

Young people, Pornography & Age-verification

January 2020

The following research
contains graphic sexual content
and pornographic language



Section

1

How do children first come into contact with pornography?

Section

2

How do children use pornography as they get older?

Section

3

What motivates young people to watch pornography as they get older?

Section

4

What are the negative consequences of watching pornography for young people?

Section

5

What do young people & parents think about age-verification?



Contents

Foreword by the BBFC	5	
Executive Summary	6	
Introduction	7	
The online pornography landscape	11	
1	How do children first come into contact with pornography?	14
	Children first accessed pornography at a young age	15
	Many first experienced pornography accidentally	16
2	How do children use pornography as they get older?	19
	Intentional pornography use increased with age	20
	Key portals: Dedicated pornography websites, social media and smartphones	22
	Parents were unaware their children—particularly their daughters—were watching pornography	27
3	What motivates young people to watch pornography as they get older?	29
	Young people expressed dissatisfaction at the sex education they had received in school	30
	Both sexes had used pornography to learn “what to do” and “how to behave” during sex	31
	Almost half of all LGB respondents felt that pornography had helped them to understand their sexuality	34
	Both sexes used pornography for gratification	35
4	What are the negative consequences of watching pornography for young people?	39
	Some children had been exposed to potentially harmful content at a young age	40
	Stumbling across “violent” or “extreme” pornography	42
	Pornography may have created unrealistic and undesirable expectations of sex	43
	Pornography influenced sexual behaviour	46
	Pornography may have negatively affected perceptions of body image	51
5	What do young people & parents think about age-verification?	53
	Many of the ways in which young people first stumbled across pornography would likely have been prevented by Age-Verification	54
	Younger children were unlikely to know about workarounds – but knowledge increases with age	56
	Some felt there could be unintended consequences of restrictions on pornography	58
	Most parents and children supported a form of restriction on pornography	60



Foreword by the BBFC

The research, undertaken by Revealing Reality, demonstrates the need for urgent intervention to protect children online by imposing age-verification, and provides important context by exploring what children and parents currently think about online pornography and how young people are accessing it today.

Pornography is currently one click away for children of all ages in the UK, and this research supports the growing body of evidence that it is affecting the way young people understand healthy relationships, sex, body image and consent. It also shows that when young children—in some cases as young as 7 years old—first see pornography online, it is most commonly not on purpose. While age-verification is not a ‘silver bullet’, it will significantly reduce the risk of young children stumbling across pornography by accident as they do today.

It is very encouraging to see that there is so much public support for age-verification. The research findings are clear that both parents and, crucially, children too, want there to be stronger controls in place.

While the introduction of age-verification for online pornography has been delayed in the UK, it remains an important child protection measure and will be introduced as part of the Government’s broader online harms strategy. On 16 October 2019, the then Secretary of State Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP said: “The government’s commitment to protecting children online is unwavering... We are committed to the UK becoming a world-leader in the development of online safety technology and to ensure companies of all sizes have access to, and adopt, innovative solutions to improve the safety of their users. This includes age-verification tools and we expect them to continue to play a key role in protecting children online.”

I very much hope that this research will inform the development of new legislation. It sets an important benchmark against which the impact and effectiveness of any future regulatory regime can be measured.

The BBFC looks forward to working closely with Government on their plans to tackle online harms. It is plainly unacceptable for children to have free, unfettered access to online pornography, and we support proportionate regulatory initiatives to make the internet a safer place by protecting children from all harmful content.

DAVID AUSTIN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

JANUARY 2020



Executive Summary

- **Many children were first exposed to pornography accidentally and at a young age.** Respondents in the qualitative research described having first stumbled across pornography, with some stating that it happened when they were as young as 7 years old. Similarly, just over 6 in 10 (62%) 11- to 13-year-olds who reported having seen pornography in the online survey described their viewing as mostly “unintentional”. Young people recalled feeling “grossed out” and “confused” when they first saw pornography, especially those who had seen it aged 10 or under, while others found it “funny” or “weird”.
- **As children got older, they actively sought out pornography, for sexual gratification and to ‘learn’ about sex.** Both boys and girls were using pornography for sexual gratification during their teen years. Moreover, young people felt that sex education at school did not adequately prepare them for sex and many were using pornography to learn the specifics of ‘what to do’ during sex. Girls in particular reported watching pornography to meet the perceived sexual expectations of boys, which they believed were in turn informed by the viewing of pornography. Indeed, the online survey showed that 45% of those who watched pornography intentionally had done so, at least in part, to ‘learn’ about sex. Similarly, nearly all lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) respondents interviewed in the qualitative work said they had learnt about their sexuality through watching pornography, and several had come to realise their sexuality through watching pornography.
- **There was a disconnect between parents’ perceptions of their children’s pornography viewing practices and the reality of children’s experiences.** Three-quarters of parents (75%) felt their child would not have seen pornography online, but among the children of those parents, 53% said they had in fact seen pornography. This figure is likely to be higher in reality due to underreporting in the survey. The qualitative work revealed a particular disconnect in respect of girls, with many parents saying they were sure their daughters would not intentionally seek out pornography. However, the majority of girls interviewed reported they had actively searched for pornography at some stage. Most respondents would usually search for pornography on dedicated pornographic websites. The most popular site for accessing pornography was Pornhub, but other sites such as xHamster, xVideos, or RedTube were also mentioned. It was also very common for respondents to have seen pornography through social media.
- **Most boys and girls across the sample indicated they had seen content they found upsetting or disturbing at some point, usually relating to “violent” or “aggressive” pornography.** Often, they were first exposed to this type of content accidentally. Some girls in particular spoke of their fear that aggressive depictions of sex would be seen as “normal” among young male viewers of pornography, and accordingly be copied in real-life sexual encounters. Young people echoed this concern in the online survey: 41% of those who knew about pornography agreed that watching it made “people less respectful of the opposite sex”.
- **Some felt pornography had affected their expectations and behaviour during sex,** particularly in the copying of rough or forceful sex, as well as replicating the noises and positions that they had seen in pornography. 18% of 16- to 17-year-olds who had an active sex life said they had either asked or been asked to incorporate things from pornography into their relations with their partner(s).
- **The overall attitude towards age-verification was positive.** Younger children and parents were particularly positive: 56% of 11- to 13-year-olds in the survey wanted to be “locked-out of websites for 18-plus year olds” and 83% of parents agreed that there should be age-verification controls in place for online pornography.
- **Most children and parents believed that age-verification would delay the age at which young people first see pornography,** but would be less likely to prevent older, determined teens from accessing it. Only 14% of 11- to 13-year-olds claimed to be able to do something that would circumvent age-verification compared to 34% of those aged 16 to 17. Many felt that age-verification would have stopped them from accidentally stumbling across explicit content at a young age, such as through uninformed Google searches, pop-ups, and being sent links to pornography sites from friends.



Introduction

Context

In today's internet era, an unprecedented amount of pornography is being produced, disseminated and consumed everyday across the globe. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that many people are exposed to pornography online from a young age. Indeed, it is estimated that half of 13- to 14-year-olds, and 7 in 10 15- to 16-year-olds in the UK have seen pornography online.¹

These statistics sit within broader narratives about the potential harm caused by viewing pornography at a young age, as indicated by a range of research. A study carried out at the London School of Economics and Political Science, for example, found that 1 in 3 young people (aged between 9 and 16 years old) were bothered by the sexual images they had seen online, and 1 in 6 were upset by them.² More broadly, there are also significant concerns about the negative impact pornography can have on young people's understanding of sex, consent, relationships and body image as they mature.

It is in this context that the UK government is attempting to tackle the ease with which young people can access pornography online. The Digital Economy Act (2017) legislated the creation of a UK age-verification regulator to ensure that commercial³ pornographic websites verify that their users are aged 18 or older. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) was designated to fulfil this regulatory role. Since this research was carried out, the government has announced that it will be implementing age-verification as part of the broader online harms strategy⁴, and the BBFC will be working with them to do so.

Pornography is defined in this report as images or video content whose primary purpose is sexual arousal or stimulation. This could include real sex, masturbation, fetish material, sexually explicit animated images, or other strong sexual images.

Aims & objectives

This research was commissioned by the BBFC to provide context to the current online pornography landscape, as well as explore young people's interactions with, and attitudes towards, pornography. It will also serve to establish a benchmark against which the impact and effectiveness of any future age-verification regime in the UK can be measured.

The research was designed to qualitatively and quantitatively explore what children and parents think about a range of topics, from the effects of pornography to their attitudes towards age-verification. More specifically, this research aims to:

- understand the different routes and platforms on which young people access pornography
- explore the current culture around pornography among young people and how pornography affects young people's attitudes towards sex and relationships
- identify any access strategies or 'workarounds' that they could use to circumvent age-verification controls

1 Children's Commissioner (2016) The impact of online pornography on children and young people <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MDX-NSPCC-OCC-Online-Pornography-CYP-Version-16.5.17.pdf>

2 Risks and safety on the internet: the perspective of European children: full findings and policy implications from the EU Kids Online survey of 9- to 16-year-olds and their parents in 25 countries <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/1/Risks%20and%20safety%20on%20the%20internet%28Isero%29.pdf>

3 The government defines what 'commercial basis' means in the Online Pornography (Commercial Basis) Regulations. This includes websites which offer pornographic content for free, but which generate revenue through advertising or through 'premium' content which must be paid for <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/23/introduction/made>

4 Online Harms White Paper (2019). DCMS https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf



Method & limitations

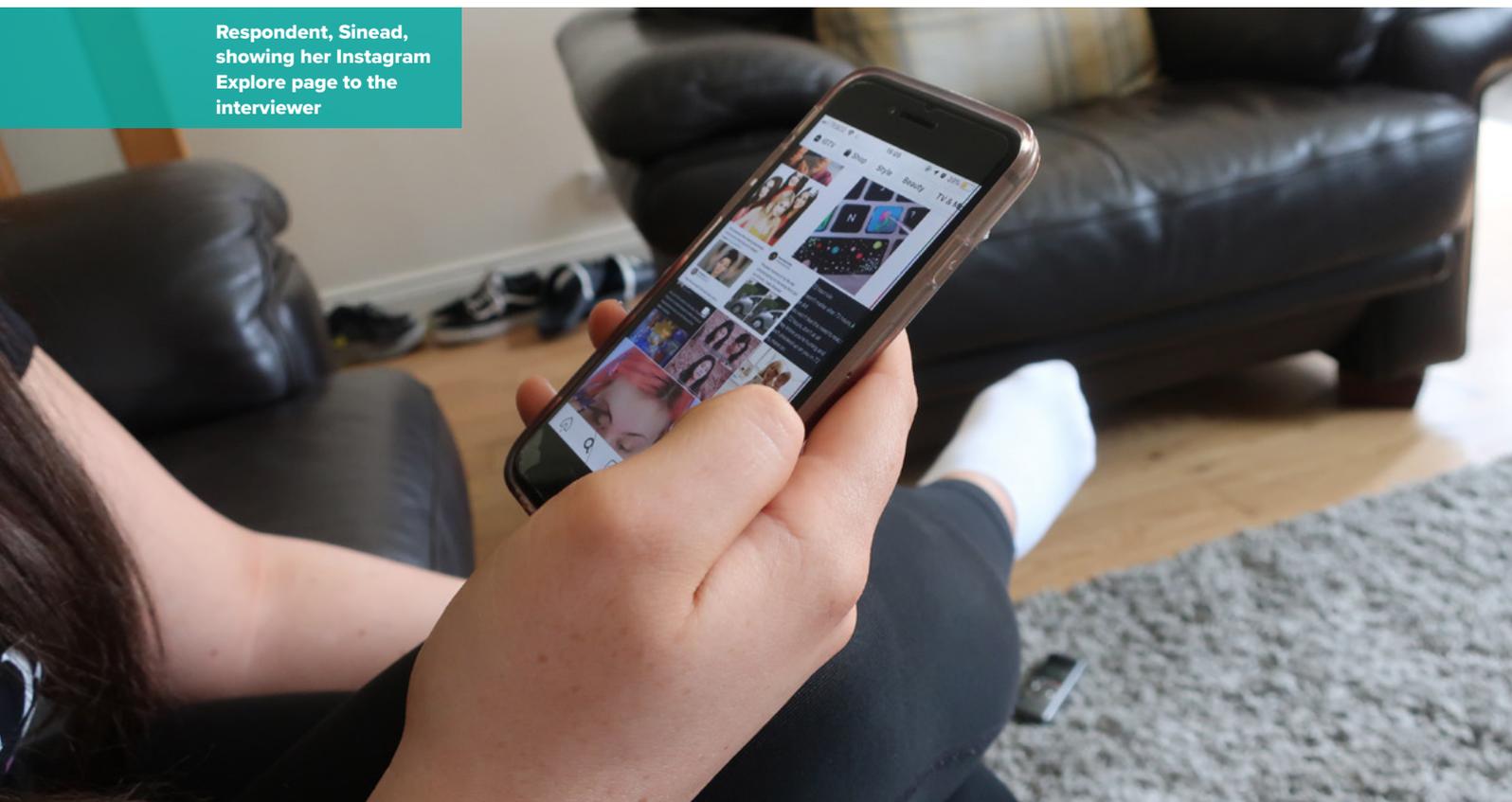
A mixed-methods approach was adopted to include a wide range of views. This work comprised a combination of qualitative and quantitative work with children and adults from May to August 2019.

