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**Conclusions:** The paper suggests that consuming pornography is not a significant factor in the generation of negative attitudes towards women. **Implications:** The survey suggests that in seeking to understand how negative attitudes towards women are generated in society we should start by asking what issues might be most important, rather than beginning from the assumption that pornography is the major cause of such attitudes.

**Keywords:** pornography, consumption, survey, attitudes towards women.

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**Introduction**

This article presents the results of a survey of 1023 consumers of pornography in Australia, which gathered three kinds of data: demographic; about their consumption of and attitude towards pornography; and about their attitudes towards women.

Public debates in Australia, as in other Western countries, suggest that the consumption of pornography can have negative effects – and, in particular, create

negative attitudes towards women. Typical comments include: “No man who regularly uses pornography can have a healthy sexual relationship with a woman” (Hamilton, quoted in Symons, 2004, p. 4). There has been concern that pornography can actually “damage” people (Hamilton, quoted in Symons, 2004, p. 4) – particularly young people. Commentators worry that pornography is: “a form of exploitation of women ... that plays on the confusion and ultimate emotional sterility of those who use it” (Shanahan, 2004, p. 13). There is an ongoing concern that: “exposure to pornography” can turn people into sex offenders (Fewster, 2004, p. 17), including pedophiles and gang rapists (Hamilton, 2004, p. 11). There are also concerns that it can create unrealistic expectations of sex, and stop people from becoming involved in real sexual relationships (Hamilton, 2004, p. 11). Others argue that pornography contributes to a general increase in violent crime in our society (Pell, 2004, p. 83). Still others state that pornography is addictive and is turning people into “lust junkies” (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 2004, p. 68).

The most common model for investigating this relationship has been that of looking for the ‘effects’ of pornography on its users, with a particular interest in anti-woman and anti-social effects. Despite the publication of a large number of studies over the past thirty years (Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod, 1987, p. 23) this tradition offers little in the way of uncontested information.

We can identify three main forms of research in this area: sex offender studies, aggregate studies, and laboratory studies; with surveys as an emerging fourth methodology.

### *Sex Offender Studies*

In sex offender studies, researchers interview subjects who have committed sex crimes – including, though not always limited to, rape – and find out about their exposure to pornographic materials. This information is then compared with the pornographic consumption of non-offending control groups. This methodology has provided the most reliable data we currently possess about the effects of pornography on its users – findings from such studies have proven consistent and replicable and there is little dispute about the interpretation of such data (although for exceptions see Check and Malamuth, 1986; Brannigan, 1991). It is generally agreed that these studies have demonstrated that rapists tend to use less pornography than control groups; and

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that, on average, they come from more sexually repressed backgrounds and are exposed to pornography at a later age (see Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy and Christensen, 1965. Goldstein, 1973, p. 218; Goldstein and Kant, 1973; Abel, 1983; Abel, Becker and Mittleman, 1985; Walker, cited in Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 34; Johnson, Kupperstein and Peters, cited in Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 34). These studies clearly do not support the hypothesis that pornography is producing sex offenders.

### *Aggregate studies*

By contrast the data generated by both aggregate studies and laboratory studies are contradictory and highly contested.

In aggregate studies researchers compare the availability or consumption of pornographic material in a society with reported levels of sex crimes – particularly rape. Some aggregate studies show that in societies where pornographic material is more readily available, rates of reported rape drop, or at least rise less quickly than other forms of crime (see Abramson and Hayashi, 1984; Kutchinsky, 1991, p. 51, p. 58; Gentry, 1991; Kimmel and Linders, 1996). Other studies show that there is a correlation between availability of pornography and rape rates (Baron and Straus, 1984; Scott and Schwalm, 1988a). It is difficult to judge how useful this information is. Contradictory results can be explained in a number of ways. There is a difference between the *availability* of pornography and the *consumption* of pornography – for example, Scott and Schwalm found a correlation between the *consumption* of adult magazines and rape rates in different US states (1988a), but also an inverse correlation between the number of adult shops and theatres (*availability*) and rape rates (Scott and Schwalm, 1988b). Some researchers have also argued that intervening variables such as age (Gentry, 1991), sexism, economic inequality and social disorganization (Baron and Straus, 1989), and the macho attitude of people in a society (see Fisher and Barak, 1991, p. 75) can explain correlations between consumption of pornography and rape rates. Further, Davies notes that aggregate studies are becoming rarer because there is no way of determining whether the people who buy pornography are the same people who are committing sex crimes (Davies, 1997, p. 4).

