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What Behaviors Do Young Heterosexual Australians See in Pornography? A Cross-Sectional Study

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This study investigated how frequently a group of young heterosexual Australians (ages 15 to 29) saw a range of behaviors represented in pornography over the previous 12 months. Participants were recruited to an anonymous online survey. Those who reported having viewed pornography in the past 12 months ($n = 517$) indicated how frequently they saw each of a list of 17 behaviors when they watched pornography in the past 12 months. Men's pleasure (83%) was seen frequently by the highest proportion of young people surveyed, followed by a man being portrayed as dominant (70%). Women were more likely to report frequently seeing violence toward a woman ($p < 0.01$). Men were more likely to report frequently seeing heterosexual anal sex ($p < 0.01$), ejaculation onto a woman's face ($p < 0.01$), women portrayed as dominant ($p < 0.01$), a man being called names or slurs ($p < 0.01$), and violence toward a man that appears consensual ($p < 0.01$). Younger age was significantly associated with frequently seeing women's pleasure ($p < 0.05$), violence toward women which appeared consensual, and all types of violence ($p < 0.01$). Older age was associated with frequently seeing men's pleasure ($p < 0.01$) and heterosexual anal sex ($p < 0.05$). Our findings draw attention to the gendered ways that behaviors in pornography are seen and identified by young heterosexual audiences.

With the proliferation of smartphone technology, pornography is more accessible, anonymous, and diverse than ever. Pornography websites now service global audiences, with one popular content provider reporting more than 23 billion views of its free online videos in 2016 alone (Pornhub Insights, 2017). Cross-sectional research suggests that the median age of first intentional exposure to pornography is 13 years among men and 16 years among women, and that 81% of young men and 28% of young women ages 15 to 29 watch pornography at least weekly (Lim, Agius, Carrotte, Vella, & Hellard, 2017). Young people, who once had to buy or share print-based pornography

or DVDs, can now access an array of pornographic content with the click of a button on their smartphones (Horvath et al., 2016). This unprecedented access has changed not only when and how often young people access pornography but also the types of pornography available and the potential impact on young people of seeing behaviors represented in pornography on sociosexual development (Harkness, Mullan, & Blaszczyński, 2015; Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012).

Correlates of Pornography Use

Public health practitioners have become increasingly concerned that viewing behaviors like non-condom use, gender stereotypes, and violence in online pornography during critical

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stages of adolescent sociosexual development could normalize and promote these behaviors as acceptable and rewarding (Albury, 2014; Lim, Carrotte, & Hellard, 2015; Rothman, Kaczmarek, Burke, Jansen, & Baughman, 2015). Studies have shown associations between pornography exposure and sexual risk factors, including decreased age of first sexual experience and more lifetime sexual partners (Harkness et al., 2015; Ybarra, Strasburger, & Mitchell, 2014). Much of the literature focuses on the effects of pornography on sex between men and women (Sun, Bridges, Johnason, & Ezzell, 2014), although viewing pornography depicting unprotected anal sex has been negatively associated with condom use among men who have sex with men (MSM) (Nelson et al., 2014). Exposure, particularly to violent pornography, has also been associated with sexual aggression and sexist attitudes among heterosexual populations, and cross-sectional studies have found links with relationship problems and depression (Bonino, Ciairano, Rabaglietti, & Cattelino, 2006; Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Häggström-Nordin, Hanson, & Tydén, 2005; Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009; Ybarra et al., 2014). However, the direction and strength of these associations remain unclear, and a causal relationship between pornography and negative health outcomes among young people is yet to be determined (Lim et al., 2015).

The potential effects of pornography on adolescent sexual behavior and gender attitudes are likely to be mediated by the viewers' preexisting ideas about gender, sex and sexuality, their sociodemographic characteristics, and importantly, the frequency and type of pornography viewed (Wright, 2013, 2014). That is, young people's perceptions and interpretations of behaviors will influence how seeing these representations affects their attitudes and behaviors (Bandura, 2001; Wright, 2014). Despite these concerns and the dramatic increase in the amount of free Internet pornography available to young people, there is limited evidence characterizing young people's perceptions of the behaviors they see when they watch pornography and how frequently they see representations of violence and gender inequality.

