

## Pornography policy

2017

Although discussions regarding pornography often focus on potential adverse effects, FPA believes that it can also be a positive aspect of people's sexual lives. We believe that the best way to deal with negative impacts (such as poor self-esteem or unrealistic expectations) is through education and the promotion of an open culture, in which people feel comfortable talking about sex.

### Our beliefs about pornography

1. FPA believes that people should be able to choose how they express their sexuality as long as this does not result in the harm or exploitation of others. This includes the use of pornography.
2. FPA believes that comprehensive, statutory relationships and sex education in schools should provide young people with information about pornography and consent, gender and sexuality in order to support young people in placing pornography in a wider context.
3. FPA believes that sexual health training, which includes the discussion of pornography, should be widely available to professionals including teachers, healthcare professionals, care workers and youth workers.
4. FPA believes that pornography must not exploit or harm the people who use it or those involved in its production.
5. FPA believes those involved in producing pornography are entitled to look after and receive accurate advice about their sexual health.

### Why we believe this

1. *FPA believes that people should be able to choose how they express their sexuality as long as this does not result in the harm or exploitation of others. This includes the use of pornography.*

Most frequently, pornography is discussed in terms of potential negative impacts. For example, headlines have included *Porn is ruining our love lives and making old men of our teenagers*,<sup>1</sup> *Children fear addiction to internet pornography*<sup>2</sup> and *It's not just boys whose minds are poisoned by online porn*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Porn is ruining our love lives and making old men of our teenagers (Telegraph, 2016) [telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/porn-is-ruining-our-love-lives-and-making-old-men-of-our-teenage/](http://telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/porn-is-ruining-our-love-lives-and-making-old-men-of-our-teenage/)

<sup>2</sup> Children fear addiction to internet pornography (Sky News, 2016) [news.sky.com/story/children-fear-addiction-to-internet-pornography-10365587](http://news.sky.com/story/children-fear-addiction-to-internet-pornography-10365587)

<sup>3</sup>This respectable graduate's story is proof - and a chilling warning to parents: It's not just boys whose minds are poisoned by online porn (Daily Mail, 2014) [dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2617272/This-respectable-graduates-story-proof-chilling-warning-parents-its-not-just-boys-minds-poisoned-online-porn.html](http://dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2617272/This-respectable-graduates-story-proof-chilling-warning-parents-its-not-just-boys-minds-poisoned-online-porn.html)



Although pornography often portrays a fantasy version of sexuality and sexual behaviour that may contribute towards unrealistic views on sex if unchallenged, it is also important to recognise that pornography can be a positive aspect of people's sexual lives. For example, opinion polling has found that people who described themselves as 'very good lovers' or 'sexually adventurous' were more likely to watch online pornography.<sup>4</sup>

FPA believes that relationships and sex education should be inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people. However, currently 95% of young people are not taught about LGBT relationships at school.<sup>5</sup> This means that, for young LGBT people, pornography can provide a source of reassurance that other people share their desires.

If pornography does not result in the harm or exploitation of others, there should not be any stigma associated with its use.

- FPA believes that comprehensive, statutory relationships and sex education in schools should provide young people with information about pornography and consent, gender and sexuality in order to support young people in placing pornography in a wider context.*

It is important that young people are aware that pornography does not represent reality to help ensure they do not develop distorted expectations of sex.

Access to pornography may have an adverse impact on young people's future relationships, for example by perpetuating gender stereotypes. Research has found that some young people are also engaging in certain sexual behaviours because they believe it to be expected of them. For example, describing her research<sup>6</sup> conducted at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Dr Cicely Marston wrote that 'young, straight men may derive some kudos among their friends from having anal sex with women, and that some of the young men in our study seemed to place a low value on their partner's wishes. Participants talked about men "persuading" and using coercive methods to have anal sex with women as if this were normal'<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> British Sex Survey 2014 (Opinium Research for the Observer, 2014)

[theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/28/british-sex-survey-2014-nation-lost-sexual-swagger](http://theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/28/british-sex-survey-2014-nation-lost-sexual-swagger)