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There are also important issues about the interpretation of evidence. For example Lahey has argued that any decrease in reported rapes in societies which have liberalised access to pornography should be interpreted as signifying an actual *increase* in the rape rate, working on the assumption that women will be less likely to report rape in a society where pornography has made it seem more acceptable (Lahey, 1991, p. 123). Conversely, Baron and Straus argue that increases in the reported rape of rate could be seen as signifying an actual *decrease* in the rape rate as, in a liberalised society, women will be more likely to report rape (Baron and Straus, 1984, p. 206).

### *Laboratory studies*

Results from laboratory experiments are also contradictory.

Researchers generally divide pornography into three types in order to conduct laboratory experiments into effects of exposure: non-violent degrading pornography (that which shows women who enjoy casual or dirty sex – Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 4); non-violent non-degrading pornography; and violent pornography. There is general agreement among researchers that exposure to non-violent pornography – whether degrading or non-degrading – has no negative effects on its consumers (see Donnerstein, 1984, p. 54, p. 76; Donnerstein et al, 1987p. 2; Padgett, Brislin-Slutz and Neal, 1989, p. 482; and Scott and Cuvelier, 1993, p. 3 – although see also Zillmann and Weaver, 1989, p. 119 who argue against this position).

In relation to the effects of violent pornography on its consumers there is more genuinely contradictory evidence. Some researchers have managed to produce significant negative effects in consumers from viewing violent pornography in laboratory experiments. These include increased tendencies to aggression against women (Donnerstein and Berkowitz, 1981); an increased acceptance of violence against women in general (Malamuth and Check, 1981) and rape in particular (Zillmann and Bryant, 1984); an acceptance of rape myths (Malamuth and Check, 1981); the production of rape fantasies (Malamuth, 1981); an increase in self-nominated likelihood to commit rape (Check, 1985; Malamuth, 1981); and decreased support for women's rights (Zillmann and Bryant, 1984, p. 134). However, other researchers have been unable to replicate these results (Malamuth and Centi, 1986; Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod, 1988; Padgett et al, 1989; Fisher and Grenier, 1994;

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Barak and Fisher, 1997; see also Baron and Bell, 1973; and discussion in Linz, 1989; Mould, 1988, p. 339; Fisher and Barak, 1989, p. 302; Fischer and Barak, 1991; Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 23; Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 52, p. 72).

### *Potential mediating factors*

If we accept that in some laboratory studies there is a link between the consumption of violent pornography and negative attitudes, how do we reconcile these data with the lack of firm correlation in aggregate studies, and the absolute refusal of such a correlation in sex offender studies? (Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 25).

One possible answer would be to point to an escalating number of other variables that have been raised as possibly mediating the production of aggressiveness: these include the gender of an actor employed by the experimenter to engage with subjects, the outcome of violence in the pornography (do the women who are raped come to like it by the end, or remain upset by it?), the amount of pornography shown, the time frame in which it is shown, the time between showing the subjects pornography and testing their responses, whether the pornography is edited to include only sexual scenes or also includes material which is non-sexual, whether subjects are given multiple chances to aggress, whether subjects have aggression modelled for them, whether subjects are given alternatives to aggression, and so on. However none of these has been convincingly established as the key mediating variable in producing aggression in the laboratory.

### *Laboratory versus natural settings*

Taking an alternative approach to this issue, some researchers have pointed to the differences that exist between the consumption of pornography in laboratory settings and the consumption of pornography in everyday culture (Fisher and Barak, 1991, p. 72; Davies, 1997, p. 15).

Eysenck has argued convincingly that one cannot dismiss lab studies generally as being irrelevant simply because they are not the same as everyday life (Eysenck, 1984). While this is obviously true, it is also clear that laboratory studies of pornography use have failed to address a number of important elements of everyday pornography use. Some commentators have pointed to the unreal nature of the laboratory violence that is used in testing aggression - usually electric shocks administered through the Buss apparatus, or over-inflation of a blood-pressure testing