Content of Pornography

To date, most research into the content of pornography has been conducted using media content analysis methodology to count and describe the behaviors depicted in a preselected sample of pornography (Jordan, Kunkel, Manganella, & Fishbein, 2009). These studies have focused on quantifying how frequently behaviors appear, by using a team of trained coders to view a selection of pornographic material and record the number of times behaviors occur according to predefined variables. Commonly studied behaviors include non-condom use, romance and affection, sexual pleasure, dominance, degradation, objectification, and aggression (e.g., Bridges, 2010; Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, & Liberman, 2010; Crabbe & Corlett, 2011; Downing, Schrimshaw, Antebi, & Siegel, 2014; Gorman, Monk-Turner, & Fish, 2010;

Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Lim et al., 2015; Mckee, 2005; Vannier, Currie, & O'Sullivan, 2014).

The few content analyses of online pornographic videos have found gender inequality to be common in heterosexual pornography, with male actors four times as likely to be shown during orgasm as female actors (Klaassen & Peter, 2015) and limited representation of mutual satisfaction (Gorman et al., 2010). According to these studies, male actors are more likely to be portrayed as dominant and female actors as submissive (Klaassen & Peter, 2015), and nearly half of all content analyzed showed female actors willing to perform whatever sex acts male actors desired (Gorman et al., 2010). Behaviors considered degrading have also been studied, including the "cum shot" (which involves one or more male actors ejaculating onto the face of a female actor), which was found in 45% of scenes analyzed in one study (Gorman et al., 2010).

Evidence about the frequency of violence in pornography is less clear. Some research has reported very high levels of violence and aggression toward women (Bridges et al., 2010), while other studies have found that overt violence is rarely depicted (Gorman et al., 2010; Vannier et al., 2014). For example, a 2010 content analysis of pornographic DVDs found that nearly 88% of videos sampled contained at least some sort of physical violence, compared to a study of popular online pornography conducted in the same year, which found that violence was present in just 2% of the 45 videos sampled (Gorman et al., 2010). Similarly, a 2014 study of 100 free "teen" and "MILF" ("mother I'd like to fuck") online pornographic videos found that violence in the form of "sexual coercion" and "exploitation" was rare and suggested that this may be in part due to the fact that overtly violent themes are more likely to be found in specialized genres of pornography like "forced sex" or "hentai" (Gossett & Byrne, 2002; Vannier et al., 2014). These findings suggest that while gender inequality is commonly represented in heterosexual pornography, violence toward women may be less frequent in mainstream online video content.

The lack of recent studies of online pornography, their inconsistent definitions of behavioral variables, and their limited scope compared to the availability of online pornography make it difficult to draw systematic conclusions from content analysis data about how frequently behaviors are depicted in pornography. Perhaps more importantly, with the sheer amount, diversity, and rapidly changing nature of free online pornography (Pornhub Insights, 2016) and the variance in the way that audiences perceive behaviors (Bandura, 2001; Wright, 2013, 2014), these studies are unable to accurately predict the behaviors that young people see when they watch pornography online or their frequency of seeing them (Klaassen & Peter, 2015).

What Behaviors Do Young People See in Pornography?

There is limited research investigating the behaviors that young people see when they watch pornography. Most existing literature focuses on identifying social and

demographic associations with prevalence of pornography exposure in general. These studies explore the age of first exposure and frequency of exposure rather than examining the prevalence of seeing specific behaviors and themes among groups of young people (Beyens, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2014; Bryant & Shim, 2008; Flood, 2007; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011; Sabina, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2008; Vandenbosch, 2015; Vandenbosch & Peter, 2016).

Some studies assessing adolescent exposure to particular types of pornography are beginning to emerge (e.g., Hald & Stulhofer, 2016; Romito & Beltramini, 2015; Vandenbosch, 2015). One recent longitudinal study with Dutch adolescents ages 13 to 17 found that younger participants were more likely to watch romance and affection, and less likely to watch violence-themed pornography (Vandenbosch, 2015). A survey of Italian final-year high school students, which defined violent pornography as any violent items including rape, torture, violent sex, gang rape, killing, sex with children, and men urinating or ejaculating on women's faces, found that 45% of male and 19% of female students surveyed had ever seen violent pornography (Romito & Beltramini, 2015). They concluded that, overall, female students were significantly less likely to have seen violent-themed pornography. Recent qualitative research has highlighted concerns from young women that young men watch derogatory and violent pornography (Walker, Temple-Smith, Higgs, & Sanci, 2015).

Most previous studies have focused on trying to define and objectively measure exposure to behaviors without acknowledging the potential for young audiences to view the same behaviors yet perceive and interpret them differently. For example, something considered violent behavior by one young person may not be perceived as such by another. Defining and verifying exposure to what is subjectively "violence" may be an important methodological and theoretical task; however, so too is measuring and recording how frequently young people report seeing violence without trying to define or qualify what is or is not objectively violent behavior, or any other behavior for that matter. As health and education programs to address potential harms of pornography on young people continue to be planned and implemented, there is a clear need for more research into how young people perceive the behaviors they see (Hald & Stulhofer, 2016; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Vandenbosch, 2015).