- Children’s qualitative research: one-on-one depth interviews
- Adults’ qualitative research: focus groups
- Online survey with parents and their children

We conducted **36 qualitative depth interviews** lasting two to three hours with 16- to 18-year-olds. Within this group, 20 of the respondents were male and 16 were female. These were conducted in respondents’ homes or in local libraries/community centres, depending on the respondent’s preference. As well as using recruitment partners, we approached schools and other organisations across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which enabled us to speak to a wide range of young people.

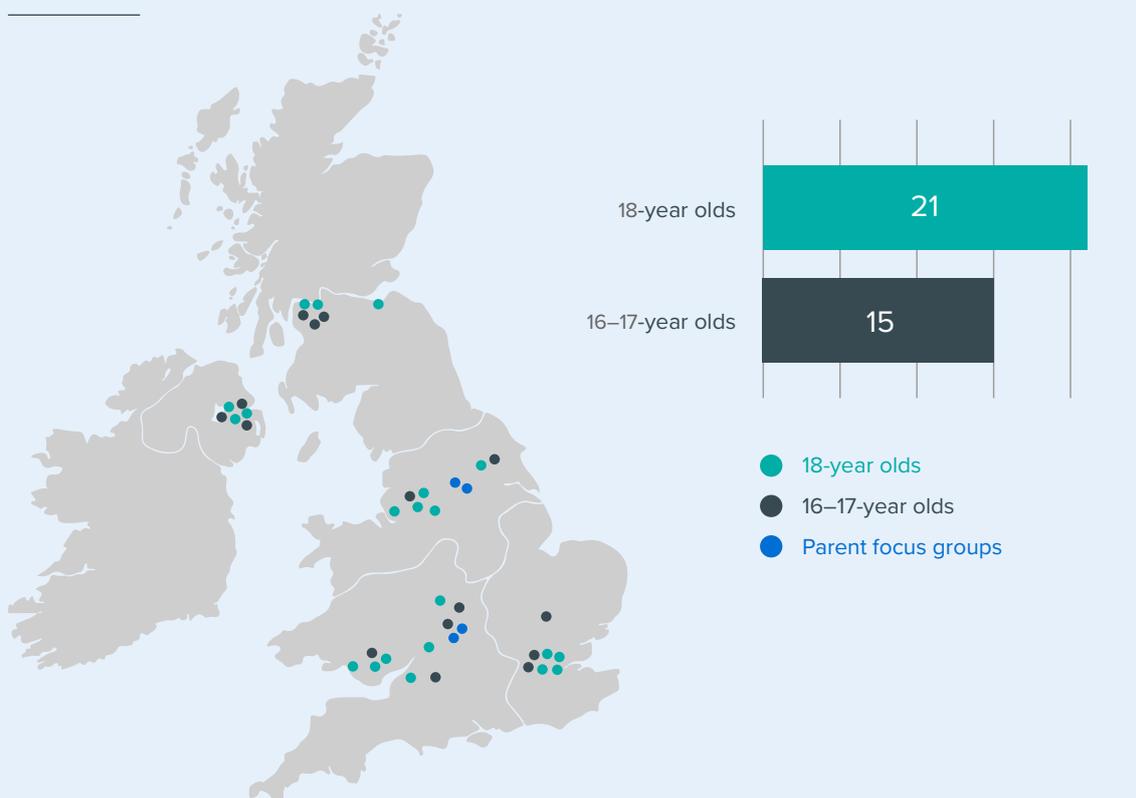
Selecting 16- and 17-year-olds allowed us to engage the age group that would be most affected by age-verification, given that they are more likely than younger children to be active users of pornography. Furthermore, we could do this without needing parental consent. This was done with the intent of producing the most candid and open discussion possible. In addition, by including 18-year-olds, we were able to discuss certain concepts—and pornographic categories—and introduce vocabulary that would not be appropriate for 16- and 17-year-olds, given the ethics of introducing adult content that younger respondents may not have previously been aware of.

Respondent, Sinead, showing her Instagram Explore page to the interviewer



In addition, we held **four parent focus groups**, each with six participants (**total of 24 parents**), in which parents discussed a range of topics in a group context. Separate focus groups were held for mothers and fathers.

FIGURE 1



Across both strands of qualitative research, all names used in this report are pseudonyms and all personal details, with the exception of ages, have been altered and the welfare of all respondents was protected.

Informed consent was obtained for all respondents.

Finally, each **online survey** was completed by a parent and a child with a combined total of **2,284 respondents** (1,142 parents, and 1,142 children aged 11 to 17). The survey was representative of children aged 11 to 17 in the UK. This comprised a 10-minute questionnaire for parents, followed by a 15-minute online survey for the child alone. The questions given to children were shown to the parents in advance (via PDF) and permission was granted or refused at that point, although it's worth noting that this refusal rate was less than 10%. By having both a parent and child section, we were in some cases able to compare the perceptions of parents with their own child's reported behaviour.

A key feature of the quantitative work was to provide a benchmark against which the impact of any future age-verification regime can be measured by further surveys. As a result, similar research effects will be present in any future survey in much the same way. Therefore, a change in results will be valid and of interest, even if the outright number seems to under-report when compared to the qualitative results. Given this apparent level of under-reporting, we urge caution in interpreting any of the statistics herein as facts. Rather, they should be used to indicate the balance of importance between different answers and highlight areas of more or less concern.

Research limitations

While this research enables us to report on what young people say and think about online pornography use, there are certain limitations to the research that should be recognised.

- Our findings below should be read with the understanding that the children's qualitative findings came from young people who had chosen to participate in this research. As a result, our findings may be slightly skewed towards those who are more comfortable talking about sex, relationships and pornography, as well as those who may be more experienced with these topics
- Due to the nature of an online survey, we cannot be sure whether or not the parents were 'hovering', nor whether the child truly believed our assurances that their answers could not be seen by their parents. Across the quantitative data, we can see a reticence to admit certain behaviours that may be less socially desirable, when compared to what was seen in the qualitative work
- Taking those above caveats into account, we would expect the true figures to be somewhere between what is suggested in the qualitative interviews and what is suggested by the quantitative data
- In the children's qualitative interviews, young people were retrospectively reporting their early experiences with pornography, meaning that data was historic and some of the online platforms/content they refer to may have changed since
- In this report, we will be referring to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) respondents, rather than LGBTQ+, as respondents in the survey and qualitative interviews only reported being lesbian, gay or bisexual. However, this is not to say that other sexualities or gender identities did not take part without noting their identity, or that groups within the wider LGBTQ+ community do not feel similarly about the themes discussed

NB – figures in the online survey results may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.



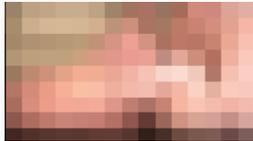
The online pornography landscape

Throughout the report, online pornography sites are referenced by respondents, given that this was how young people most commonly accessed pornography. Before exploring the effects that the use of these sites has on young people, it is important to understand the ways in which young people use online pornography sites, and the types of content they see when they visit these sites.

This section provides illustrations that show the layout and different types of content found across popular online pornography sites mentioned by respondents. While Pornhub was the site that young people tended to use the most, xHamster, xVideos, and RedTube were also mentioned. The illustrations do not represent any single site but show a combination of the typical elements found on the most popular sites.

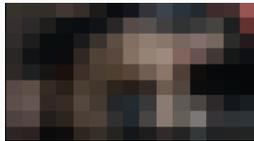
The video titles used in this illustration are taken from a cross-section of the most popular online pornography sites, and names of porn stars have been changed.

Hot porn in the United Kingdom



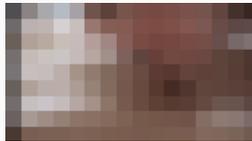
Teacher fucks Tinder date Outside

1.2M 77%



Girl Reacts to Rough Sex - Honest Porn

1.8M 71%



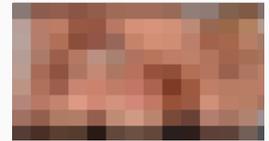
Female Orgasm Compilation - Hitachi

1.4M 78%



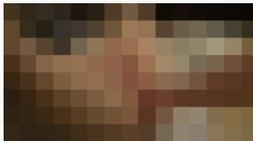
Maya Hughs nude wrestling in and strapon

20,889 78%



Curvy Beatrice Ludlo Face Fucks Stranger

4,740 94%



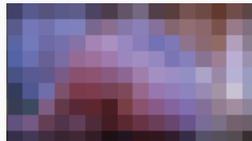
Teen Amateur First Time Facial Compilation

148k 71%



Son Gets Caught Watching StepMom

1.8M 71%



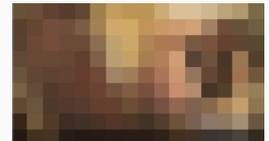
Public Agent Amber Polkert gets

180k 74%



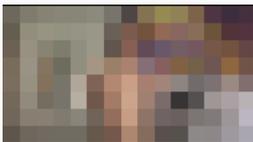
Tied teen anally

95,574 97%



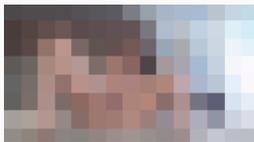
Dirty Flix Nancy - Seducing nerdy tutor

2,539 100%



I fucked my Step - sister's husband and all my holes get filled

1.8M 77%



Stacey Roo Every Time She Shakes Her Ass!

