

## **Attitudes generally to pornography, sex work and sex positivity:**

I have had several discussions and heard many views first hand from my own network. The large majority are positive – that pornography can be beneficial to both individuals and couples etc in relationships. It can reduce shame, encourage more creativity between people and allow open discussion. I'm fully aware of negative views, and many – not all – of these seems to be driven by either ideology or personal triggers around sex and relationships that then feed through to pornography. Pornography (and sex work) often reduces shame, encourages more creativity between people and allows prompts, leading to a more open discussion. It also indirectly helps society – I see people connecting and discussing sex with their associates more openly with less shame. It also strongly helps people identify different parts of their sexuality – they evolve as people from identifying with different practices and orientations. This is especially important for LGBTQIA+ people, who have less reference points in society.

## **The Online Safety Bill:**

The UK Online Safety Bill has some worrying similarities to FOSTA/SESTA in the US. FOSTA/SESTA claimed it was about preventing trafficking, but the history behind it shows it was mainly driven by evangelical Christian groups and 'Radical Feminists' who deliberately wished to conflate consensual sex work with trafficking. Since it's introduction in 2018 only 1 trafficking conviction has happened, but it has had a devastating effect on the safety of sex workers and has closed down many sex educator and body positive people online. Sex workers have been driven away from online, onto the streets and other unsafe environments, increasing violence, and the number of pimps has increased – previously workers were independent. Sex workers are now more scared to report trafficking cases. Online sex educators and body positive brands etc have been deleted by social media and other policies (based on FOSTA/SESTA), meaning people, including young people, can't see crucial information about their body and sexual practices and orientation, leaving them isolated without community, and unable to develop fully.

Any regulation that comes from a place that only some types of sex are acceptable, is undesirable and/or wrong, is likely to cause damage to viewers, performers, and society. More specifically for online, any regulation should recognise that diversity of sexual behaviour and that pornography is (generally) healthy, and access for all tastes and orientations needs to be protected. It is the sex positive and LGBTQIA+ material that is most likely to show fully consensual acts.

## **What is classified as legal/illegal, and best way to counter harmful online content:**

Two examples:

I know many people of all genders who practice BDSM in their relationships, with as many females being dominant as men. Nearly all have seen and some regularly view BDSM pornography, and a fair number (including women) have had sessions or workshops with professional dominatrices. Once again it has a very healthy effect – reducing shame, giving connection and discussion between people, showing how practices may be safely engaged in, showing how truly consensual BDSM is. Attending BDSM parties have an equally positive effect. This then has a knock-on effect in a more healthy and respectful relationship. Rachel Thompson, in her book 'Rough' shows that BDSM is based on high consent, and wrongly

linking it to abuse means that people who are abusers, are indirectly given cover. More research is now emerging showing that BDSM practitioners have a higher understanding of consent, and are better adjusted on several key psychological measures, and the 'average'

person. Allowing accessible online presence for both amateur and professional practitioners in this area is essential.

Pre and post 18 age group: While it is an emotive area, the minimum age of 18 to view and appear in pornography is recent, in the UK it was 16, and the global definition of adulthood in nearly all respect (marriage, sex, military service etc) was 15, with Scotland having a 'young person' category for 16 -18. While grey areas are controversial, there are significant nuances and variation in the 16 – 18 age group. My understanding is that people under 18 in France and Finland can view some pornography. For BDSM, age and probably other things, if something that can be argued is a grey area is illegal, it's very possible that more people are likely to view and engage in it? While it doesn't relate to sex and relationships specifically, there is serious questioning of laboratory research (typically brain scans) that claims to show maturity is not reached until 25. In virtually all areas of health and development, laboratory findings rarely translate to the real world. Virtually all recent history, anthropological findings and real-world psychological studies show emotional maturity around mid-teens. This though, is part of a wider debate, and not limited to sexual issues.

**Protecting vulnerable groups:** Related to the above 2 examples (BDSM, age) and some other areas, creating a narrative that people or society need protection, typically means that they may be unjustly stopped from identifying and expressing themselves, and are infantilised, creating a narrative and environment that 'rescue' is needed, rather than rights. In recent history this can be seen with women, where a major reason for their oppression was that society needed to protect them. The recent example of Britney Spears being under the control of her father, shows how legislation that's about 'protection' can lead to oppression and abuse. Groups that are clearly vulnerable do need protection, but this must be rationally justified and clearly limited to that group.