In this study we chose not to define any of these behaviors because our measure does not intend to provide definitive or objective rates of behaviors present in pornography or objectively measure how frequently predefined behaviors are seen by young people. Rather, based on the principles of receiver-oriented message analysis (ROMA) methodology (Austin, 2010), which recognizes that media messages can be perceived differently by different people (Bandura, 2001; Wright, 2014), we aimed to establish how the young heterosexual people surveyed recognize and report on a range of behaviors that are represented in pornography (Bridges et al., 2010; Crabbe & Corlett, 2011; Downing et al., 2014; Gorman et al., 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Lim et al., 2015; Mckee, 2005; Vannier et al., 2014). Because

this research investigated gender inequalities in depicted behaviors, which may differ between pornography aimed at heterosexual audiences and pornography aimed at, for example, gay men, only young people identifying as heterosexual were included in this analysis.

Study Overview

To meet the need for evidence in this area, the first aim of this study was to measure how frequently the young people we surveyed identify seeing a range of behaviors commonly represented in pornography, including romance/affection, violence, and dominance. The second aim was to explore gender inequality by examining difference in the frequency of seeing certain behaviors (e.g., men's pleasure compared to women's pleasure). The third aim was to examine whether gender and age of participants were predictors for reporting seeing these behaviors frequently. Based on current evidence about the types of behaviors depicted in online heterosexual pornography and antecedents for exposure type, the following was hypothesized:

H1: More participants will report frequently seeing romance/affection than violence.

H2: More participants will report frequently seeing violence and slurs aimed toward women than toward men.

H3: More participants will report frequently seeing men's pleasure and men's dominance than women's pleasure and women's dominance.

H4: More female participants and younger age participants will report seeing romance/affection frequently and fewer will report seeing violence/dominance frequently.

Method

Participants

The study was nested within the Burnet Institute's Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll (SDRR) survey, a repeat cross-sectional online survey with a convenience sample of Victorians ages 15 to 29 (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015). In this study, participants were 15 to 29 years old and currently resided in Victoria, Australia. Inclusion criteria for age (15 to 29) was based on the preexisting annual survey which defined young people in these terms (Lim, Hellard, Aitken, & Hocking, 2007). During January to March 2016, participants were recruited via social media platforms, including paid advertisements on Facebook, targeting social media users who were 15 to 29 years old. Study authors contacted personal and professional networks to share the link to the online survey. Participants from prior Burnet Institute surveys who had consented to be contacted about future research were e-mailed. A notice was placed on the Burnet Institute Web site and Facebook page. And researchers contacted Facebook groups to advertise the survey (e.g., university student pages).

The online survey was completed by 1,029 respondents (730 female, 278 male, 17 reporting other genders or combinations of gender identities), of whom 900 reported that they had ever viewed pornography and 871 had viewed intentionally in the past 12 months. Participants were included in the analysis if they had intentionally viewed pornography in the past 12 months, identified as heterosexual, and answered at least one question about the behaviors they had seen. In total, 517 respondents identified as heterosexual (320 female, 197 male) and responded to at least one question about exposure to types of behaviors they had seen in pornography during that time. Of those who had intentionally viewed pornography during this time, 92% of males and 53% of females reported watching at least monthly and almost all reported watching it alone (91%), followed by with a partner (8%) or friend (0.5%). Characteristics of this sample are provided in Table 1.

Measures

Sociodemographic characteristics assessed included participant age (in years) and gender identity (male, female, trans male, trans female, nonbinary, genderqueer, don't wish to say), educational level (primary school, high school, undergraduate, postgraduate), sexual identity (heterosexual, gay/homosexual/lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer,

questioning, don't know, don't label) and ever had sexual intercourse (yes/no). Sexual intercourse was defined as penetrative sex (vaginal or anal). Respondents were asked if they had ever viewed pornography, their age of first accidental and intentional exposure (in years), who they usually viewed with during the previous 12 months (partner, friends, alone, other), and how frequently they had viewed pornography over the past 12 months (less than monthly, monthly, weekly, daily). Finally, participants who had viewed pornography over the past 12 months were asked to use a Likert scale to indicate how frequently they had seen a range of behaviors depicted in pornography during that time.

