

*“Probably the most educational thing you will
ever see”*

What do young men learn from pornography?

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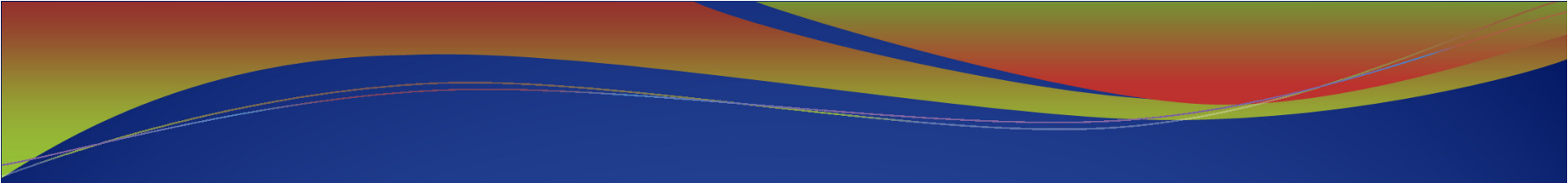


Why are we bothered?

What's the problem?

What I plan to cover.....

- The data I'm drawing on
- Defining pornography – What do we mean?
- Some facts and figures
- Why young men use pornography
- What young men learn – three perspectives
 - What the literature says
 - What the young men say
 - What my data say
- Pornography and masculinities
- Teaching young men about pornography – challenges
- So what...



This talk draws on...

The research literature – though this is very limited in the UK

My own research – two studies conducted with young men aged 15-17 and one with young men and young women aged 14-16 – focused on sexual risk taking rather than pornography

My professional practice - as a youth worker, counsellor and educator with young men

Defining Pornography

“printed or visual material containing the explicit description or display of sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate sexual excitement.”

(Oxford Dictionary)

“that subset of sexually explicit material that depicts women being coerced, abused, dominated or degraded in such a way as to endorse their subordination.”

(Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy)

Some facts and figures – how many young men access pornography?

87%	USA	Carroll et al, 2008
84%	Australia	Flood, 2007
98%	Sweden	Haggstrom-Nordin, 2009
99%	Italy	Romito and Beltramini, 2011

No reliable figures for the UK

The Literature – Why do young men use pornography?

Little recent research but main cited reasons....

- Curiosity
- Sexual excitement/masturbation
- For information
- Because friends do

The first three were true for boys and girls, the last related to boys only

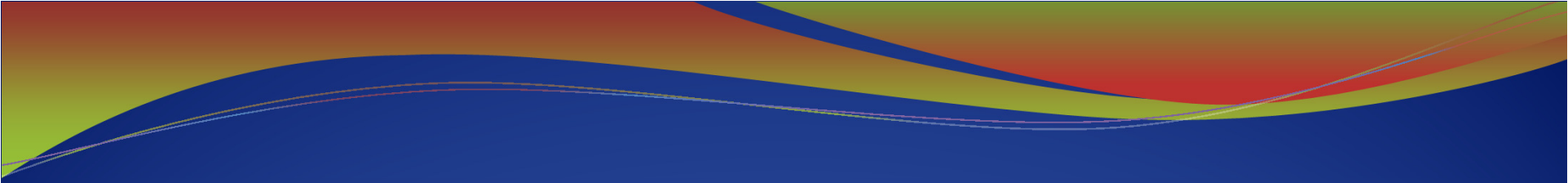
(Romito and Beltramini, 2011; Wallmyr and Welin, 2006)

The Literature - The impact of pornography

On attitudes and values including permissiveness, acceptance of rape myth, the repertoire that constitutes sex and the acceptability of sexual coercion (Carroll et al, 2008; Peter and Valkenberg, 2008; Flood, 2009; Lo and Wei, 2005)

Impact greater where the pornography was 'extreme' (Stulhofer et al, 2010) or the use was more frequent (Flood, 2007)

Impact on behaviour – more contested – but Haggstrom-Nordin et al (2005;2009) and Tyden and Rogala (2004) found increases in young women reporting coercion to have sex and demands for anal sex.