<sup>5</sup>Shh.. No talking: LGBT inclusive sex and relationships education in the UK (Terrence Higgins Trust, 2016) [tht.org.uk/~media/O094%20Campaign/7164200%20SRE\\_report\\_2016\\_FINAL\\_low-res.pdf](http://tht.org.uk/~media/O094%20Campaign/7164200%20SRE_report_2016_FINAL_low-res.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK (BMJ Open, 2014) [bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/8/e004996.full](http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/8/e004996.full)

<sup>7</sup> The government cited my research in its campaign against porn and anal sex – here's why I disagree (LSHTM, 2016) [lshtm.ac.uk/expert-opinion/government-cited-my-research-its-campaign-against-porn-and-anal-sex-heres-why-i](http://lshtm.ac.uk/expert-opinion/government-cited-my-research-its-campaign-against-porn-and-anal-sex-heres-why-i)



However, as Dr Marsden argues, coercion, ignoring women's desires, and certain sex acts being seen as goals for men pre-date easy access to online pornography. Sexual coercion and harm cannot simply be explained by pornography in and of itself.

There is little evidence to suggest that plans to restrict young people's access to pornography through online age restrictions will be successful, and age restrictions do not challenge the deeper, social attitudes that lead to harmful sexual activity. Instead, schools should be providing comprehensive relationships and sex education including opportunities to frankly discuss issues such as relationships, and concepts such as gender, consent and power. This will support young people to contextualise pornography as a fantasy and challenge some of the potentially damaging messages and stereotypes some pornography may contain.

3. *FPA believes that sexual health training, which includes the discussion of pornography, should be widely available to professionals including teachers, healthcare professionals, care workers and youth workers.*

Through our [training programme](#), we know that many professionals don't feel confident about addressing issues that arise out of discussion of pornography, such as consent, communication and body image.

Training is important for both those who work with young people, such as teachers, and those working with adults, including people with learning disabilities. It is key that staff delivering education and support services are able to address issues related to pornography safely and confidently to support young people to make informed choices about their sexual health. Training should provide professionals with the opportunity to learn more about the law relating to pornography and to explore their own attitudes towards pornography and how this can affect their practice and the service they provide.

4. *FPA believes that the production of pornography must not exploit or harm the people who use it or those involved in its production.*

FPA strongly condemns the production of any pornography that depicts child imagery, sexual exploitation or sexual violence. In the UK, the possession of extreme pornographic images is against the law under the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

We also oppose the publication of any explicit images distributed without the consent of the person or people portrayed (commonly known as 'revenge porn'). Research has shown that survivors of revenge porn experience trust issues,



post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression, with similarities to sexual assault survivors.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2015, revenge porn has been a crime in the UK, with a maximum custodial sentence of two years. FPA believes that high-quality training and relationships and sex education must also include teaching about the law, to ensure that people are aware of the consequences of sharing material without consent and feel able to report incidences if they are targeted.

5. *FPA believes those involved in producing pornography are entitled to look after and receive accurate advice about their sexual health.*

Pornography is often notable for an absence of safer sex practices, including condom use. FPA believe that performers and other sex workers should have access to good sexual health information, high-quality and non-judgemental services and the provision and use of condoms and dams, through targeted campaigns, public health interventions and the education of employers. Staff at sexual health services should be trained in order to meet the needs of sex workers and to identify exploitation.

### **Further resources**

- FPA's young people policy statement  
[www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/young-people-policy-statement.pdf](http://www.fpa.org.uk/sites/default/files/young-people-policy-statement.pdf)
- FPA relationships and sex education factsheet  
[www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/sex-and-relationships-education](http://www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/sex-and-relationships-education)
- FPA's law on sex factsheet  
[www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/law-on-sex](http://www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/law-on-sex)
- The Pleasure Principle: Fantasy and reality  
[www.fpa.org.uk/sexual-health-week/pleasure-principle/fantasy-reality](http://www.fpa.org.uk/sexual-health-week/pleasure-principle/fantasy-reality)

### **Additional reading**

- The government cited my research in its campaign against porn and anal sex – here's why I disagree, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine  
<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/expert-opinion/government-cited-my-research-its-campaign-against-porn-and-anal-sex-heres-why-i>

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<sup>8</sup> Revenge porn and mental health. A qualitative analysis of the mental health effects of revenge porn on female survivors. (Feminist Criminology, 2016)  
<http://fcx.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/06/20/1557085116654565.abstract>