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device (Fisher and Barak, 1989, p. 298; Kutchinsky, 1991, p. 48; Davies, 1997, p. 5). However, other researchers have refuted this point, noting that experiments have shown that administering fake harm is correlated to administering real harm (Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 12). Another difficulty is that in laboratory experiments an authority figure is commanding subjects to act aggressively – the opposite of normal social situations (Brannigan, 1991, p. 5). This has been linked to an experimenter demand effect, where subjects give experimenters what they obviously want – indeed, are asking for (Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 35). Again, however, other researchers refute this point, saying that there is more control, through surveillance, in laboratories than in normal social settings (Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 13). There is also an issue with the cohort used in experimental work – almost always willing college students, usually studying psychology. Again, however, some researchers deny this is a problem – citing the fact that college age men are the most likely demographic to exhibit sexual violence against women and thus precisely the group that should be studied in most detail (Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 14). Finally, we must also bear in mind the fact that studies tend to be published mainly if they have positive effects – null effects are not favoured for publication (Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 26). Again, some researchers deny this is a difficulty, arguing it would take a huge number of null results to invalidate the positive results that have been found (Donnerstein et al, 1987, p. 17).

However the most convincing distinction between laboratory experiments and natural consumption of pornography is the fact that outside of laboratories the vast majority of pornography consumption is done on a voluntary basis for pleasure. Consumers choose to consume pornographic materials; they choose the types of materials that they like; they choose how they want to consume them, in what setting, for how long, and what they are doing while they consume them – most commonly masturbating to orgasm (Potter, 1996, p. 111). In contrast, in laboratory settings people are most often unaware that they are going to be consuming pornographic materials; they don't choose what kinds of pornography they are going to see (including often violent material, bestiality and rape scenes); they have no control over how much they see, or where they see it – often in a public group, for long periods. And they are not in situations in which masturbation or orgasm is encouraged or permitted (Zillmann, 2004).

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These factors are extremely important, given that the vast majority of pornography consumption in natural settings is done for pleasure. It is possible to imagine that sitting in public watching ninety minutes of pornography which you personally do not like, with no other distractions (pornography offers few pleasures in terms of narrative, performance or visual pleasures outside of the sexual), unable even to masturbate or orgasm should one wish, could be a distressing experience. Indeed some researchers have noted that it is not the sexual content of pornography, per se, that leads to increased aggression in some laboratory settings – it is rather the degree to which subjects are disturbed by what they see. If they are already familiar with, and enjoy, the genre of pornography they are seeing then they do not become aggressive. Zillmann and Bryant note that:

a reduction of excitatory responsiveness to erotica due to habituation and a corresponding reduction in negative affect jointly mediate a reduction in aggressiveness ... frequent and massive exposure to pornography ... will diminish the likelihood of aggression facilitation after erotic stimulation (Zillmann and Bryant, 1984: 130, 131)

Donnerstein similarly notes that when subjects have ‘positive affective relationships’ with the pornography viewed then it does not ‘increase subsequent aggressive behaviour’ (Donnerstein, 1984, p. 62).

An emerging genre of research attempts to address these issues by studying the effects of pornography on its users within natural environments. Some researchers now use surveys of self-nominated pornography users in order to understand how the genre functions in everyday life (Padgett et al, 1989; Potter, 1996; Davies, 1997; Richters et al, 2003, p. 186). There have been several calls for more empirical work in this area (Potter, 1996, p. 77; Davies, 1997, p. 16; Lawrence and Herold, 1988, p. 168; Smith, 2002, p. 1). The current research fits into this tradition.

### *Limitations of survey research*

There are important limitations to survey work – most importantly that it relies on self-selecting samples of pornography consumers; and that it relies on their self-reporting (Donnerstein, Bryant and Penrod, 1987, p. 78; Potter, 1996, p. 82). These limitations must be borne in mind as the results of the present survey are discussed. Nevertheless, self-reporting is increasingly accepted in the social sciences as a valid form of data gathering, as long as its status is borne in mind (Padgett et al, 1989, p.

485; Lahey, 1991, p. 128, p. 9; Fisher and Barak, 1991, p. 74; Richters, Grulich, de Visser, Smith, and Rissel, 2003, p. 181). And it is clear that surveys provide a better way to access information about the use of pornography in natural settings than do laboratory experiments, for the reasons discussed above. As part of a range of methodological techniques, surveys can be useful and important.

