the trade. The online distribution of pornography is characterised by an almost total absence of regulation and accountability. Some legislation relating to pornography is profoundly archaic, with low levels of associated convictions, and there is scant focus on the material harms caused by the pornography trade to the safety and wellbeing of women and girls.

What has become apparent during the course of this inquiry is that we cannot end

the epidemic of male violence against women and girls without confronting and combatting the contributory role that pornography plays in fuelling sexual objectification and sexual violence.

For too long, Government and Parliament has paid scant attention to the harms being perpetrated by the pornography trade – and the deleterious effect these have on women and girls' lives. This must change.

Our inquiry has proposed a series of urgent reforms to combat some of the most egregious abuses evidenced in the pornography trade. We have also identified issues requiring further research and review, proposing future directions for Parliament.

We urge the Government to take the recommendations of this inquiry forward and enact legal reforms to curb the serious harms perpetrated in the pornography trade.

Appendix 1: Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence to the APPG on Commercial Sexual Exploitation's inquiry on pornography.

Tuesday 2 November 2021

- Dr Gail Dines, Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women's Studies, Wheelock College, Boston; Founder/President, Culture Reframed
- Robert Jensen, Emeritus Professor, University of Texas at Austin; author of *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity*
- Professor Clare McGlynn QC (Hon), Professor of Law, Durham University
- Laila Mickelwait, Founder/CEO, Justice Defense Fund; Founder, Traffickinghub Movement

Tuesday 18 January 2022

- David Austin, Chief Executive, BBFC
- Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England
- Dr Michael Flood, Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology
- Emma James, Senior Policy Advisor, Barnardo's
- Lynn Perry MBE, Chief Executive, Barnardo's
- Matt Tindall, Senior Policy Officer, BBFC

Tuesday 8 February 2022

- Gemma Aitchison, Founder, YES Matters
- Dr Jackson Katz, Activist; author of *The Macho Paradox*
- Vanessa Morse, CEO, Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation (CEASE)
- Purna Sen, Visiting Professor, Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University
- Linda Thompson, National Coordinator, Women's Support Project

Tuesday 22 February 2022

- Alyssa Ahrabare, Spokeswoman, Osez le Féminisme!
- Taina Bien-Aimé, Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women
- Alia Dewees, Director of Aftercare, Safe House Project; survivor of pornography and trafficking
- Professor Ruchira Gupta, New York University; Founder-President, Apne Aap Women Worldwide
- Dr Max Waltman, Assistant Professor, Stockholm University

Monday 11 April

- Haley McNamara, MA, Director, International Centre on Sexual Exploitation; Vice President, National Center on Sexual Exploitation

Thursday 21 April 2022

- Esther (pseudonym), Survivor