1.4M 79%



Sexy stepsister gets her pussy wet

6M 71%



Fake Hostel Virgin backpacker takes a cock

304k 76%



Gang bang revenge

1M 64%

Most viewed videos in the United Kingdom

Best Porn British Amateur Mature Old & Young Lesbian



Cute schoolgirl Andrea gets her pussy licked in mercedes

1.8M 77%



Tattooed Big tit babe Passionate creampie

1.1M 74%



NYMPHO Ebony babe Demi

31,626 98%



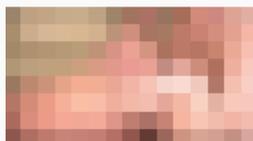
Teen with bit natural tits Kelisha

5,249 93%



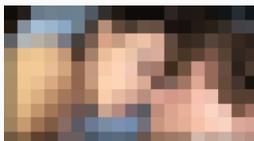
Big Thick Mags Gets Titty Fucked hard

7,294 96%



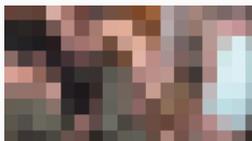
Carnival Madness

95,574 97%



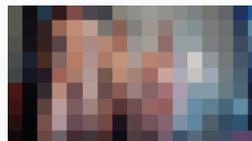
'Don't cum inside me!' 18yr old Stripper takes \$20 to fuck w/out

1.2M 84%



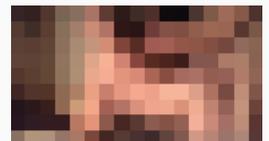
Mom is tricked into sex by horny step son

22.4M 72%



TeenMegaWorld - Busty Tiny Teen Sonia gets fucked

5.6M 74%



Devils film hot wives play with each other and swap husbands

10,525 98%

1 2 3 4 5 6 ... 26,080 Next

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Categories

Different categories of pornography are often shown on a side bar on the homepage, whilst there is also the option to browse all videos by category of pornography. There are often 150+ categories. Categories range from rough to romantic, and many respondents were using this to guide their searches. Popular categories are often shown first and these tend to include genres such as 'Gay' 'Lesbian' 'Teen' 'Bondage' 'Milf' 'Step Fantasy' 'Hentai' and 'School'.

[Videos](#)
[Live Sex](#)
[Pornstars](#)
[Channels](#)
[Premium](#)
[Categories](#)
[Fuck Now](#)

Best videos
Most viewed
50 newest videos
Recommended

Subscriptions

- British
- Amateur
- Anal
- Arab
- Asian
- Babe
- Babysitter
- BBW
- Behind the scenes
- Big ass
- Big dick
- Big tits
- Bisexual male
- Blonde
- Blowjob
- Bondage
- Brazilian
- Brunette
- Bukkake
- Cartoon
- Casting
- Celebrity
- Closed Captions
- College
- Compilation
- Cosplay
- Creampie
- Cuckold
- Cumshot
- Czech
- Described Video
- Double Penetration
- Ebony
- Euro



Japanese
(40,856 Videos)



Amateur
(257,240 Videos)



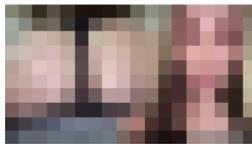
Step Fantasy
(23,297 Videos)



Teen
(218,710 Videos)



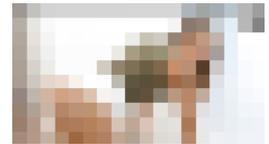
Anal
(108,498 Videos)



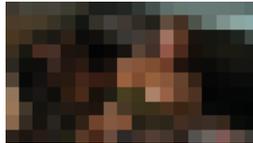
Lesbian
(63,513 Videos)



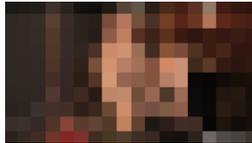
Gay
(77,761 Videos)



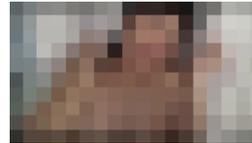
MILF
(114,107 Videos)



Hentai
(13,015 Videos)



Big Tits
(220,225 Videos)



Threesome
(54,360 Videos)



Ebony
(44,856 Videos)



Cartoon
(19,009 Videos)



Old/Young
(13,291 Videos)



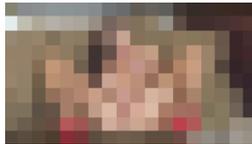
Bondage
(26,320 Videos)



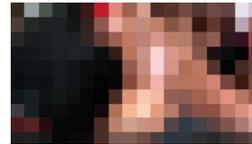
Public
(43,091 Videos)



Big Dick
(118,008 Videos)



Creampie
(41,581 Videos)



School
(40,856 Videos)



Gang Bang
(17,131 Videos)

Mobile View

Mobile phones were the most popular way by which young people accessed pornography sites.



Categories



Homepage



Categories search

How do children first come into contact with pornography?

This section will detail young people’s earliest experiences of pornography: how and why they first view pornography, what types of content they see, and how they feel about this.

This section will only explore their first, or first few, experiences with pornography, while the next section—‘How do children use pornography as they get older?’—will detail young people’s experiences as they become more exposed to pornography, and in some cases become active users.

Children first accessed pornography at a young age

The majority of the young people interviewed in the qualitative research had seen pornography by the age of 13. There were examples, however, where respondents reported viewing pornography as young as 7 years old. One interviewee, **Chanelle** (18), saw pornography via a pop-up on an illegal streaming website when she was 7, while **April** (18) says she used to regularly search for and watch “violent”⁵ pornography at 7 or 8 years old, after initially stumbling across it accidentally. A very small number first viewed pornography much later, at 17 or 18.



Awareness of pornography

The results from the survey show that the proportion of children who report having seen pornography at some point increases significantly with age, as might be expected:

- 51% of 11- to 13-year-olds (shown in the graph below as the combination of the two blue bars)
- 66% of 14- to 15-year-olds
- 79% of 16- to 17-year-olds

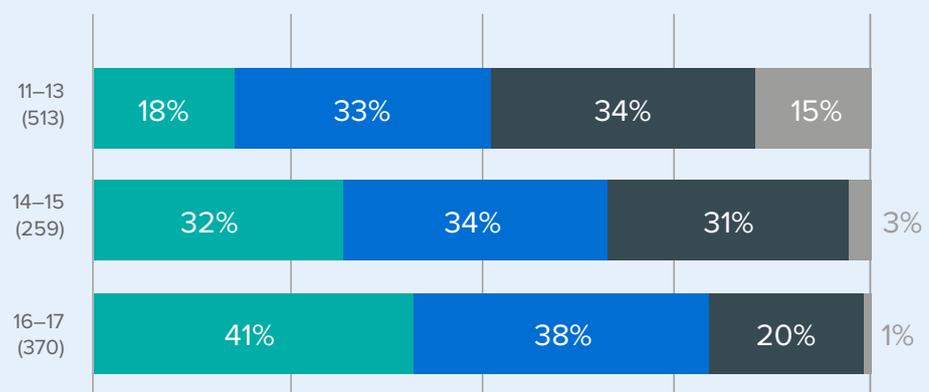
Based on the findings from the qualitative work, this appears to be somewhat under-reporting the true extent of exposure to pornography, which is to be expected given the limitations discussed in the introduction to this report.

FIGURE 2

Awareness of pornography by age

Base: All (bases in brackets in graph)

- Seen in the Last 2 Weeks
- Not seen in last 2 weeks, but have seen before
- Heard of it, but not seen any
- Never heard of it



⁵ By “violent” the respondent indicated that this meant where the man was being “heavily forceful” on the woman in the video



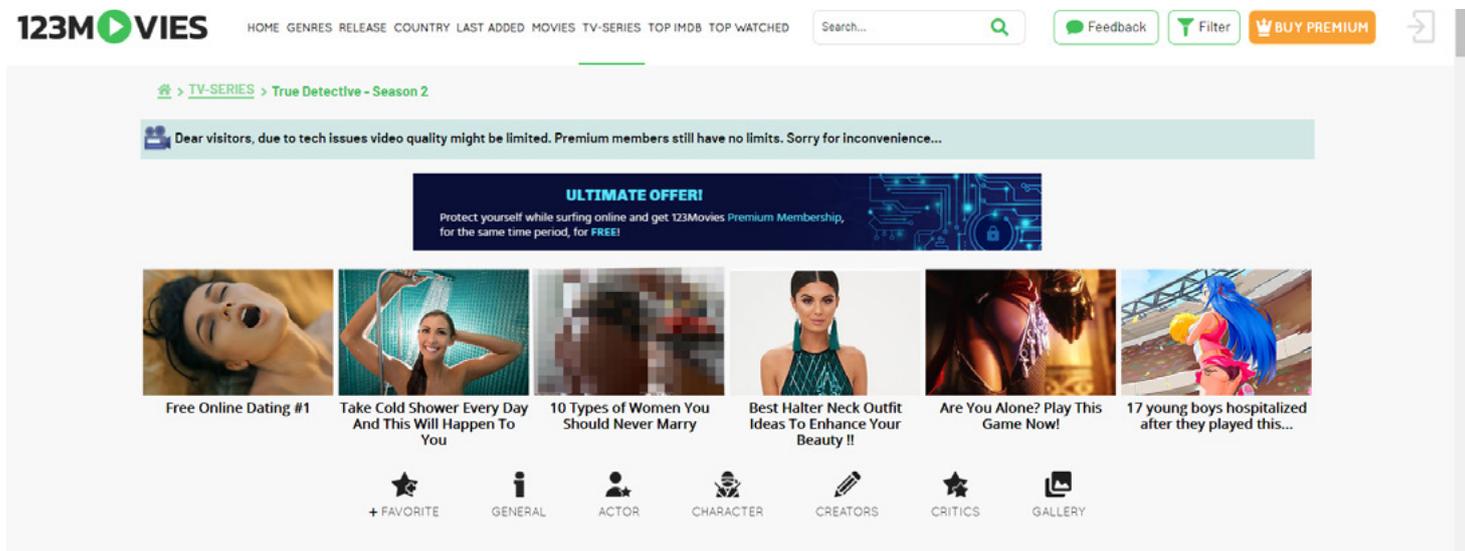
Many first experienced pornography accidentally

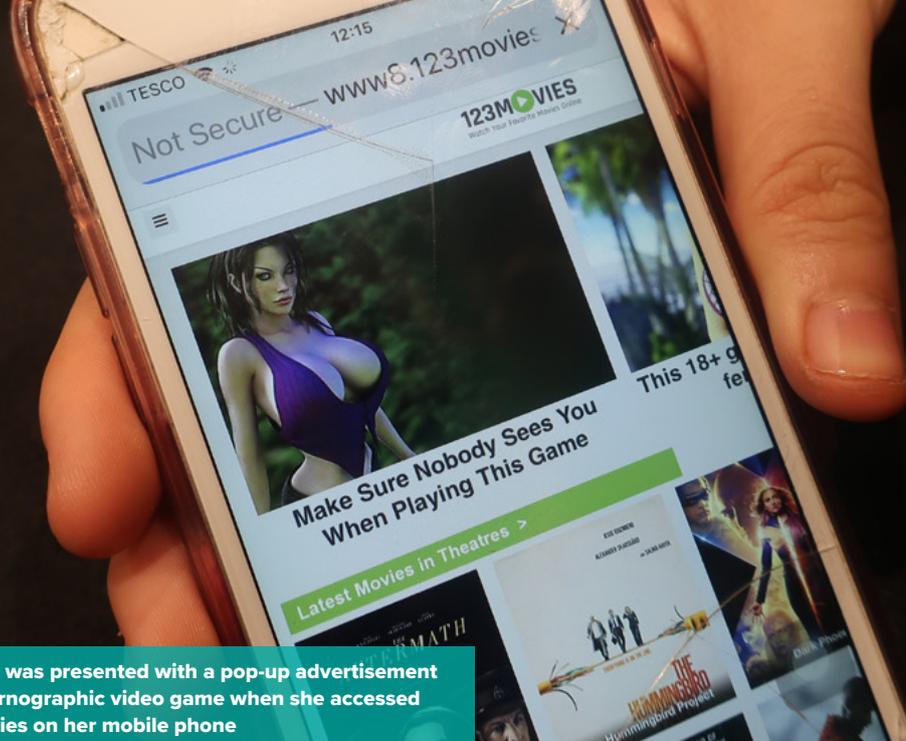
Many respondents described their first viewing of pornography as having occurred “accidentally” via a number of routes. These included:

- Google searches where many described unwittingly searching terms such as ‘sex’ or ‘porn’ without understanding what these words meant
- Receiving links to videos on pornographic sites from friends without knowing what the content would include
- Adverts or pop-ups on film streaming, sport streaming or gaming websites, which host content that is often shared illegally
- Being shown videos on a friend’s phone. Often this happened when they started secondary school, aged 11 or 12 years old

The devices most children were using at the time varied, although it tended to be on a family desktop or laptop computer, or on a personal tablet or phone.