What part do young men say pornography plays in their learning about sex, relationships and women.

Four main sources of information reported:

- Schools
- Parents
- Peers
- Pornography

Where do young men say they learn about sex and relationships?

Source	School	Family	Peers	Pornography
Content	Moralistic What not to do Staying safe Safety and responsibility over pleasure	Values Safety Respect Fulfilment over pleasure	How to behave Who to have sex with Norms (derived from other sources) Setting the standard	Pleasure Expertise Repertoire What things look like Nothing
Process	Didactic One-way Rigid	Taught Discussed Power with the teller	Absorbing rather than asking – learning without saying you don't know By failure to comply	Learning without asking, without being exposed, without revealing ignorance Non-judgemental, positive and safe
Assumed intent	Facts Adult values	Facts Expectations Family values	Approved behaviours Values Limits	Expertise Skills

“There they are talking about reproduction and all that lot but it is not really in reality not everyone has sex for reproduction do they?”

“School came much too late, didn’t start sex education until we were in like year eight or nine (13/14 years). It’s like the people who needed to know already knew and the people who didn’t need to know, didn’t really care so...”

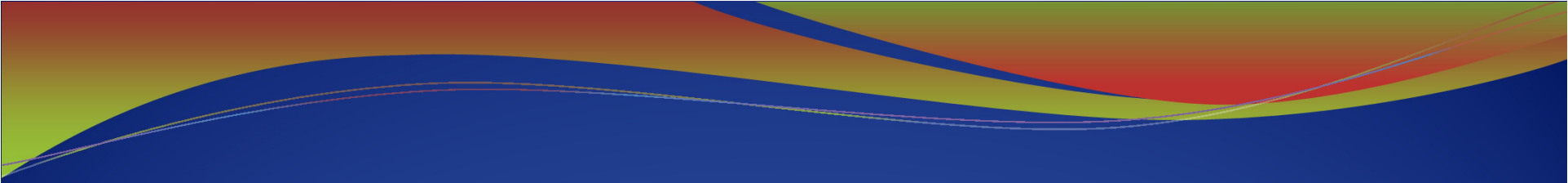
“Warning the dangers and what can happen not saying ‘do it’ or ‘don’t do it’, just saying... just telling you the safeties about it”

“Like when you are doing sex education it is like science videos and stuff like that so they are not really going to do it about teenagers point of view are they?”

“This guy used to come in once a month and had some fuckin’ plastic dildo an’ teach you how to put johnnies on an’ shit.”

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“My dad has given me all my values. The way he has taught me all the things that you don’t get taught at school if you know what I mean, how to treat a woman and what to do and all that and I can talk to him about anything”

“My dad was always really good about it as well, he was always really, like open about it an’ that, an’ me step-mum, especially me step-mum. Always like really easy to talk to an’ that sort of stuff.”

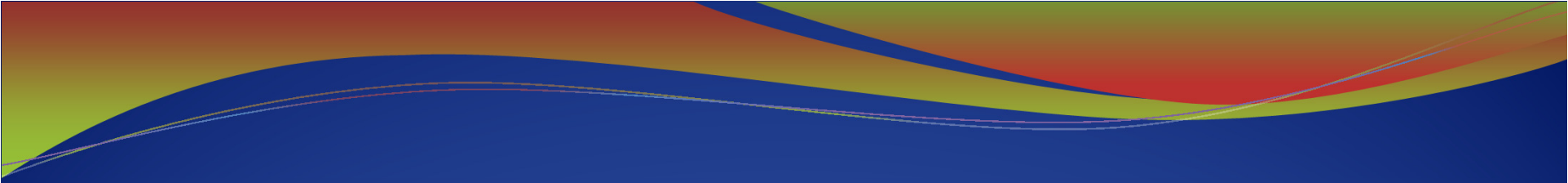
“Like they can’t really stop me so they might as well.. if I am going to do it, well.. they might as well make sure that I do it safely and put the message into my head that I do it safely”

“They want me to just stay with one bird and not just...they wouldn’t want me to just go shagging anything that walks”

“She comes up and fucking starts talking to me..... so did me dad. It felt weird, I told her to fuck off”

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“Honest to god, boys, yer learn off yer mates, boys. You can't just discover it. It can't just come into your head, can it, you learn off your mates.”

