

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
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10 March 2016

Dear Committee,

### **Inquiry into harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet**

I am a final year PhD Candidate studying the regulation of pornography in Australia at the University of New South Wales. My doctoral research is supervised by Associate Professor Kath Albury in the School of Arts and Media, co-supervised by Dr Daniel Joyce in UNSW Law. I write to you in my individual capacity, not representative of my institution, in regards to the current inquiry.

I recommend the Committee re-visit the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission 2012 report on content regulation. As classification of online content is impossible in an age of convergent media, the ALRC recommend hybrid models of co-regulation whereby independent overseers can enforce industry codes. The Australian Law Reform Commission recommends that classification of adult content is unnecessary, providing reasonable steps are taken to restrict access.

Voluntary filters already exist, and adult producers are already signposting their material. A mandatory Internet filter is an unworkable response that will block important health promotion, harm reduction and educative materials. Access requirements should be consistent with the age of consent to sexual activity, and age verification should not involve consumers uploading identification that risks their privacy.

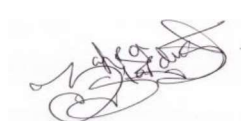
I believe the issue of free online access to pornography is in substance an issue about piracy and monopolisation that is not unique to pornography. The decriminalisation of pornography in Australia would assist in reducing stigma, allowing performers to speak in dialogue with young people to deconstruct the production process.

I urge the committee to re-consider the assumptions at the basis of this inquiry. Causal links between pornography and harm are highly contested. We cannot say in 2016 that anal sex is inherently degrading, consensual sex on film is inherently objectifying, or that spanking is inherently violent. Pornography is not a monolithic category, and precise and careful wording is essential to ensure law and policy have the appropriate and intended effects and do not capture unintended material.

In addition, the Committee should bear in mind that young people have a human right to appropriate, relevant, targeted sex education and information, including visual material. Pleasure-based education and sexual ethics can act as a violence prevention and cyber-safety strategy. Young people are critical media consumers and engage with pornography for a variety of reasons. Any reforms should be driven and informed by young people's experiences and needs.

Please do not hesitate to email me on [z.stardust@unsw.edu.au](mailto:z.stardust@unsw.edu.au) if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,



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