123Movies is an online streaming platform that allows you to watch TV and movies for free. The content on this site has been illegally shared. Users search for content they want to watch or select suggested content. Users will often have to close a series of pop-up ads before being able to press play, including ads for pornographic services. People use this site to access content they would otherwise not be able to view unless they had paid for it





Georgie was presented with a pop-up advertisement for a pornographic video game when she accessed 123Movies on her mobile phone

Many described feeling “grossed out” and “confused” when they first saw pornography, particularly for those who had seen it when they were under the age of 10.

For example, **Lorna** (17) first saw pornography aged 7, after her friend told her about sex and she googled it on her grandma’s computer. This resulted in her watching pornography on a dedicated pornographic website, and eventually her grandma discovering what she had been watching. At the time she recalls not understanding what was happening:

“ It can be damaging for kids... I didn’t understand what I was watching. It’s not the best memory to have and is embarrassing that my gran caught me watching it when I was so young. ”

Others had been “tricked” into viewing pornography by friends, who sent videos but did not state they were pornographic.

Calum (18), who is a Manchester United fan, was told about the pornographic website RedTube by a friend when he was 11, which he thought was for Manchester United content. He then accessed the website on his family computer in front of his parents. At the time he felt “very embarrassed” and was banned from his family computer for two weeks.

Some respondents also described their early experiences with pornography as “funny”—as something to laugh at with friends. These were often particularly what was termed by respondents “extreme” or “weird” videos such as ‘Two Girls, One Cup’⁶ or ‘nugget porn’⁷, and were mainly watched in the company of their peers at school or at home. Young people would also commonly show each other celebrity sex tapes.

⁶ ‘Two Girls, One Cup’ was a viral ‘scat porn’ video showing women eating each other’s excrement and vomiting on each other

⁷ ‘Nugget porn’ features actors with no arms and no legs



Viewing intentions

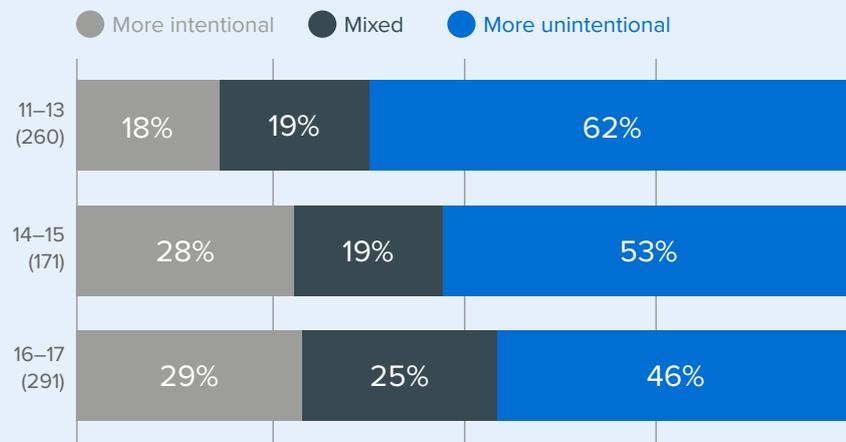
Among those that said they had seen pornography, children in the youngest age-group (11 to 13) were the most likely to say that their viewing of this content was mostly or all unintentional (62% vs. 46% of 16- to 17-year-olds). While the balance towards increased intentional viewing shifts with age, the overall levels of intentional vs. unintentional viewing still suggests a level of under-reporting when contrasted with the qualitative work.

FIGURE 3

Intentional vs. unintentional pornography viewing by age

Q: Of all the pornography you have seen, how much did you see intentionally compared to seeing by accident?

Base: Those who've seen pornography (bases in brackets in graph)



N.B. Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding

Many of the respondents, both boys and girls, also described looking for pornography after learning about it elsewhere and becoming curious. Respondents would sometimes hear about it through people they knew, such as friends or relatives, or in conversation, but would wait until alone to search for it themselves.

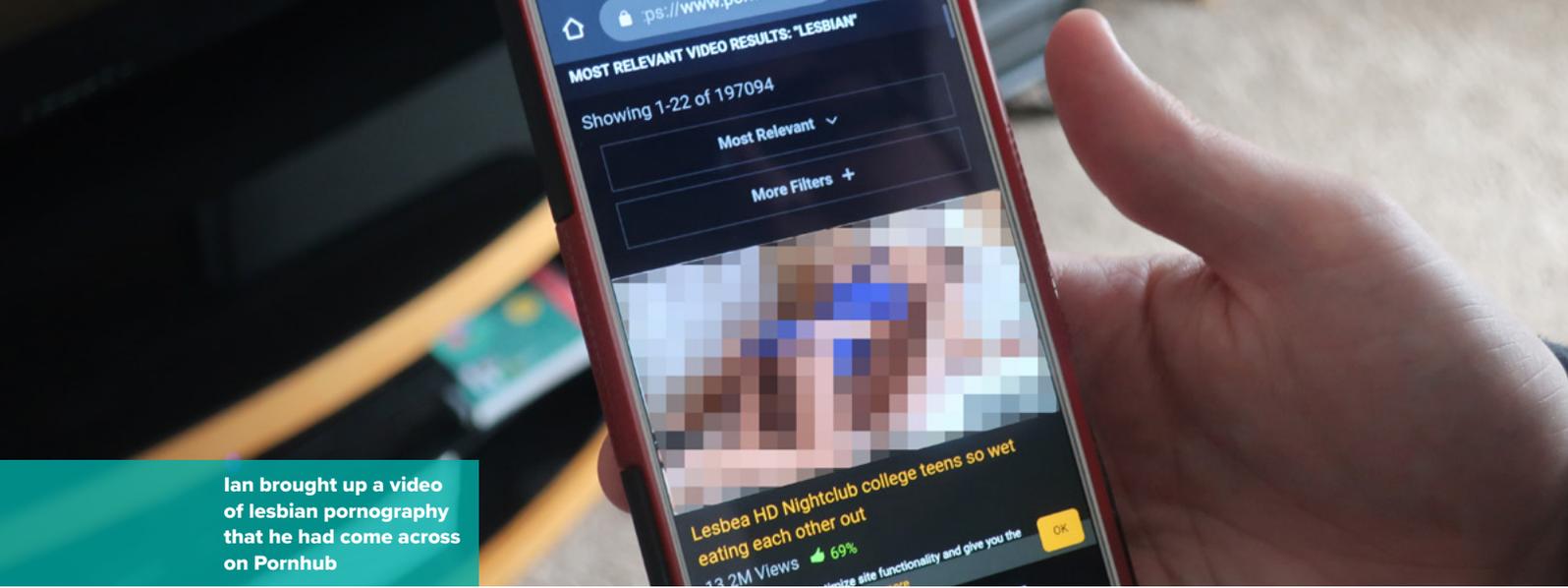
Aoife (18) says she first saw pornography accidentally in a pop-up on a video streaming site, 123Movies, at age 14 but didn't then go and search for it. Only after speaking to her cousin about pornography when she was 15 did she look it up herself. Respondents also often heard it referred to on TV, YouTube or other media platforms.

Aiden (17) described first hearing about pornography on a US television sitcom when he was 11 or 12. Following this he searched for the term and started to actively watch pornography.



How do children use pornography as they get older?

This section details the changing experiences of young people as they become more exposed to pornography. It examines how young people access pornography, how much they typically watch, and what types of content they are engaging with.



Ian brought up a video of lesbian pornography that he had come across on Pornhub

Intentional pornography use increased with age

After young people were first exposed to pornography, both boys and girls tended to start actively seeking out pornography. For some, the progression from seeing pornography accidentally to actively seeking it out happened almost instantly, while others reported accidentally having seen pornography when they were young (aged under 13) and then only starting to actively seek it out when they were older (often aged 15 or above). Some girls reported starting to watch it again at this age as this was when they were starting to think about having sex and wanted to “prepare”, or otherwise used it for sexual gratification.

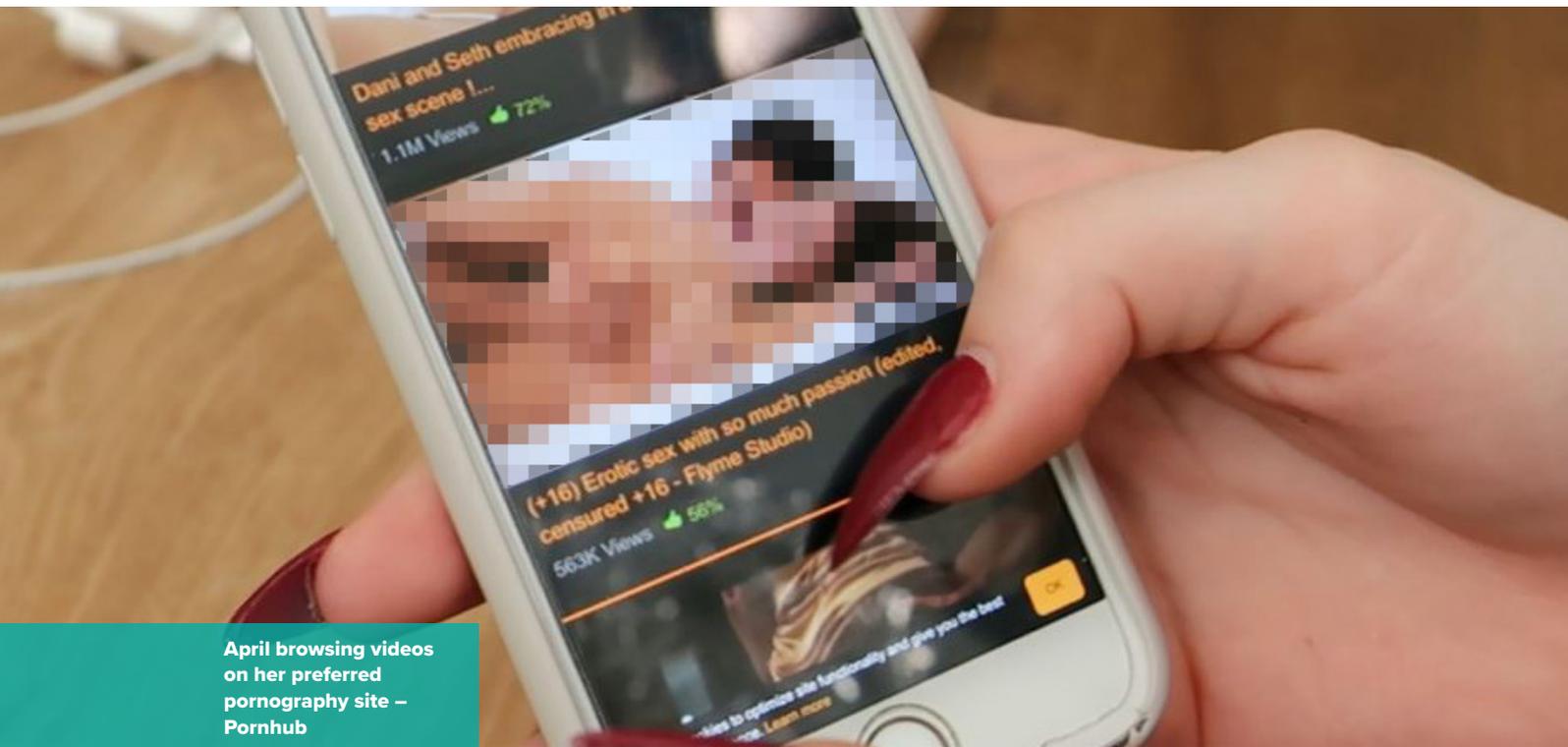
The amount of pornography watched by girls varied. Some girls interviewed in the qualitative work reported watching pornography four times a week between the ages of 14 and 16, while others said they watched it a few times a month.