We did not ask participants to differentiate if they had intentionally viewed the behaviors. The idea that audiences are more or less affected by the messages in media content which they actively seek out compared to that which they passively view or accidentally see is not consistent with the consumption patterns or effects of convergent media like online pornography (Martino, Collins, Kanouse, Elliott, & Berry, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Bandura, 2001). Online audiences search, scan content offered, follow suggested links, and view home pages (or landing pages) that suggest a variety of clickable content which they can view partially, scroll through, or view in entirety (Jenkins, 2006). Further, the labeled themes and categorizations of curated online pornographic videos on commonly viewed "tube" sites (see Pornhub Insights, 2016) may not be representative of the behaviors present in the category's video sequences. For example, a video categorized in the "blow job" section of an online pornography site may also contain an instance of a woman gagging and a woman being called slurs without being labeled with those behaviors. Whether or not a person intended to view those behaviors does not accurately explain what people see when they watch online pornography.

In this context, the authors decided that asking young people how frequently they saw the behaviors over a period of time provides a more useful measure than what they had intentionality watched. Response options included *I have never seen this* (1); *Rarely (once or twice)* (2); *Occasionally (< 50% of time)* (3); *About half the time* (4); *Most of the time (> 50% of time)* (5); *Always/nearly always* (6); *I don't know* (7); and *I don't wish to say* (8).

The 17 items were developed based on a review of current content analysis literature (Gorman et al., 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Vannier et al., 2014). As part of this review, the authors identified several common behaviors and themes that have been of interest to previous researchers studying online pornography. For example, the prevalence of violence has been studied by Klaassen and Peter (2015); domination has been studied by Gorman et al. (2010), Klaassen and Peter (2015), and Vannier et al. (2014). Pleasure has been studied by Klaassen and Peter (2015) and Vannier et al. (2014); and condom use has been studied by Gorman et al. (2010), Downing et al. (2014), and Vannier et al. (2014). Most of these studies reported differences in rates of perpetration and victimization by gender of pornography actors. The role of consent in violence is important considering some violent and aggressive

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics by Gender

Characteristics	Male	Female	Total ^a
	(N = 197)	(N = 320)	(N = 517)
Age group			
15–19, <i>n</i>	52	67	120
%	26.4	20.9	23.2
20–29, <i>n</i>	145	253	398
%	73.6	79.1	77.0
Postsecondary education			
Yes, <i>n</i>	166	285	452
%	84.3	89.1	87.4
Ever had sexual intercourse			
Yes, <i>n</i>	156	275	432
%	80.4	86.5	83.6
Pornography viewing frequency previous 12 months			
Less than monthly, <i>n</i>	15	152	167
%	7.6	47.5	32.3
Monthly, <i>n</i>	22	94	116
%	11.2	29.4	22.4
Weekly, <i>n</i>	92	66	158
%	46.7	20.6	30.6
Daily/almost daily, <i>n</i>	68	8	76
%	34.5	2.5	14.7
Usually viewed pornography with during previous 12 months			
Partner, <i>n</i>	8	31	39
%	4.1	9.7	7.5
Friends, <i>n</i>	0	3	3
%	0.0	0.9	0.6
Alone, <i>n</i>	189	284	473
%	95.9	88.8	91.5

^aProportion of total number who answered each question (numbers vary).

behaviors may occur within consenting relationships (McKee, 2015). These variables were also selected in accordance with public criticisms of pornography stating that the prevalence of heterosexual anal intercourse is increasing (and claims that the act is not pleasurable for many women), pornography is overly focused on men's pleasure, and pornography is demeaning toward women by depicting verbal slurs and abuse (Freedman, 2012; McNally, 2015). In general there is a concern that young people are seeing these behaviors when they watch pornography, intentionally or not (Crabbe & Corlett, 2011). Based on this review, the following 17 items were included:

1. Romance and/or affection
2. Focus on women's sexual pleasure
3. Focus on men's sexual pleasure
4. Condom use
5. Anal sex between a man and a woman
6. Woman being called names or slurs
7. Man being called names or slurs
8. Ejaculation onto a woman's face
9. Ejaculation onto a man's face
10. Woman being gagged while giving oral sex
11. Man being gagged while giving oral sex
12. Women being portrayed as "dominant"
13. Men being portrayed as "dominant"
14. Violence or aggression toward a man that appears to be consensual (i.e., he appears to enjoy it or want it),
15. Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears to be consensual (i.e., she appears to enjoy it or want it),
16. Violence or aggression toward a man that appears to be nonconsensual (i.e., he does not appear to enjoy it or want it),
17. Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears to be nonconsensual (i.e., she does not appear to enjoy it or want it)

We chose not to define these behaviors in line with our aims to understand how frequently young people perceive seeing each of them, rather than any objective measure of exposure.