“Me and my mates have got like a circle there is like six of us that are dead close and we do talk about it regularly what is happening with each other. If any of us has any problems we always talk about it and sort it out that is what normally happens”

“It is just how you pick it up you just watch them do stuff, they watch you do stuff most of it is just instinct like you know what to do you don't really need to be told”

“You just learn things from listening to what people talk about and catch onto things”

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"No, that [pornography] just teaches you dirty sex. That's not sex.... that's when you'll end up with diseases..... an' it's rude"

"You don't go 'I want to learn about sex, I'll get a porn film' it's like 'I want a wank, I'll watch a 'porn film', it's more like that."

"Seeing what happens"

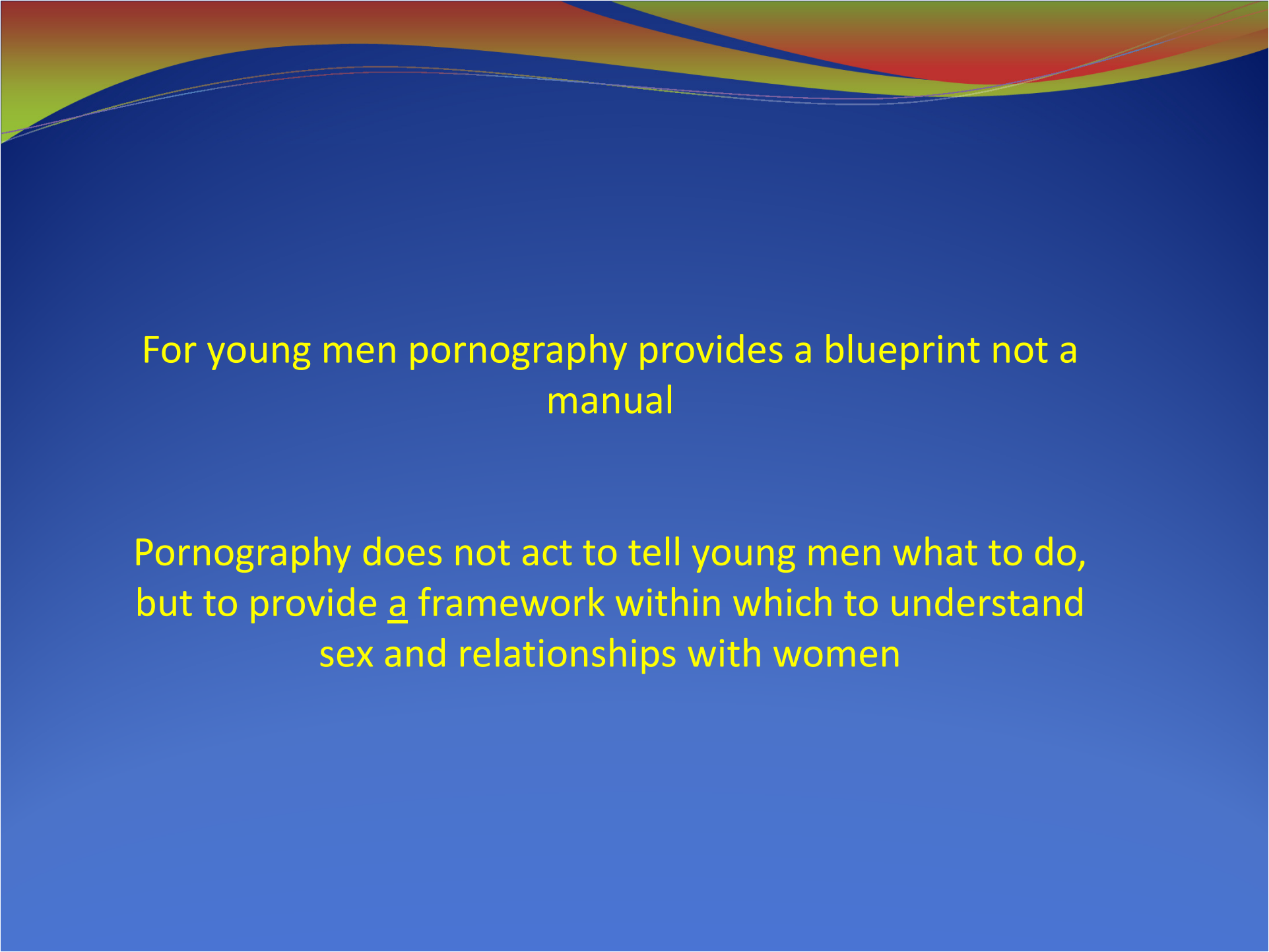
"Touching the fanny, where you tickle 'er"