For boys, the use of pornography usually increased as they got older, often between the ages of 14 and 16. The amount of pornography watched by male respondents peaked at three to five times a day, and most of the boys in the qualitative interviews reported having watched pornography daily for a period of their lives. However, few boys admitted to currently having, or ever having had, what they would describe as a pornography addiction. Yet boys were more likely to cite pornography addiction as a potential negative effect of pornography compared to girls.

“ It was like a cigarette: I did it once [aged 14] and I was hooked. I usually watch it once a day during the week, and on the weekend, who knows, every hour if I’m bored? ”

Jay, 18, Leicester

It is important to note that many boys and girls were regularly watching pornography prior to having any real-life sexual experiences with another person. For many, this led to expectations of sex that they realised were unrealistic when they started to have sexual experiences. This will be explored further in Section 4 detailing the negative consequences of pornography for young people.



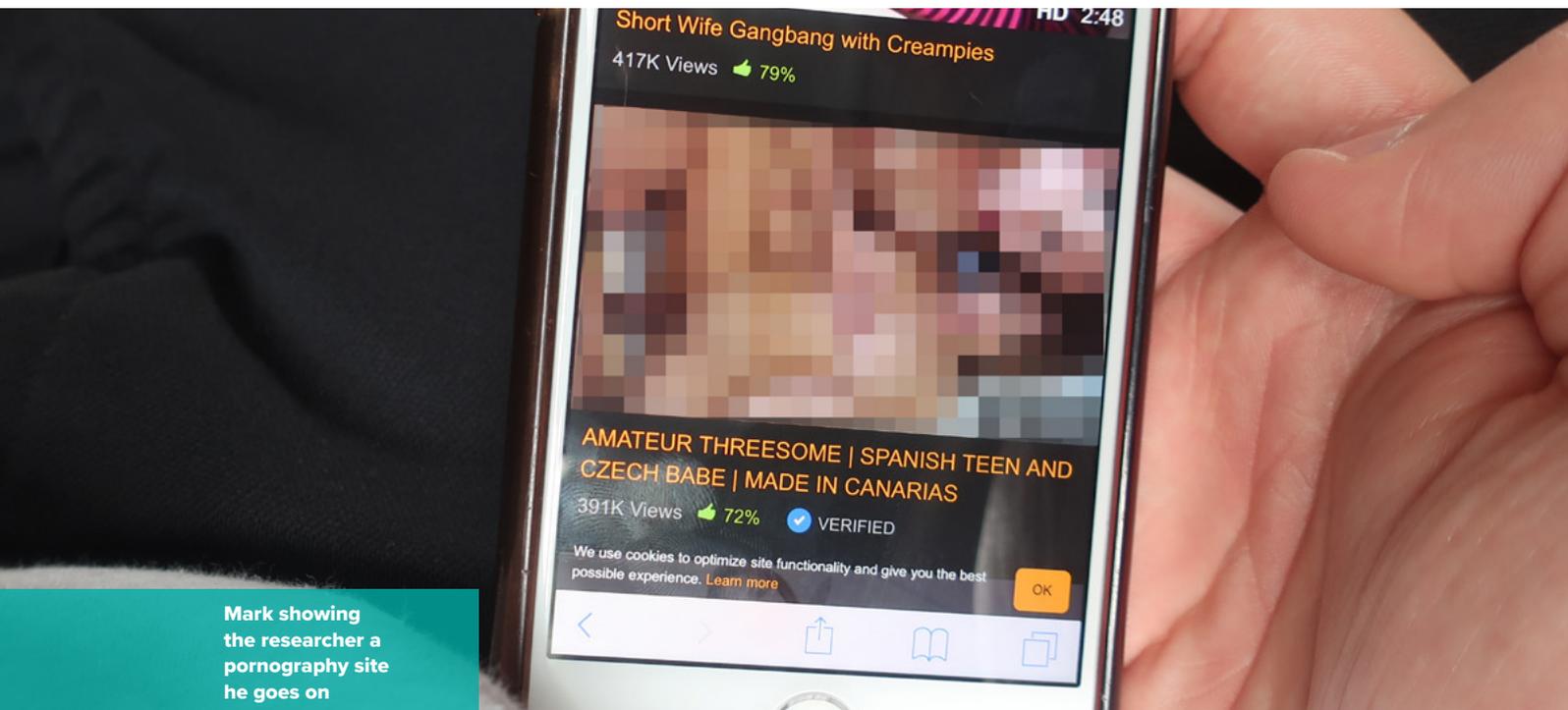
April browsing videos on her preferred pornography site – Pornhub

Male respondents reported that the frequency of their pornography use would usually go down once they lost their virginity or started having regular sexual contact.

CASE STUDY

Steve (18) first started watching pornography at around 13 years old, and would watch it once every week or two. But from about the age of 14, a period when he says his sexual desires were increasing, he started watching more of it. At its peak he says he watched pornography around five times a week, but this would vary depending on what he was doing that week and how aroused he was. Steve says he liked watching lesbian, threesome and gangbang pornography. He also enjoyed watching 'Fake Taxi'⁸ pornography videos.

⁸ 'Fake Taxi' videos depict the interactions between a taxi driver and a passenger, in which the driver convinces the passenger to engage in sexual intercourse in the back of the taxi



Mark showing the researcher a pornography site he goes on

Key portals: Dedicated pornography websites, social media and smartphones

Most respondents would usually search for pornography on dedicated pornographic websites. The most popular site for accessing pornography was Pornhub⁹, but other sites such as xHamster, xVideos, or RedTube were also mentioned.

When describing how they would use the sites, some respondents would actively search through their preferred categories or for particular porn stars, while others would scroll the homepage until they found a video they liked. This meant that many young people would often watch the most viewed or trending videos, which are displayed on the homepages of sites. Similarly, they would click on the popular categories, which are often shown on a sidebar on the homepage. They tended to include genres such as ‘Gay’ ‘Lesbian’ ‘Teen’¹⁰ ‘Bondage’ ‘Milf’¹¹ ‘Ebony’¹² and ‘Hentai’¹³. More detail on these sites and how they are used by young people can be found in the earlier section, titled ‘Online pornography landscape’.

Mobile phones were the most popular device by which to access these pornographic sites. Boys described often using “whatever was to hand”, but in general stated a preference for mobile phones due to their ease of use and portable nature. However, some boys preferred using laptops or tablets due to the improved sound quality and greater screen size.

⁹ Pornhub is the most popular adult website in the UK in terms of online traffic at time of publication: <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom/category/adult>

¹⁰ Teen pornography involves actresses who are young looking, although it is assumed actresses are over 18 years old (and so the depicted activity is legal)

¹¹ MILF (‘Mother I’d Like to Fuck’) features women who are considered older or more mature

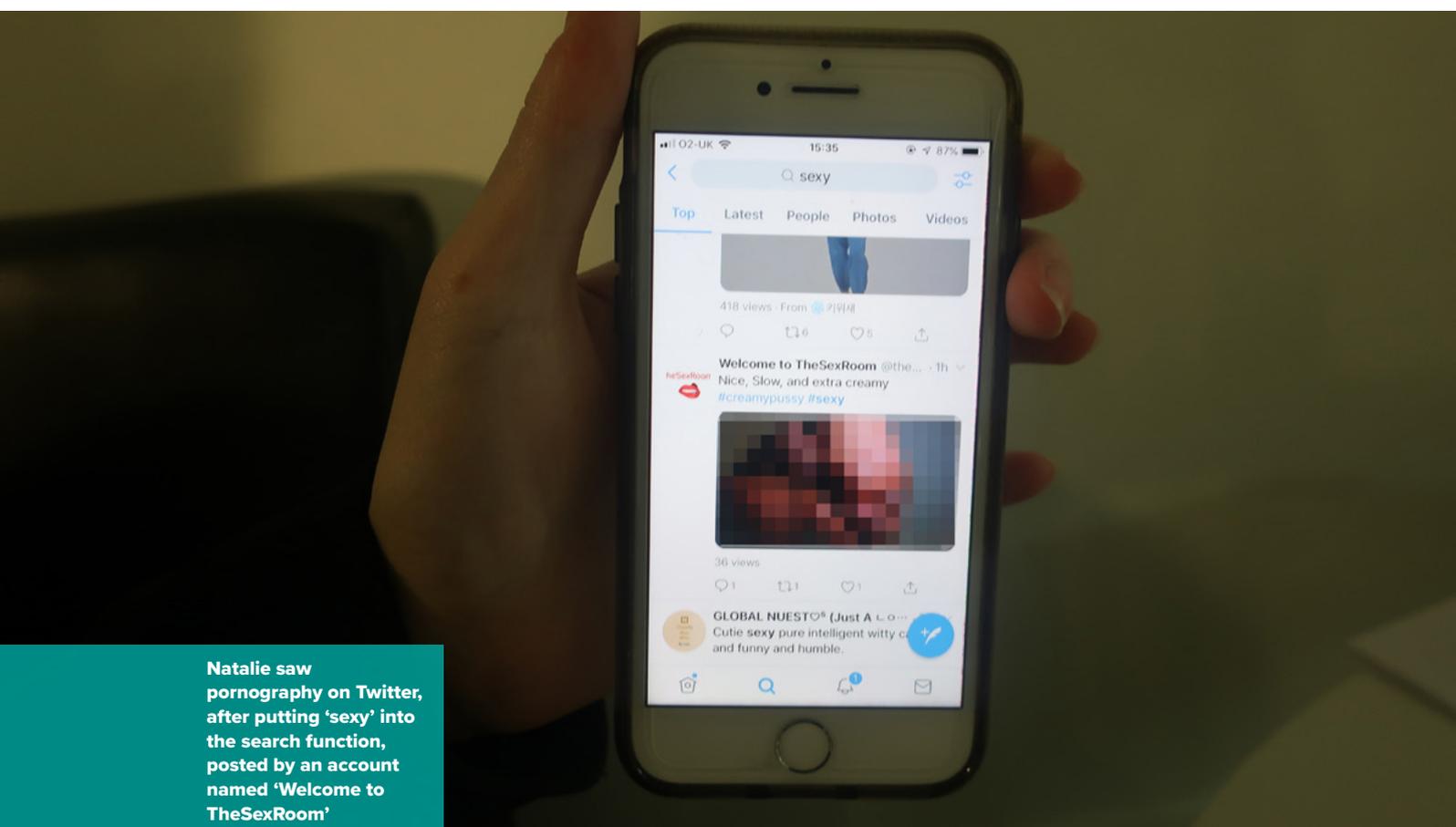
¹² Ebony pornography features actresses who are from a black ethnic group

¹³ Hentai pornography is anime (a style of Japanese animation) and manga (Japanese comic books or graphic novels) pornography. The word is of Japanese origin, where it means “abnormal sexual desires”, however in English, Hentai covers a range of soft and hardcore animated pornography

While dedicated pornography sites such as Pornhub and xHamster were the most popular source of pornography for interviewees, it was also very common for respondents to have seen pornography through social media. The most common platforms were Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter¹⁴. Respondents said that Twitter contained pornography posted both by porn actors and sent between individual users via direct messaging.