Procedure

Ethics approval to conduct the study was granted from the Alfred Health Human Research Ethics Committee. Between January and March 2016 participants completed an anonymous online survey that consisted of questions about their demographics, sexual behaviors, pornography exposure, drug and alcohol consumption, lifestyle behaviors, and general well-being.

Data Analyses

Responses relating to frequency of viewing different behaviors were dichotomized for analysis. The derived

binary variable consisted of half of the response options in each of the new categories. Response options *About half the time*, *Most of the time (>50% of time)*, and *Always/nearly always* were recategorized to create the measure for "frequent" exposure ($\geq 50\%$) and *I have never seen this*, *Rarely (once or twice)*, and *Occasionally (<50% of time)* were recategorized as "less frequent" exposure.

In addition to the 17 individual behaviors, a violence variable was derived by combining all four violence measures (Violence or aggression toward a man, which appears to be consensual; Violence or aggression toward a woman, which appears to be consensual; Violence or aggression toward a man, which appears to be nonconsensual; Violence or aggression toward a woman, which appears to be nonconsensual) to report on exposure to any form of violence toward either male or female actors/subjects. The first three hypotheses were tested using McNemar's (chi-square) test of paired nominal data. For the final hypothesis, logistic regression analysis was conducted for each behavior, with age (in years) and gender (male versus female; participants not identifying as male or female were excluded from this analysis) as covariates, to determine whether age and gender were associated with frequently seeing each behavior. Participants were excluded from both descriptive and statistical analysis if they did not respond to any of the 17 exposure items.

Results

Table 2 illustrates the frequency at which the sample reported seeing each of the 17 behaviors when they viewed pornography over the previous 12 months. Frequency of viewing different behaviors was categorized into "frequent" ($\geq 50\%$ of the time) and "less frequent" ($< 50\%$ of the time). Table 3 illustrates the proportion of respondents who reported seeing each behavior frequently ($\geq 50\%$ of the time) when they watched pornography over the previous 12 months. Men's pleasure was seen frequently by the highest proportion of respondents (83% saw frequently), followed by men as dominant (70%). This is compared to women's pleasure (56%), ejaculation onto a woman's face (48%) and violence toward women that appears consensual (35%). In total, 8% of respondents reported frequently seeing violence toward a man that appears consensual and 9% reported frequently seeing condom use.

Our first hypothesis was that more participants would report frequently seeing romance/affection than violence. In contrast, a significantly higher proportion of young people frequently saw violence (37%) than saw romance/affection (27%) ($p < 0.01$).

Our second hypothesis was that more participants would report frequently seeing violence and slurs aimed toward women than toward men. In support of this, a significantly higher proportion of participants reported seeing slurs/name-calling, consensual violence, and non-consensual violence directed toward women than toward men ($p < 0.01$; Table 4).

WHAT BEHAVIORS DO YOUNG HETEROSEXUAL AUSTRALIANS SEE IN PORNOGRAPHY?

Table 2. *Reported Frequency of Seeing Behaviors in Pornography (Past 12 Months)*

Exposure Frequency % (n = 517)	I Have Never Seen This	Rarely (Once or Twice)	Occasionally (< 50% of Time)	About Half the Time	Most of the Time (> 50% of Time)	Always/ Nearly Always	Don't Know/ Wish to Say
Romance and or affection	11.4	33.5	27.3	13.5	9.7	3.5	1.2
Focus on women's pleasure	3.9	13.9	25.9	20.9	21.9	13.4	0.2
Focus on men's pleasure	3.1	5.4	8.7	15.7	25.6	39.9	1.6
Condom use	38.6	33.9	16.9	6.4	1.9	0.4	1.9
Anal sex between a man and a woman	17.3	19.8	27.3	17.1	12.6	4.5	1.6
Woman being called names or slurs	17.3	23.1	22.1	15.9	12.2	6.2	3.3
Man being called names or slurs	49.4	33.1	8.9	4.1	1.6	0.8	2.1
Ejaculation onto a woman's face	14.0	13.4	23.8	16.3	19.6	11.1	1.9
Ejaculation onto a man's face	76.0	15.1	3.9	2.1	1.4	0.4	1.2
Woman being gagged while giving oral sex	30.1	13.6	24.5	12.0	12.6	5.2	1.9
Man being gagged while giving oral sex	81.4	11.5	2.7	1.9	0.6	0.2	1.8
Woman portrayed as dominant	25.6	28.9	28.0	11.3	4.1	1.0	1.2
Man portrayed as dominant	9.3	5.1	15.2	18.5	26.2	23.3	2.5
Violence or aggression toward a man that appears consensual	54.8	24.9	10.7	4.5	3.1	0.8	1.4
Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears consensual	26.0	15.2	22.5	12.4	15.9	5.6	2.3
Violence or aggression toward a man that appears nonconsensual	82.3	11.7	2.5	0.8	0.6	0.0	2.1
Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears nonconsensual	56.5	17.5	13.2	5.8	3.3	1.8	1.9
Any violence	22.7	13.8	23.7	12.8	17.3	6.4	3.3