"Sometimes you get, like some like retards in my class bring in porn mags going 'oh, look at this' an' this sort of stuff. I mean if you're younger it might have some effect on you - they think it's porn, it's FHM. Pathetic."

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From this it is easy to see why pornography is an attractive source of information for young men



For young men pornography provides a blueprint not a
manual

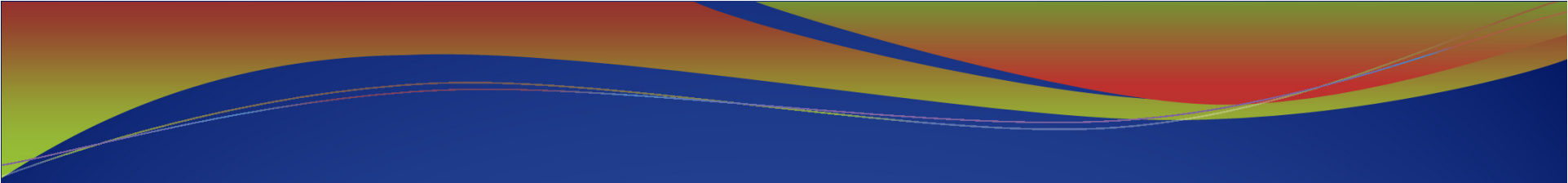
Pornography does not act to tell young men what to do,
but to provide a framework within which to understand
sex and relationships with women

Six discourses pervading heterosexual pornography

1. **Sex is a physical experience that takes place within an emotional vacuum.** It is this physicality – culminating in male ejaculation - that is important with little concern for context or feelings.
2. **Compulsory male heterosexuality** – though sex between women is common.
3. **As it is men who are the target for pornography it consequently privileges men's experience over women's.** Intercourse and male ejaculation signal the climax and completion of the act – it is these that are the point of sex.

Six discourses pervading heterosexual pornography

4. **Men should take the lead in, and be in control of, sex** and to do this requires the right equipment and the right performance. The ideal, reflected by pornography, demands that the man is good at sex, he has a large penis - that neither fails to erect nor ejaculates too soon - and he never refuses a sexual opportunity.
5. **Women as always willing to have sex – even if at first they don't realise it** – the proficiency of the male performance will inevitably induce pleasure and orgasm. The pleasure that the woman takes from sex reflects not on her, but on the expertise and artistry of the man – her sexual pleasure is his achievement.
6. **There are no negative consequences to sex** – no regret afterwards, no pregnancy and no infections – and in this no-consequence arena there is clearly no need for condom use nor discussion and negotiation



These discourses link very well with the approved sexual performance underpinning young masculinities

- The need to demonstrate expertise and leadership
- A voracious sexual appetite
- Embodied sexualities
- Sexual intercourse as the defining activity
- The labelling and categorisation of young women

(Wight, 2004; Holland et al, 1998; Frosh et al, 2002; Segal, 1997; Hyde et al, 2009)

“[Pornography] works in a symbiotic relationship with common constructions of masculine, heterosexual sexuality” (Flood 2007, p57)

All young men?