## **Method**

### *Sample: mailing lists of pornography consumers*

Our goal was to recruit consumers of pornography from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible. To this end, the survey was administered in two ways. The first route was by enclosing copies of the survey within a catalogue of pornographic material which is distributed by the mail order company Axis Entertainment in Australia. Because of the unusual nature of censorship laws in Australia (it is legal to *buy* pornography in every State and Territory in the country, but illegal to *sell* it in any State – it can only be sold in the two Territories, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory), mail-order distributors of pornography in Australia have a wide reach among pornography consumers around the country. Axis has 55,000 households on its mailing list. We supplied 5000 copies of the survey to Axis: they inserted copies in every tenth catalogue (ordered by surname) of the first 50,000 catalogues on their list, along with a printed prepaid envelope. The cover text on the survey stated that: “We've included this survey with your Axis catalogue so you can tell us what you think about pornography and its place in society. Please feel free fill in this form and return it in the Reply Paid envelope provided”. In addition to the basic descriptive information about the study, it also informed respondents that: “In this survey, we are using the term ‘pornography’ in its widest sense, from soft porn (‘erotica’) to fully explicit material. This includes magazines, videos, the internet and explicit novels”. These surveys were sent out in August 2003. Three hundred and sixty seven (367) valid responses were returned (7.3% response rate). It should be noted that this is a low response rate. This is to be expected in a public context in which users of pornography, as noted above, are sometimes vilified as being dangerous or criminal. This necessitates care when generalising from these responses. Nevertheless, this does

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provide us with a useful sample of ‘traditional’ consumers of pornography: those who are willing to approach ‘adult’ companies for their material.

### *Sample: Internet users*

In order to allow for the possibility that there may also be consumers of pornography in Australia who are not comfortable putting their name on the mailing list of an adult company – or who simply choose not to, for reasons including ease of access to pornographic material through alternative routes such as the Internet - we also administered the survey on the Internet. The survey instrument (which was the same as that used in the catalogues) was placed online (<http://www.understandingpornography.info>) on the 2 June 2003 and remained accessible until the 29 October 2003. In order to gain access to the widest possible population of pornographic consumers the authors advertised the survey in a number of different media, including radio, newspapers and magazines, live events such as debates and on Internet lists. We approached some of these media to request the opportunity to mention the survey; in other cases, having heard about the project they approached us to discuss the project more widely. Given the range of circumstances, as well as the different genres and audiences involved, it was not possible to use a standard script to advertise the survey and we used language that was appropriate for each specific situation. We were careful, however, to emphasize three standard points in each medium. First, we were interested in hearing from people who actually used pornography. This was not a survey of attitudes towards pornography in the general population. Second, we had no preconceptions about what we would find out about consumers of pornography. In particular, we did not assume beforehand that we would discover that pornography had bad effects on people or that those who used it were in any way abnormal, but we were openminded about the possible effects of the consumption of pornography. Third, we provided details of how the site could be accessed. Six hundred and fifty six (656) valid responses were received from the Internet (after they had been checked for duplicate responses, completeness, internal consistency and multiple responses from single IP addresses), for a total sample of 1023 responses from consumers of pornography. Relevant demographic data are discussed in the Results section.

### *Measures*

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The survey instrument consisted of 41 questions, refined after a small pilot project was run in April 2003. The pilot study showed that the wording of some questions was causing confusion. These were reworded for clarification. The revised instrument included 10 questions asking for basic demographic data (1-8, 33-34), three questions about sociability (9-11), four questions about general cultural consumption (12-15), 17 questions about use of and thoughts about pornography (16-32) and seven questions about attitudes towards women (35-41).

In this paper, for reasons of length, we do not report on the answers to all questions. We have focussed instead on the relationship between the consumption of pornography and attitudes towards women. We then report on some of the demographic data which previous research has suggested may have a relationship with attitudes towards sexuality (see Smith, A. M. A., C. E. Rissel, J. Richters, A. E. Grulich, and R. O. de Visser, 2003), and the relationships of those variables to the attitudes towards women score, to compare which of these variables are more significantly related.

The issue of the relationship between pornography consumptions and attitudes towards women has been an ongoing concern in studies of pornography and its users. Several useful instruments already exist for measuring attitudes towards women, including the 'Attitudes towards women scale' (Spence and Helmreich, 1972), the 'Acceptance of women as managers' scale (Peters, Terborg and Taynor, 1974), the 'Rape Myth Acceptance Scale' (Burt, 1980) and the 'Index of sex-role orientation' (Dreyer, Fugate-Woods and James, 1981). The questionnaires allow the identification of a series of common issues that can be used to measure attitudes towards women. A seven question Likert scale instrument was designed specifically for the present survey to address these issues. It aimed to be as sensitive as possible to a cultural context in which violence and prejudice against women are now seen publicly to be unacceptable and unspeakable, even while the reality of such violence and prejudice remains a part of Australian society. It thus avoided questions that implied affirmative action (this was identified as a problem by Potter, 1996). It addressed a number of key equity issues around gender (access to abortion, right to work and get paid equally, right to hold positions of power, and the right to stop sexual encounters) in language that was as neutral and accessible as possible.