Table 3. *Gender (Male/Female) and Age (Years) as Predictors for Reporting Seeing Behaviors Frequently in Pornography*

Exposure Type	% Who Have Seen Behavior ≥ 50% of the Time in the Past 12 Months											
					Gender				Age			
	n ^a	Overall	Male (n = 197)	Female (n = 320)	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI
Romance and/or affection	511	27.0	28.6	26.0	0.88	0.59 1.32	0.543	1.01	0.95 1.07	1.07	0.766	
Focus on women's pleasure	516	56.2	59.4	54.2	0.78	0.55 1.13	0.191	0.94*	0.89 0.99	0.020		
Focus on men's pleasure	508	82.5	79.8	84.1	1.39	0.87 2.22	0.164	1.09*	1.02 1.18	0.018		
Condom use	506	8.9	11.5	7.3	0.61	0.33 1.13	0.114	0.99	0.90 1.09	0.858		
Anal sex between a man and a woman	508	34.7	42.6	29.7	0.58*	0.40 0.85	0.005	1.07*	1.01 1.13	0.026		
Woman being called names or slurs	499	35.5	33.3	36.8	1.14	0.78 1.67	0.491	0.95	0.89 1.00	0.057		
Man being called names or slurs	505	6.5	10.4	4.2	0.38*	0.18 0.78	0.008	1.00	0.90 1.12	0.971		
Ejaculation onto a woman's face	506	47.0	57.0	42.2	0.54*	0.38 0.78	0.001	0.97	0.92 1.03	0.308		
Ejaculation onto a man's face	510	3.9	2.6	4.8	1.99	0.71 5.59	0.192	1.08	0.94 1.25	0.263		
Woman being gagged while giving oral sex	505	30.5	30.3	30.6	0.99	0.98 0.67	1.470	0.95	0.89 1.01	0.075		
Man being gagged while giving oral sex	506	2.8	1.5	3.5	2.78	0.75 10.30	0.126	1.25	1.05 1.48	0.011		
Woman being portrayed as dominant	509	16.5	21.9	13.1	0.55*	0.34 0.88	0.013	1.05	0.98 1.13	0.148		
Man being portrayed as dominant	502	69.7	64.8	72.8	1.43	0.97 2.11	0.072	0.96	0.90 1.02	0.187		
Violence or aggression toward a man that appears to be consensual	508	8.5	11.7	6.4	0.50*	0.27 0.94	0.031	0.93	0.84 1.03	0.149		
Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears to be consensual	503	34.8	29.1	38.4	1.48*	1.00 2.18	0.047	0.92*	0.87 0.98	0.006		
Violence or aggression toward a man that appears to be nonconsensual	504	1.4	0.5	1.9	3.75	0.45 31.47	0.223	0.91	0.71 1.17	0.475		
Violence or aggression toward a woman that appears to be nonconsensual	505	11.1	6.1	14.2	2.49*	1.28 4.86	0.007	0.94	0.85 1.03	0.160		
Any violence	515	36.5	32.0	39.3	1.21	0.79 1.86	0.378	0.87*	0.82 0.94	0.000		

^aTotal number of complete responses for each question.

*p < 0.05.

Table 4. *Difference in Proportion of Respondents Who Saw Behavior “Frequently” ($\geq 50\%$ of the Time)*

Proportion of Participants Who Saw Behavior Frequently	%	<i>p</i>
Men being portrayed as dominant	69.70	< 0.01
Women being portrayed as dominant	16.50	
Men’s pleasure	82.50	< 0.01
Women’s pleasure	56.20	
Men being called names or slurs	6.50	< 0.01
Women being called names or slurs	35.50	
Consensual violence directed toward men	8.5	< 0.01
Consensual violence directed toward women	34.80	
Nonconsensual violence directed toward men	1.40	< 0.01
Nonconsensual violence directed toward women	11.10	

Third, we hypothesized that a higher proportion of participants would report frequently seeing men’s pleasure and men’s dominance than women’s pleasure and women’s dominance. As illustrated in Table 4, our results support this hypothesis with a significantly higher proportion of participants frequently seeing male dominance and male pleasure than female dominance and female pleasure ($p < 0.01$).