### **Violence Against Women and Girls:**

From my network, and research I have seen (e.g. Ferguson & Hartley, 2020 – see link), pornography viewers are not linked to VAWG and are more likely to be feminist (University of Western Ontario research, 2015). Generally, my network of viewers have a significantly more positive attitude to women and girls and finding VAWG abhorrent. This seems to be because of their positive attitude to sex and relationships, pornography encouraging them to be open and discussing and practicing true consent. The reverse – VAWG is associated with Incel culture with it's associated shame, and, significantly, negative attitudes to pornography.

### **Online accessibility of pornography and sex workers platforms:**

The increased access to pornography by it's shift to online, and sex workers websites and platforms, has had a positive impact for my network, and I believe, society. This accessibility is part of a 'sex positive' movement that is creating a reduction in shame (and shame is hugely damaging to people, to those around them and to society) and allows people to safely and consensually engage in sexual practices that they wished to (it was inside them and part of them), but previously felt unable to do. The less shame there is, and the more that people can identify and practice who they are in a safe and consensual manner, the better for them

and society. Frequently it is stigma that not only causes shame, but leads directly and indirectly to violence (e.g. with sex work).

### **Wrongly conflating sex work with trafficking:**

The Online Safety Act has unfortunately been used by ideologically motivated campaigners to damage sex work and sex workers (e.g. by wrongly conflating trafficking with consensual sex work - which is c95% (figure based on research) of sex work in the UK - by attempting to ban online sites advertising sex work. Any regulation or Ofcom policy should genuinely include the core groups of viewers, pornography performers and other sex workers and their organisations, embrace independent evidence-based research and exclude ideologically motivated positions. It is clear from non-ideologically motivated, sex work positive trafficking organisations, that legislation that involves sex workers, and reducing stigma (regulations have sometimes increased stigma) allows sex workers, viewers and sex worker clients, to come forward and report illegal activities and abuse. Often legislation (e.g FOSTA/SESTA in the US) has been extremely damaging – apparently introduced to combat trafficking, it did not do that but also severely damaged the ability of sex educators to communicate online their positive messages and education, damaged depictions of the human body, and damaged consensual sex workers (see link), including the ability to report child abuse, coercion and other forms of abuse.

It is very important that we also recognise that ‘trafficking’ does not equal being misled or coerced – laws in the UK and other countries have been introduced meaning that trafficking simply means breaking immigration law – most of the people ‘trafficked’ are not being forced, they are moving jurisdictions consensually, and they often know what the 3rd party ‘traffickers’ may be unpleasant.

Some references for this:

Link: Deplatforming sexual speech in the age of FOSTA/SESTA, 2021: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357000063\\_Deplatforming\\_sexual\\_speech\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_FOSTASESTA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357000063_Deplatforming_sexual_speech_in_the_age_of_FOSTASESTA)

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/20/trafficking-numbers-women-exaggerated>

The Truth about Modern Slavery, Emily Kenway, 2021

90 – 95% of migrant sex workers are working consensually: <https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/0/5C5820784DE272618025793A0032AA6B?OpenDocument>

### **Education on pornography and sexuality:**

Pornography is entertainment, not education – this must be recognised. Access should be given and encouraged to sex positive educators who are feminist, and take a positive view of ethical pornography, and call out unethical pornography – e.g. material that is misogynist. These educators are very good as discussing how pornography can be used well. Adults and carers may not be aware of these resources, so help should be given to direct them to the educators, and this education encouraged, and supplemented. These educators should also be made available in the classroom.

## **The Online Safety Bill Overall:**

Stigma and ideology against pornography and sex work is often based on some peoples unresolved traumas and desires. Those campaigners often consciously or unconsciously mispresent 'evidence' and 'statistics' to try to support their case. Very generally, pornography and sex work is not damaging (apart from the stigma around it), but it could also be so much better. Ethically produced and represented pornography is very healthy for performers, viewers (and their relationships) and society. It should be encouraged through culture, law and policy. Very importantly, pornography is entertainment, not education. The lack of sex positive, pleasure based, education of children, teenagers and adults is responsible for much of VAWG, and also for driving people to seek education through pornography. Education must be radically changed to embrace a sex positive culture.

On regulation, The UK Online Safety Bill was also compiled without the involvement of core groups – sex workers, pornography performers and pornography producers. The people directly effected must have a clear and important voice.