Self-reporting is now an accepted methodology for analysing the effects of pornography on its consumers, as long as researchers are aware of the limitations of the approach (see for example Padgett et al, 1989; Potter, 1996, p. 82; Richters et al, 2003, p. 181). In order to minimise the problems that arise with self-reporting in relation to a topic such as the consumption of pornography - which still retains some level of stigma in our society even when it is not actually illegal - we informed respondents that they could remain completely anonymous. However we also invited those who were interested in being interviewed to elaborate on their survey answers to provide contact details. Three hundred and twenty nine (329) respondents provided their contact details (31.9% of those completing the hard copy of the survey and 32.3% of Internet respondents). Of these 329 respondents we then chose fifty, picked to maximise coverage of age, gender, sexuality and geographical location (not for representativeness) and interviewed them face to face about their answers. The results of these interviews will be published separately. We mention them here as they relate to the issue of reliability of self-report in this study, because it seems relevant to the issue of honesty that a considerable minority of consumer-participants were willing to meet face to face to discuss their responses to our survey.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Attitudes towards women*

We surveyed the attitudes towards women of the respondents by use of seven questions. Most of the questions were assessed on a five point Likert scale, from “Strongly agree” through “No opinion on the issue” to “Strongly disagree” for a series of statements about women’s place in society. The questions were developed to assess attitudes towards a number of issues identified by feminist writers as being important in the maintenance of gender roles, worded to be as accessible and as non-politically correct as possible.

We first asked respondents a general question, “How would you describe your own politics about gender?”. They were offered a range of responses between “Strongly against feminism” to “Strongly feminist”. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: “How would you describe your own politics about gender?”

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Strongly against	2.4
Slightly against	7.1
Not interested	51.2
Slightly feminist	24.1
Strongly feminist	14.1
Total	99.0
No answer	.8
Uncodable	.2
Total	100

Interestingly, when we moved away from abstract political labels to specific questions about gender equality the results became more positive. A question about equal pay for equal work dealt with the basic issue of equality, as well as women's access to the workplace. A question about women working after having children examined attitudes towards traditional gender roles around parenting and domesticity; while a question about working for a female boss was related hierarchies and power relations. A question about abortion raised a central issue in feminist debates. We wanted to ask a question about rape, but given that feminism itself has successfully made it very difficult to publicly support the idea of rape, we worded that question so as to avoid that emotive term and make the question as neutral as possible. Finally, bearing in mind that feminism in the 1970s fought strongly for women's sexual pleasure to be more acknowledged as an important part of relationships, and for women to ask for what they wanted sexually (Dell'Olio, 1972), we asked a question about women's sexual assertiveness.

Table 2: "Women should get equal pay for equal work"

Strongly disagree	1.5
Disagree	.5
No opinion	3.1
Agree	35.7
Strongly agree	58.7
Total	99.4
No answer	.3
Uncodable	.3

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Total	100
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Table 3: “Women should have access to abortion on demand”

Strongly disagree	3.4
Disagree	5.4
No opinion	8.3
Agree	38.1
Strongly agree	44.1
Total	99.3
No answer	.3
Uncodable	.4
Total	100

Table 4: “It is acceptable for women to continue to work outside the home after they have children, if they want to”

Strongly disagree	1.1
Disagree	3.3
No opinion	3.6
Agree	36.2
Strongly agree	55.1
Total	99.3
No answer	.5
Uncodable	.2
Total	100

Table 5: “It is acceptable for a woman to stop a sexual encounter at any point, no matter how keen she may have been initially”

Strongly disagree	1.6
Disagree	5.9
No opinion	5.0
Agree	35.2
Strongly agree	51.7
Total	99.3
No answer	.6
Uncodable	.1
Total	100

Table 6: “It is acceptable for a woman to be sexually assertive”

Strongly	.4
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disagree	
Disagree	.6
No opinion	4.4
Agree	32.4
Strongly agree	61.7
Total	99.4
No answer	.5
Uncodable	.1
Total	100

Table 7: “I would not mind working for a female boss”

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Strongly disagree	1.2
Disagree	1.8
No opinion	8.5
Agree	36.3
Strongly agree	51.5
Total	99.2
No answer	.7
Uncodable	.1
Total	100

It is important to bear in mind that these answers are self-reported. Nevertheless, they do provide a fascinating insight into the attitudes of consumers of pornography, as they themselves describe them. From the responses to the statements that dealt with specific issues rather than a general statement of gender politics we can say that consumers of pornography are overwhelmingly feminist in their attitudes. Indeed, given an agreement rate of over 90% for several of the statements, and that for most of the statements fewer than 5% of respondents disagreed, we could describe them as extremely feminist in their views. The most contentious issues were access to abortion on demand; and the right of a woman to stop a sexual encounter at any point; but even here rates of disagreement were extremely small (8.8% and 7.5%) respectively.