Finally, we hypothesized that more female participants and younger age participants would report frequently seeing romance/affection and fewer would report frequently seeing violence/dominance compared with male participants and older participants. Table 3 illustrates associations between seeing behaviors frequently and gender (male/female) and age (by year). In contrast to our hypothesis, there was no association between frequently seeing romance/affection and either gender or age. Also in contrast, frequently seeing violence toward a woman that appears consensual was significantly associated with being female and younger in age ($p < 0.05$). Frequently seeing violence toward a woman that appears nonconsensual was associated with being female ($p < 0.01$). When we combined the four violence categories (consensual and nonconsensual violence toward both women and men) into a single measure, we saw an association with younger age ($p < 0.01$). Frequently seeing men’s pleasure was associated with being older ($p < 0.01$) while frequently seeing women’s pleasure was associated with being younger ($p < 0.05$). Male and older participants were significantly more likely to report frequently seeing heterosexual anal sex ($p < 0.05$), while male participants were also more likely to report seeing women’s dominance ($p < 0.01$), ejaculation onto a woman’s face or body ($p < 0.01$), violence toward a man which appears consensual ($p < 0.05$), and men being called names and slurs ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion

The present cross-sectional study investigated how frequently a group of young Australians saw a range of behaviors commonly represented in pornography over the previous 12 months. Perhaps unsurprisingly we found that men’s pleasure and men’s dominance were seen frequently by

the highest proportion of participants surveyed. However, a range of interesting results emerged from our data showing significant differences in how frequently participants reported seeing some behaviors based on their gender or their age.

Contrary to findings from previous studies (Romito & Beltrami, 2015; Vandenbosch, 2015) and to our first hypothesis, a significantly higher proportion of respondents reported frequently seeing violence than those who reported frequently seeing romance/affection when they watched pornography during the previous 12 months. This may be because online pornography contains more violence than romance/affection or because young people perceive violence more often than romance/affection. It may also indicate differences in seeing violence between heterosexual young people in Australia ages 15 to 29 and other groups of young people previously studied; for example, in one study Dutch adolescents were twice as likely to have seen affection-themed pornography as violence-themed pornography (Vandenbosch, 2015). It could also indicate changes in pornographic content between 2013 when the Dutch study was conducted and the current study.

The results of this study were consistent with our second hypothesis—that more participants would report frequently seeing violence and slurs aimed toward women than toward men. These findings extend claims made about representations of violence (Gorman et al., 2010; Vannier et al., 2014) and gender inequality (Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Gorman et al., 2010) in online pornography by demonstrating that when young people did see violence, they saw it directed toward women significantly more than toward men.

Results also supported our third hypothesis that more participants would report frequently seeing men’s pleasure and men’s dominance than women’s pleasure and women’s dominance. These findings also suggest that perceptions of the behaviors seen by young people surveyed here are broadly consistent with findings from content analysis studies that gender inequality relating to pleasure and dominance are commonly present in online pornography (Klaassen & Peter, 2015; Gorman et al., 2010). These findings generate important insights to complement research that has demonstrated the potential implications of repeatedly viewing gender inequality in pornography on men’s

expectations and behaviors during sexual encounters with women (Sun et al., 2014).

Contrary to our fourth and final hypothesis, female participants were significantly more likely than male participants to report frequently seeing consensual and nonconsensual violence toward women. These unanticipated findings are in contrast to previous research with young people (Romito & Beltrami, 2015; Vandenbosch, 2015) and anecdotes about the types of pornography that young women view. However, they are consistent with findings from a previous study with adults that investigated differences in the perceptions of behaviors in pornography and found that men perceived less aggression and degradation toward women in pornography than women perceived (Glascok, 2005). While it is possible that female respondents objectively saw more violent pornography, an alternate explanation is that female respondents are more able and willing to interpret the behaviors that they see in pornography as violent. Young male respondents, in contrast, may not identify the same behaviors they see in pornography as violent toward women.

Further, being younger in age actually increased the likelihood that a participant would report frequently seeing women's pleasure and any type of violence. One explanation might be that older people are better at identifying subtleties in women's pleasure (or displeasure) due to more real-world sexual experience and therefore are less likely to think what they see in pornography represents women's pleasure. It could also be suggested that younger age participants may have normalized verbal and physical violence as part their understanding of women's pleasure because of their earlier age of exposure to pornography compared to older participants (Lim et al., 2017). However, more research with young people to explore these differences and perceptions is needed to unpack possible explanations.