For some respondents, seeing pornography on social media was intentional—for example, those who followed porn stars on Twitter—while for others it was accidental, for instance those who reported seeing pornography on their ‘Explore’ page on Instagram.

One respondent, **Chanelle** (18), saw bondage and sex-machine pornography¹⁵ in the ‘Explore’ page¹⁶ of her Instagram account, which she described as “strange”. It is worth noting that some of these reports of pornography on social media platforms dated from eight years ago and many hadn’t seen pornography on Instagram in particular in recent years.

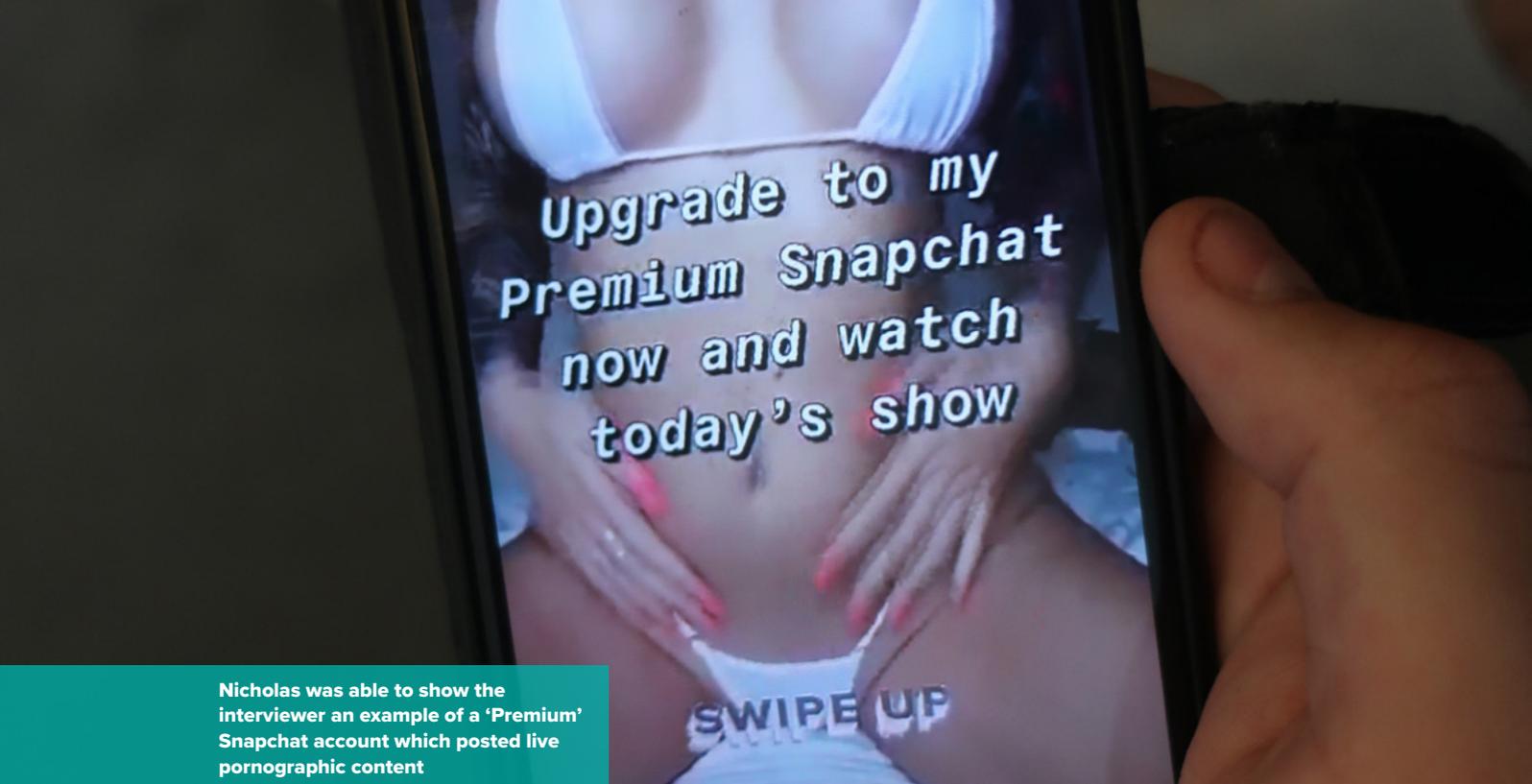


Natalie saw pornography on Twitter, after putting ‘sexy’ into the search function, posted by an account named ‘TheSexRoom’

¹⁴ Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter are three of the most popular social media sites. An extended list includes Facebook and Reddit, among others

¹⁵ A sex machine is a mechanical device used to simulate human sexual intercourse or other sexual activity

¹⁶ The Instagram Explore page shows content that the individual user is likely to engage with. For instance, by showing posts liked by accounts you follow or have engaged with, posts by accounts similar to ones you already follow, or posts with high engagement. Hence each individual’s Explore page is ‘tailored’ to them



Nicholas was able to show the interviewer an example of a 'Premium' Snapchat account which posted live pornographic content

Snapchat was another platform used to actively seek out pornography. Some interviewees followed accounts that had added 'Premium'¹⁷ to their name, which young people said would indicate they were advertising pornographic services. Individuals could then transfer money to the person who owned the 'Premium' account, and in turn they could gain access to the videos and photos of the account owner performing sexual acts via Snapchat. **Nicholas**, a 16-year-old from Glasgow, at the time of the interview received a lot of follow requests from 'Premium' accounts, some of which he followed to see posted photos advertising their services. These were also often sexually explicit, but did he not pay for their services. Meanwhile, **Brian**, an 18-year-old in Glasgow, knew of a girl from his school who had set up a 'Premium' account to fund a holiday by sharing sexually explicit photos and videos of herself.

Pornography was also viewed inadvertently on social media. **Bridgette** (18) had seen lots of 'trick' videos on her Facebook newsfeed—where the video would start out normally and then turn to pornographic content—when she was 16 or 17 years old. She reported accidentally watching a few of these videos while at work, which she found embarrassing. **Sid** (18) described being in a WhatsApp group chat for his local football team with men in their mid-twenties—which he joined when he was 17—in which pornographic videos would be shared. He thought this was "a bit sad" and "didn't appreciate" their comments regarding what they'd do to the girls in the videos. One of the dads within the parent focus group also described being in similar group chats where explicit content was being shared and said that it was "just a bit of fun", although he acknowledged that he didn't always know where the images had come from or the age of the people in them.

Many Snapchat or Instagram accounts also posted links and 'teaser' trailers to video subscription services such as 'Just For Fans'¹⁸ and 'OnlyFans'¹⁹, where people can pay a monthly subscription service to watch explicit content posted by others. **Alex** (16), for example, referred to "the gay Twitter" (a community of Twitter users, within which gay pornographic content is sometimes posted and shared) where explicit photos and videos are available without any restrictions beyond an easily dismissible warning that the media may contain graphic imagery. Some respondents also reported having followed accounts on Snapchat that posted anonymous, homemade²⁰, point-of-view ("POV")²¹ pornography.

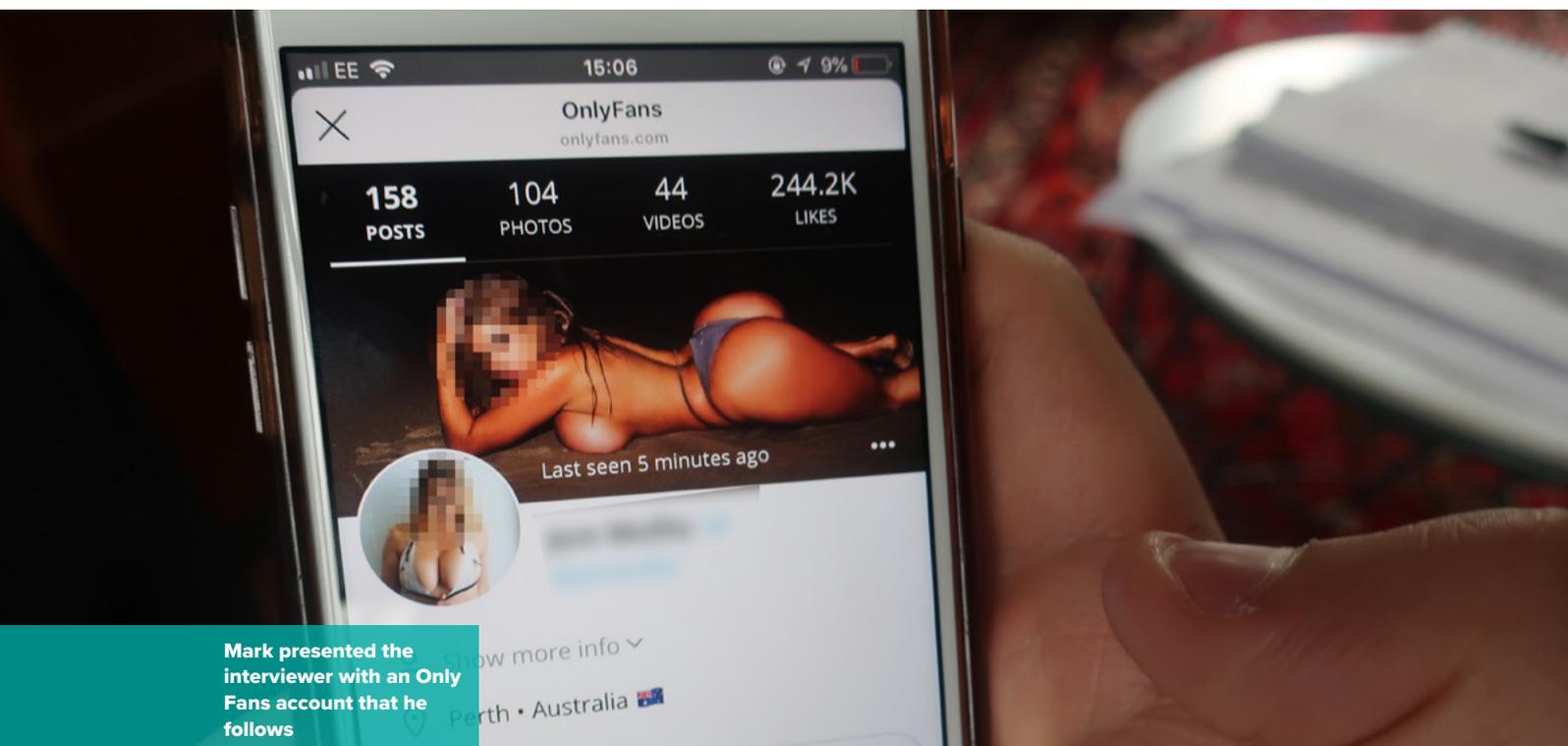
17 Snapchat 'premium' isn't an official feature of the platform but rather a term used to describe the way in which some people were using it