We then took the responses to the final six questions (excluding the question about self-labelling as feminist, as its Likert scale was slightly different from that used for the final six) and subjected them to factor analysis. Results demonstrated that these 6 questions loaded on one factor which also exhibited internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .80) adequate enough for the items to be used as a single scale. Consequently, the items were summed to provide one 'attitudes toward women' scale. This gave a

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final figure for each respondent of between five and thirty, with higher marks representing better attitudes towards women. We then compared means for these 'Attitude towards women' scores across a number of variables.

### *Consumption of pornography*

We asked multiple questions about pornography consumption, inviting respondents to tell us about their reasons for choosing particular texts, whether they chose to watch alone, with a partner or in a group, and so on. However, for reasons of length in this paper we report only on the results of questions about the amount of pornography consumed.

We asked respondents: 'How many times would you use pornography in an average week?' (Table 8)

Table 8: “How many times would you use pornography in an average week?”

Don't usually consume in the average week	.3
Less than once a week	27.7
Once a week	21.2
Up to three times a week	28.5
More than three times a week	21.2
Total	98.9
No answer	.3
Uncodable	.8
Total	100

We also asked “In an average week, how many hours would you spend using pornography?” (Table 9)

Table 9: “In an average week, how many hours would you spend using pornography?”

None in the average week	2.1
Less than one hour	40.7
1-3 hours	35.3
3-5 hours	11.9
More than five hours	9.4
Total	99.3
No answer	.6
Uncodable	.1
Total	100

It is notable that over 40% of consumers consumed less than one hour per week. In future studies it would be worth using more sensitive categories in order to explore the exact lengths of time for which consumers use pornography.

#### *Relationship between consumption of pornography and attitudes towards women*

We wanted to see if the respondents who consumed more pornography would be less supportive of feminist principles. One-way ‘Attitude towards women’ scores

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depending upon the number of times pornography is consumed each week ( $F_{3,979} = 1.30, p = .273$ ). There were no statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 10: Number of times pornography is consumed each week and mean score for 'Attitude towards women'

Number of times a week pornography is consumed	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Less than once a week	26.3
Once a week	26.2
Up to three times a week	26.1
More than three times a week	26.7

We also compared the mean scores according to the number of hours of pornography consumed each week: similarly, there were no statistically significant differences among the groups ( $F_{3,965} = 1.18, p = .318$ ).

Table 11: Number of hours spent each week consuming pornography and mean scores for 'Attitude towards women'

Number of hours each week consuming pornography	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Less than one hour	26.5
1-3 hours	26.1
3-5 hours	26.4
More than five hours	26.1

It seems that consuming greater amounts of pornography does not lead to worse attitudes towards women. This finding agrees with the results of a study by Padgett et al that found patrons of an adult movie theatre, who viewed more pornography than a cohort of college students, had "more favourable attitudes towards women" than did the college students (Padgett et al, 1989, p. 479). Similarly, it accords with the work of Davies who reported in a survey of people who rented X-rated videos: "No correlations were found between the number of videos rented and attitudes toward feminism and rape" (Davies, 1997, p. 1). Hugh Potter asked a sample of consumers of pornography a series of questions about attitudes to feminist issues and found that: "the attitudes expressed by X-rated video consumers are [sic] consistently more

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supportive of women than those expressed by [a] representative sample of Australians asked the same questions a few years earlier” (Potter, 1996, p. 143).

### *Demographic data*

The demographic questions were chosen to address issues that previous researchers have identified as relevant in the consumption of pornography, including age, gender, sexuality, and geographical location (see Smith et al, 2003, p. 103). We also asked questions that related to public debates about pornography: religion and voting intentions (see discussion below). First, we present the data for all the relevant categories. We then discuss its relationship to attitudes towards women.