Overall results support the literature that suggests pornography seen by young people commonly preferences male sexual dominance and pleasure over women's and that gender inequality is embedded in the scenes (Gorman et al., 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015). We extend this work by showing that this content is reflected in what this group of young people actually perceive they are seeing.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

To date, there has been limited research into how frequently young people perceive seeing behaviors like violence and gender inequality when they watch pornography. The heterosexual young people surveyed here reported frequently seeing sexualized depictions of gender inequality, and though less frequent, a concerning proportion also reported frequently seeing violence toward women in the pornography they had watched. While our study did not investigate links between seeing behaviors in pornography and attitudes or behaviors among young people, it provides a critical first step in understanding how young people interpret what they see when they watch pornography.

These findings have important implications when understood in the context of a range of literature (e.g., Bandura,

2001; Albury, 2014; Lim et al., 2015; Rothman et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2014; Wright, 2013) which identifies the potential for pornography to glamorize violent, demeaning, or painful behaviors as desirable, by sanitizing them as occurring without implications such as pain and other consequences (Kunkel, 2009, p. 16). The study findings suggest a range of future directions for research, including more detailed qualitative work to draw out how young people perceive the impact of frequently seeing such behaviors as women being verbally abused, gagged, or participating in anal sex on their own sexual scripts and sexual subjectivity. Specifically, they raise interesting questions for future studies with young people about the way that they perceive both violence and pleasure in pornography and how seeing these behaviors in pornography influences their own understanding of sex and sexuality. For example, while just over half of respondents did report seeing women's pleasure frequently, a similar proportion of respondents, when they viewed pornography, frequently saw behaviors that could be considered demeaning to women (e.g., ejaculation onto the face of a woman, violence against women that appears consensual, slurs directed at women, heterosexual anal sex, woman gagging during oral sex). The fact that respondents more frequently saw these behaviors than they saw women portrayed as dominant deserves further exploration in research with young people.

This study is an important contribution to the field of knowledge about pornography exposure, because rather than attempting to provide an objective measure of how frequently these behaviors occur in pornography, our findings draw attention to the gendered ways that behaviors are identified and reported on by young heterosexual audiences. Perhaps most important, they provide some evidence to suggest that interventions like formal school-based education targeting young people with information about potential harms of pornography could be expanded beyond a focus on the potential risks of watching the content toward a broader approach which recognizes the social and cultural contexts in which young people see and make sense of behaviors represented in pornography. The data presented here support the need for more discussion with both young men and women about how they interpret behaviors (in pornography and in reality) and the potential effects of frequent exposure to sexualized gender inequality and violence toward women. While this study focused on heterosexual young people, further work is required to understand how gender- or sexuality- diverse young people, perceive the images they see in pornography and their specific experiences of its effects.

Limitations

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. Results are drawn from a convenience sample and are not generalizable to all young Australians. The sample was skewed toward female, tertiary-educated respondents, which is common in sexual

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health research (Richters et al., 2014; Smith, Rissel, Richters, Grulich, & De Visser, 2003). Further research with other sociodemographic groups and specific pornographic genres should be conducted to understand exposure patterns in a broader cross-section of the community and within different subgroups.

For reasons we have outlined, our measure did not provide an objective quantification or indicate rates of violence (or other behaviors) in pornography or seen by young people. Further, we did not differentiate between what participants actively sought out to watch compared to what they passively saw when watching pornography. Rather, as discussed, the measures provide an indication of how frequently young people in this study perceive seeing behaviors. Further research would be useful to verify and explore the results presented here with young people. Finally, although the survey was conducted online to reduce social desirability and recall bias, it was difficult to control for some amount of bias in what male and female participants reported seeing over the previous 12 months. For example, participants may be responding to an element of social pressure or knowledge of popular critiques of pornography and therefore underreport seeing violence toward women in the pornography they viewed. We were also asking participants to judge how frequently they had seen behaviors over a 12-month period. As a result, primacy and recency biases may affect those behaviors they reported viewing frequently.

Conclusion

This research highlights gaps in the literature examining the types of behaviors that young people see in pornography and correlates of seeing these behaviors. The results illustrate the importance of further research to better understand the way that different groups of young people perceive the behaviors represented in pornography and the impact of commonly seeing gender inequality and violence in pornography on the sociosexual scripts of young people. The proportion of heterosexual young people surveyed who reported frequently seeing gender inequality and violence in pornography confirms that this issue deserves the attention of public health, violence prevention, and sexual education researchers and policymakers.

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