18 'Just For Fans' is an adult content site, where pornographic imagery and video by professional models or amateurs can be accessed. Some content is free but much of the 'premium' content is paid for with a subscription service

19 'Only Fans' is a service where 'fans' can subscribe (for a monthly fee) to the content of an individual, amateur or professional. While not aimed at exclusively providing pornographic content, our respondents knew it only in the context of pornography and often knew 'amateurs' (sometimes people they knew) who posted content

20 Homemade pornography: pornography made by amateurs at home and then posted online (either on a pornography website or social media)

21 A POV (Point Of View) shot is filmed from the actor's perspective, showing what a character or subject is looking at



Mark presented the interviewer with an Only Fans account that he follows

CASE STUDIES

After watching a documentary about the pornography industry, in which he learnt that the sex in pornography was “unrealistic” and “fake”, **Luke** (18) decided to stop watching “fake porn” and instead use “homemade porn” by which he meant pornography made by amateurs at home and uploaded to pornography sites rather than professionally shot pornography. Rather than use pornography sites, he had a separate Twitter account for pornography, where he followed his favourite porn stars as well as accounts posting montages of pornography. He also used to use Snapchat to follow porn stars and other people generating pornographic content. He felt that seeing pornography in this way was more “realistic”.

Calum (18) saw child sexual abuse material on Instagram when he was 14. He said he received a private message from an unknown user telling him to report another user’s page and included a link to it. Calum followed the link and the page was what he described as “child porn”²², including an adult woman giving a small boy oral sex, and a very little girl giving a grown man oral sex. At the time Calum felt “shocked and disturbed” and reported the video to Instagram before quickly leaving the page. When he checked the page again the next day it had been removed. He didn’t tell anyone about the incident apart from one of his friends.



Routes to pornographic content

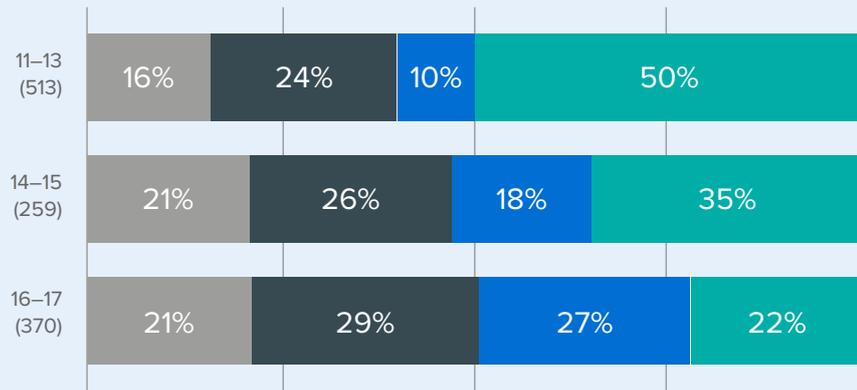
50% of 11- to 13-year-olds, 65% of 14- to 15-year-olds and 78% of 16- to 17-year-olds reported having seen pornography in some way.

FIGURE 4

Routes to pornography by age

Base: All (bases in brackets in graph)

- Only shown / sent pornography by someone else
- Only searched for it / stumbled upon it themselves
- Both of the above
- Not seen pornography



N.B. Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding

23% of children 11 to 17 reported having sought out pornographic sources online intentionally. According to the data, the three most likely routes to this intentional viewing are as follows:

Intentional access to pornography

- Image or video search engine
- Social media sites
- Dedicated pornography websites

Overall (257)	11-13-year olds (72)	14-15-year olds (61)	16-17-year olds (124)
53%	50%	38%	62%
44%	42%	41%	46%
43%	33%	52%	44%

Base: those viewing pornography intentionally (note small bases in age-groups)

Please note that these percentages account for where they have seen pornographic content, but not the total number of visits to these kind of sites for this purpose. For example - among those who had used dedicated pornography websites (including live-cam sites), around a third (34% of n=110) said they visited these a couple of times a week or more frequently.

Overall, around half of the children in the survey claimed pornography had *only ever* come up while they were doing something else. Broken down by age, this is:

- 55% of the 11- to 13-year-olds who had seen online pornography said it had only ever come up by accident (n=160)
- This is 46% among 14- to 15-year-olds (n=114)
- And 40% among 16- to 17-year-olds (n=207)

While the remaining children actively looked for it, the vast majority of them (78%) also reported it coming up while they were doing other things (although it's unclear what "appearing by accident" means to different people and to what extent this is affected by their search history and cookie settings).



Parents were unaware their children—particularly their daughters—were watching pornography

There was a disconnect between parents' perceptions of their children's pornography viewing practices and the reality: 75% of parents felt their child would not have seen pornography online, but of those children, 53% said they had in fact seen pornography, as identified below in the survey results.

SURVEY RESULTS

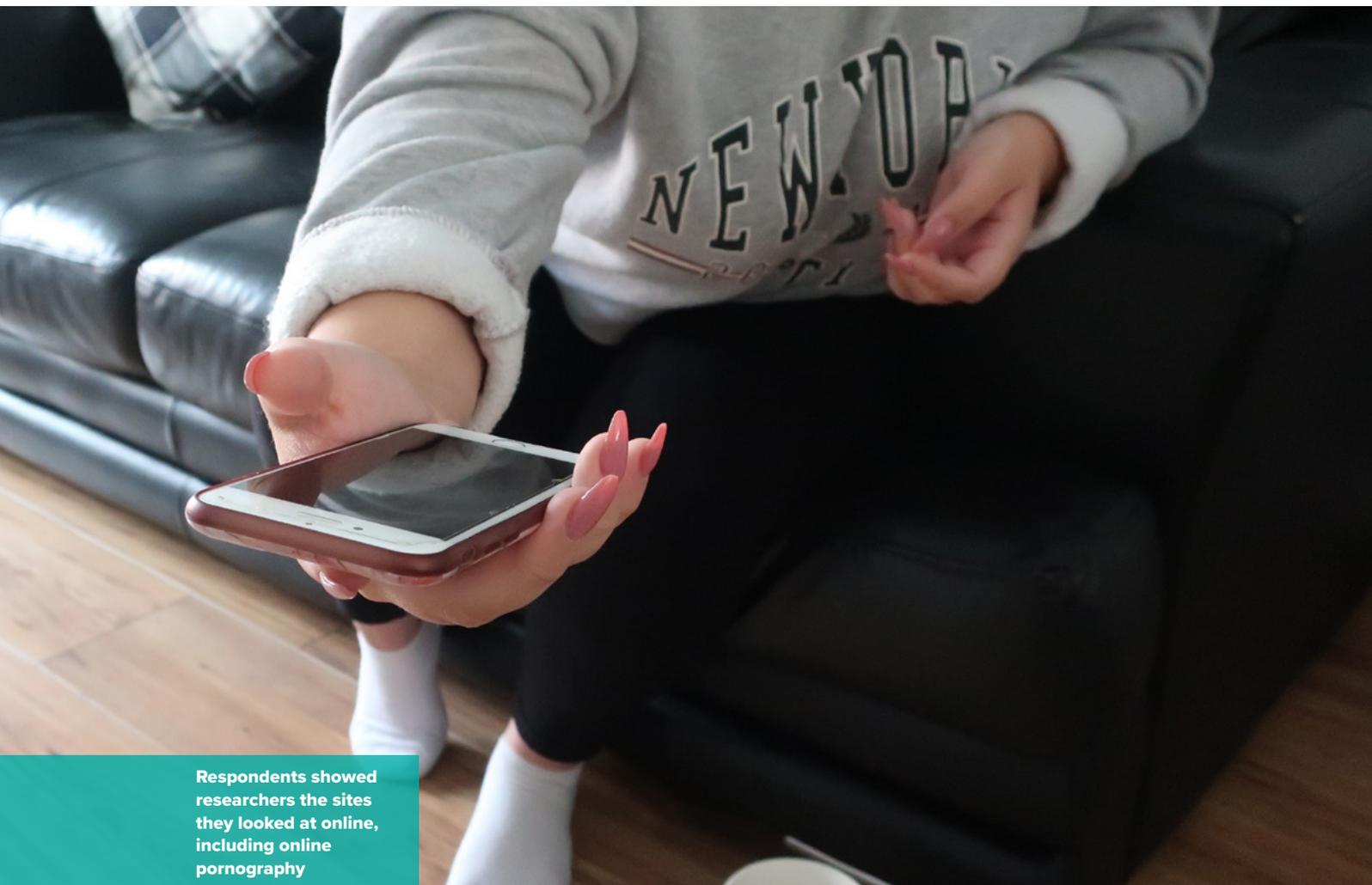
Parental awareness

The survey was designed so that parents were asked questions specifically about their child and then their child completed the survey. This allowed us to compare whether parents thought their child had seen pornography with whether their child actually reported having seen it.

- 25% of parents said they thought their children would have seen pornography, while the remaining 75% didn't. However, this overall statistic masks some stark differences between expectations of boys and girls. Broadly speaking, parents of boys were twice as likely to expect their child to have seen pornography than parents of girls of the same age:
 - 16% of parents of 11- to 13-year-old boys vs. 8% of parents of girls of this age
 - 35% of parents of 14- to 15-year-old boys vs. 16% of parents of girls of this age
 - 52% of parents of 16- to 17-year-old boys vs. 31% of parents of girls of this age
- Based on the findings from the qualitative interviews, it suggests that parents of 16- to 17-year-olds are either in denial or largely unaware of what their child views online (i.e. that they think that around half to two-thirds of them haven't seen pornography).
- Of the parents that thought their child wouldn't have seen pornography (n=862), 53% of their children went on to tell us they had seen some (and 47% hadn't). This is most pronounced among 16- to 17-year-old boys where 72% of them said they had seen pornography (n=89).
- Of the smaller group of parents who thought their child had seen pornography (n=280), the vast majority were correct, with just 4% of children saying they hadn't actually seen any.

Consistent with the survey results, the parents within the focus groups were often less likely to recognise that their daughters would purposefully seek out pornography compared to their sons. While they thought that their sons would watch pornography for sexual pleasure, they believed that their daughters would primarily see pornography by accident. This is contrary to the qualitative research findings showing that many girls were also using pornography for sexual pleasure.

This was also reflected in conversations about controls in place at home to prevent children from looking at online pornography. For example, **Lorna's** (18) parents asked to look at her younger brother's internet history on his phone but this was not something they used to do with her, and **Emma's** (18) parents put a block on the WiFi to stop her younger brother watching pornography, meaning that she uses a VPN app²³ to access certain websites, including pornography.



Respondents showed researchers the sites they looked at online, including online pornography

23 A VPN (Virtual Private Network) allows you to create a secure connection to another network over the internet, which can enable you to access blocked internet sites

What motivates young people to watch pornography as they get older?