The mediating effects of....

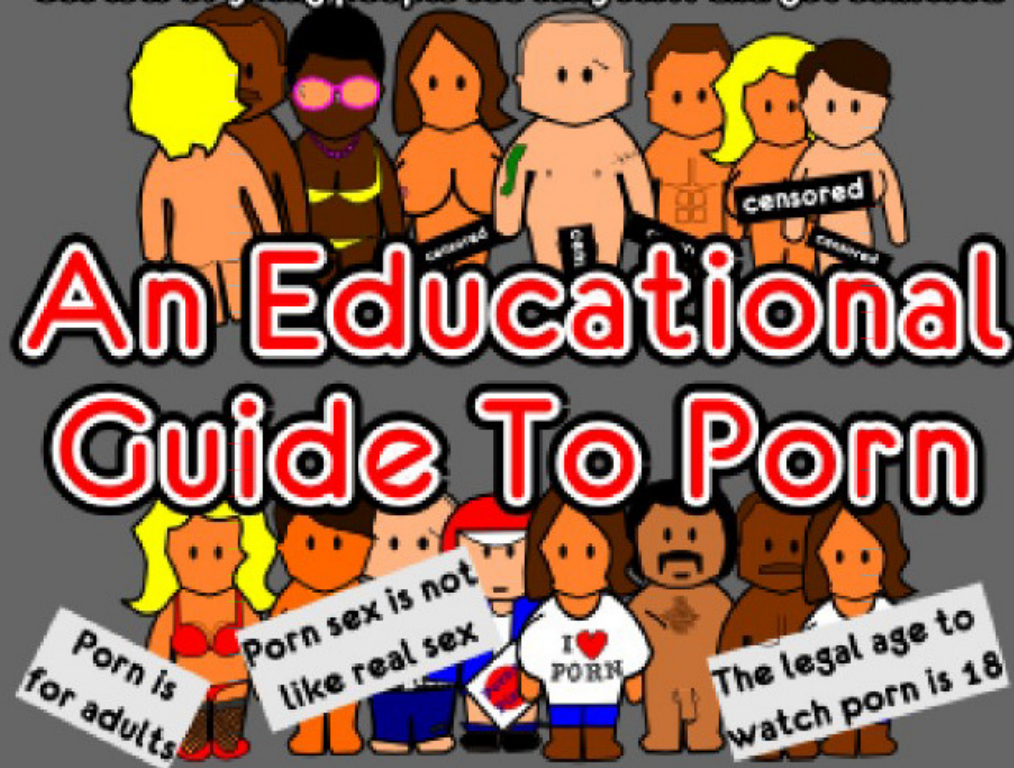
The frequency, content and context of pornography use

Marginalised masculinities and the importance of sexual performance

The availability of alternative credible perspectives and models of sexual performance

	School	Family	Peers	Pornography
Included Young Men	2	1	3	4
Excluded Young Men	4	3	1	2

Cos lots of young people see sexy stuff and get confused



WARNING: this contains graphic sexual references and cartoon images. Not recommended for under 14s, please use your professional judgement.

Review:
Limmer (2012)

Key Points

Almost all young men have accessed pornography - it is therefore an appropriate issue for discussion

A significant proportion of young men say that they learn from pornography – it plays a unique role in their sexual learning. Where else can they learn what they seek to learn from pornography

Pornography provides a blueprint not a manual

Discourses of pornography reflect and validate discourses of heterosexual masculinities

The impact of marginalised masculinities and availability of alternative credible sources on the learning from pornography.

The problem of pornography is power not sex – pornography perpetuates and validates models of gender inequality

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