We asked “Which sex are you?”. The stereotypical view of a consumer of pornography is male. In fact, 839 respondents (82%) were male, 177 (17.3%) were female (7 gave no answer, or answered as “Other”). Previous research has suggested that women are increasingly viewing or consuming adult materials (Lawrence and Herold, 1988, p. 161). A survey of 380 Australian consumers of pornography conducted by Hugh Potter in 1996 was completed by a sample consisting of 10% women and 90% men.

We asked “How old are you?”. Data on age is shown in Table 12. We also asked “At what stage did you complete your formal education?”. This data is given in Table 13.

Table 12: Age

Age	%
Under 18	1.0
19-25	20.8
26-35	32.8
36-45	24.0
46-55	12.6
56-65	5.7
66+	3.0
Total	100.0

Table 13: Level of formal education

Level of education	%
Still studying	12.6
Primary	1.3
Secondary	27.1
Tertiary	42.8
Postgrad	16.0
Total	99.8
No answer	.2
Total	100

It can be seen that we have respondents from all age categories, with very few under 18, and with numbers dropping off from the age of 46 onwards. This accords with the results of a representative survey of the Australian population's experiences of sexuality, where Richters et al found that younger Australians were more likely to consume pornography than older Australians (Richters et al, 2003, p. 186).

However, respondents were disproportionately highly formally educated. In 1999, 27% of 25-64 year olds had attained a tertiary qualification in Australia (ABS, 2002, np) – given that 602 respondents (58.8%) had a tertiary education, with 164 of those having a postgraduate qualification, it can be seen this sample is substantially more formally-educated than the Australian population as a whole. This is somewhat surprising, given that in a representative survey of the Australian population's experiences with sexuality, Richters et al found that two of the demographic indicators for greater use of pornography by men were: “men who had not completed post secondary education” and “men with blue collar or white collar occupations” (Richters et al, 2003, p. 186); although for women, there was no such relationship. It is worth noting that when Potter surveyed Australian consumers of pornography he also found that the respondents were: “an unrepresentative sample of mostly middle-class and upper middle class respondents” (Potter, 1996, p. 149). This suggests that Australians with higher levels of formal education are more likely to complete surveys.

We asked respondents “In which area do you live?”. Data is presented in Table 14.

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Table 14: residence by urban/rural

City, urban	23.0
City, suburban	51.3
Town	10.0
Small town	6.5
Rural	7.3
Remote	1.1
Other	.5
Total	99.7
No answer	.2
Uncodable	.1
Total	100

Respondents were also asked “How do you usually vote?” (Table 15); and “How would you describe your religion?” (Table 16).

Table 15: voting intentions

Liberal/ National (right wing)	24.1
Labor (left wing)	28.3
Democrat (centrist)	9.2
Green (extreme left wing)	16.4
One Nation (extreme right wing)	2.8
Other	3.5
Don't vote	3.1
Swinging voter	6.5
Independent	1.7
Total	95.6
No answer	2.4
Uncodable	2.0
Total	100

Table 16: Religion

Catholic	15.1
Anglican	10.4
Protestant	4.3
Methodist	1.6
Other	6.7
Christian	2.9
Buddhist	31.5
Atheist	.3
Muslim	16.6
Other	
No	
position	8.6
on religion	
Total	97.9
No answer	1.7
Uncodable	.4
Total	100

There is a tendency in public debates in Western countries for right wing parties to champion censorship of explicit material and left wing parties to fight against censorship. These figures are interesting for showing that roughly equal numbers of users of pornography vote for the major right wing (the Liberal/National coalition) and left wing (Labor) parties in Australia (although significantly more vote for minor left wing parties than minor right wing ones). In his 1996 survey Potter found that 44% of his sample of consumers of pornography voted for the Labor party and 36% for the Coalition (Potter, 1996, p. 86).

It is also interesting, given the role of the church in condemning pornography, to see that 57.9% of respondents claimed some religious affiliation. This is somewhat larger than was found in Potter's sample, where 49% claimed a religious affiliation (Potter, 1996, p. 149).

#### *Relationship between demographic variables and attitudes towards women*

We compared the mean scores for 'Attitudes towards women' across these demographic factors.

Results indicated that women reported more positive attitudes toward women than did men ( $F_{1,988} = 26.48, p < .001$ ).

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Table 17: Gender and mean score for 'Attitude towards women'

Gender	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Female	27.6
Male	26.1

Results indicated statistical difference among the age groups ( $F_{6,990} = 8.247$ ,  $p = .001$ ), with a general trend of older respondents having slightly more negative attitudes than did younger participants.

Table 18: Age and mean score for 'Attitude towards women'

Current age	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Under 18	27.1
19-25	26.7
26-35	27.0
36-45	25.9
46-55	26.1
56-65	24.5
66+	23.8

Results indicated statistical difference depending upon the level of formal education achieved ( $F_{3,862} = 15.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Results indicated that increasing levels of formal education were associated with more positive attitudes toward women.

Table 19: Level of formal education and mean score for 'Attitude towards women'

Level of formal education	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Primary	22.5
Secondary	25.3
Tertiary	26.4
Postgraduate	27.1

Results indicated statistical difference according to place of residence ( $F_{5,984} = 4.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those living in urban areas reported more positive attitudes toward women than did participants living in all other localities. These differences were significant except for the difference between those living in urban areas and those living in remote areas.

Table 20: Geographical area of residence and mean score for ‘Attitude towards women’

Geographical area of residence	Mean score, ‘Attitude towards women’
City, urban	27.1
City, suburban	26.2
Town	26.0
Small town	25.9
Rural	25.3
Remote	26.9

Results indicated statistical difference among those with different voting preferences ( $F_{5,838} = 14.12, p < .001$ ). One Nation supporters (an extreme right wing party) reported less positive attitudes toward women than did respondents with all other voting preferences. Those participants who indicated a preference for voting Green reported attitudes toward women that were significantly more positive than all other respondents except for those indicating a preference for voting Democrat or Other.

Table 21: Voting preference and mean score for ‘Attitude towards women’

Voting preference	Mean score, ‘Attitude towards women’
Green	27.8
Other	27.1
Democrat	26.9
Labor	26.4
Liberal/National coalition	25.4
One Nation	23.4

Results indicated statistical difference among the religious groups ( $F_{5,706} = 12.372, p < .001$ ). Atheists reported more positive attitudes toward women, with Buddhists being second.

Table 22: Religious affiliation and mean score for 'Attitude towards women'

Religious affiliation	Mean score, 'Attitude towards women'
Atheist	27.3
Buddhist	27.1
Catholic	25.4
Anglican	25.7
Protestant	24.2
Other Christian	25.1

These findings accord with those of Potter, who found that: 'the characteristics which best predicted these respondents' attitudes towards women were their educational attainment and age' (Potter, 1996, p. 143); and that: 'none of the pornography consumption measures played a statistically significant role when all other relevant variables were considered' (Potter, 1996, p. 144).

## **Conclusion**

While some laboratory experiments have generated significant anti-women results among populations who may not normally consume pornography, studies of pornography use in natural settings have not been successful in replicating this finding. Several researchers have called for more research into the use of pornography in everyday settings where consumers use it out of choice. This survey attempts to address this need and contributes to the understanding of how pornography consumption functions in natural settings.

It is important to emphasise the limitations of this study. The sample is self-selected and thus we make no claims as to its representativeness of Australian consumers of pornography generally. It must also be borne in mind that there may well be a strong experimenter effect in place here, as respondents were aware of the purpose of the survey and may have given answers accordingly. Further, some readers might wish to raise the question of the degree of "political correctness" in the responses. It would be possible to investigate this issue in further studies. The questions could be rewritten in the opposite form: for example, rather than using the statement "I would not mind working for a female boss", the instrument could say: "I would rather work for a male boss". The original version could then be supplied to half of a given sample; and

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the revised version to the other half. Comparing the results across the whole sample would suggest the extent to which the phrasing of the question influences the results.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging these caveats we also suggest that this, the largest survey of its kind undertaken in Australia, gives us a useful insight into the attitudes towards women of Australians who consume pornography; and the relationship between their attitudes and a number of demographic variables.

Of most interest is the possibility that negative attitudes towards women may be influenced more powerfully by a number of cultural factors than by the simple consumption of pornography; in particular by age, the level of formal education, area of residence, political affiliations and religious belief. This is significant; in the past we have tended to work from the assumption that pornography is a key cultural artefact in the creation of negative attitudes towards women. However, these data suggest that consumption of pornography may not be causative in a person's attitudes towards women and certainly not as influential as other demographic and cultural factors.

This study reveals an important new realm for research into gender attitudes. Social scientists may find it useful to begin to investigate whether exposure to the teachings of organised religion, or to the pronouncements of right wing political parties can have the effect of creating negative attitudes towards women in our societies or what personal characteristics of individuals may cause them to aggregate in such groups which then denigrate pornography while continuing to consume it.

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