This section explores the reasons young people are motivated to watch pornography as they get older. Two main motivations were identified: in the absence of sources of sex education, young people were using pornography to learn about sex, and both sexes were using pornography for gratification.

Young people expressed dissatisfaction at the sex education they had received in school

Young people expressed dissatisfaction—and in some cases, frustration—with the quality of sex education within schools. For example, some people felt sex education was overly focused on the “biology of sex” and understanding sexually transmitted diseases, while lacking detail on its pleasurable elements. This was especially the case for young people who were LGB as they felt that what little sex education there was in schools focused on straight sex. Similarly, in the online survey 48% of children agreed that “I want my school to teach us more about sex and relationships”.

Instead, many young people in the qualitative research turned to pornography to understand sex and what it might entail. In some cases, young people felt that without pornography they would not know what to do during sex. Although many said that they only learnt what to “really” do by having sex, it was common for the respondents to say that they “got an idea” of what happens from pornography and often failed to recognise other sources of learning.

// Because the [sex education] lesson was so vague, and it didn't explain everything, I feel like that's why people went away to watch pornography and teach themselves. We never got taught it. //

LUCY, 17, GLASGOW

// It [sex education] was absolutely rubbish... we never learnt about gay sex, only learnt about straight sex which was not very helpful for me unfortunately. //

ROBYN, 16, MANCHESTER

Many young people also felt that discussions *about pornography* were missing from sex education. Similarly, few young people had spoken about pornography with their parents, with most saying they would find it very uncomfortable. This contrasts with 60% of parents in the survey who claim to have spoken to their children about online pornography at least once or twice. However, talking to parents about sex more generally, particularly around contraception, was more common.

Related to this, several of the parents in the focus groups felt pornography should be integrated into sex education in schools, with one father arguing that it is “better to be adult about porn” and have “frank conversations” with children about the potential impact of watching pornography online.

Both sexes had used pornography to learn “what to do” and “how to behave” during sex

Given the limitations of sex education, many young people in the qualitative research spoke about using pornography to learn how to have sex. In particular, young people spoke about using pornography to learn different sex positions and get a sense of what sex would be like.

// If I didn't have porn, there's not really any education on [...] the things you can do or what positions or what it's supposed to be like. I know that porn's not a great representation of it [sex] but it does still educate you a little bit. //

SCARLET, 17, BIRMINGHAM

CASE STUDY

Emma (18) from Glasgow started watching pornography when she was in Year 9, aged 14, and watched it about four times a week until the age of 16 when she got her first boyfriend. Emma thought that pornography could “give you a good idea of what to do on your first time [having sex]” and described learning “new positions” and “how to please someone” through watching pornography. She would mainly google “porn” and click on the top website, usually Pornhub. From there she would go to the most viewed videos on the homepage, given she wasn't sure what to search for.

In the qualitative interviews, boys were less likely to describe actively trying to learn about sex or sexual acts through pornography or through the internet generally. However, when asked to reflect on how they learnt about sex initially, many said that pornography was a key source in understanding “what to do” during sex.



‘Learning’ from pornography

The qualitative interviews surfaced the idea of children using pornography to learn about sex in different ways, with girls in particular discussing it as a more active pursuit to fill knowledge gaps they perceive themselves to have in comparison with boys (who mentioned learning less as an active pursuit). The survey covered a range of elements that could be described as ‘learning’ about sex:

- Ideas for new things to try sexually
- Learning about sex generally
- Learning how to get better at sex
- Learning what people expect from me sexually

Of the children who admitted to intentionally searching for pornography (n=276), nearly two-thirds of them (63%) said they had done so at one point or another **specifically for** one or more of the four reasons bulleted above.

In more general terms, across all children who’d seen pornography (n=722), 41% said they’d got one or more of the four aspects of ‘learning’ from watching it before. There was a big disparity in this statistic between the children identifying as LGB (61% of those who’ve seen it have learnt from pornography—n=56) and those identifying as heterosexual (41% of n=593²⁴).

In addition to this, and among the same 722 children, 20% agreed that “watching porn helps me understand what is normal in sexual relationships” (33% disagreed, 19% neither agreed nor disagreed and 28% said that in their opinion it didn’t apply to them as they were not sexually active).

Figure 4 below shows a few reported gender differences across the aspects of ‘learning’ from pornography that shows how much boys are learning.

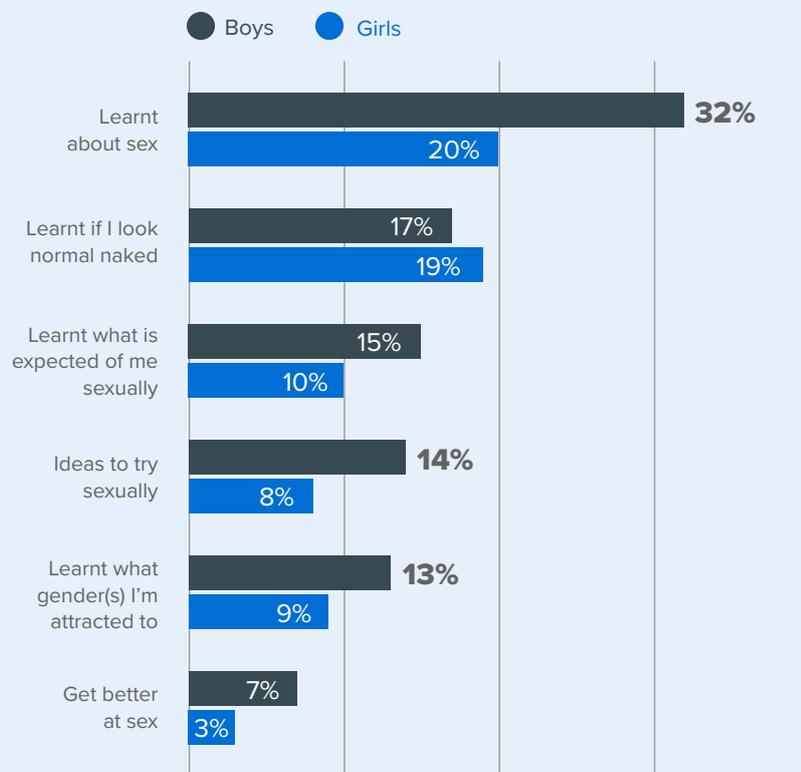
FIGURE 5

Gender differences in aspects taken from pornography viewing

Q: Have you ever got any of the following from watching pornography, whether or not that was the original reason for watching it?

Base: Those who have seen pornography (girls = 330, boys = 392)

NB – bold stats show statistically significant differences between boys and girls



²⁴ The bases, 56 and 593, do not add up to all children who’d seen pornography (722) as some did not declare their sexuality or said they hadn’t thought about it yet



Girls in particular mentioned using pornography to learn how to meet boys’ “expectations”

When asked why they wanted to learn about sexual acts, girls commonly replied that boys likely had higher expectations around sexual performance due to viewing pornography. Female respondents often worried about being embarrassed if they did not know what they were doing when with boys, who were thought to be “in the know” because they were more open about discussing sex and were known to be watching pornography from a young age. Due to the boys’ perceived expertise, some girls used pornography as a way of catching up on knowledge.

However, most of the boys interviewed did not mention having these expectations and instead spoke about not being sure what to do the first time they had sex.

For example, **Cory** (18), from Cardiff, spoke about not knowing what to do when he first had sex, and laughing about it together with his partner.

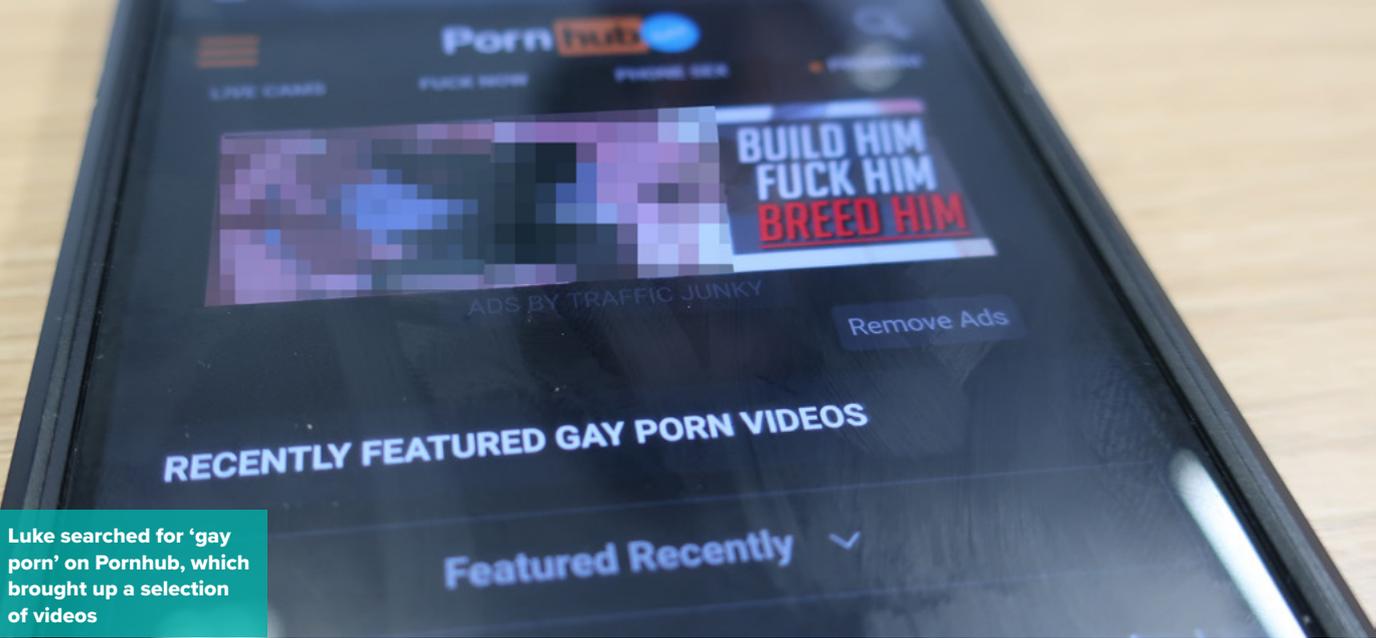
// Girls drive themselves insane worrying about being good enough at sex when boys will just take what they get and ‘wing it’. //

NADIA, 17, YORK

// I feel like boys already know what to do so we [girls] thought we should also watch it to know what they want to do... Things like anal—we need to understand how to do it. //

AOIFE, 18, BELFAST

Therefore, there appears to be a disconnect between what girls assume boys are expecting when it comes to sex, and what boys are actually expecting. This disconnect seems to have caused some girls to worry about being “good at sex” and put pressure on them to behave according to what they see in pornography. While we cannot be certain how this gap in expectation has arisen, many spoke about boys being vocal about watching pornography and having sex, which may have contributed to the sense of pressure girls felt.



Luke searched for 'gay porn' on Pornhub, which brought up a selection of videos

Almost half of all LGB respondents felt that pornography had helped them to understand their sexuality

As mentioned, LGB young people expressed frustration with sex education in schools and the absence of LGB relationships in the curriculum, often turning to pornography instead. For many of the LGB respondents in the qualitative research, pornography was a way of understanding their sexuality. It was common for these respondents to start by watching heterosexual pornography, only to realise that they did not find this sexually gratifying and then gradually move to homosexual pornography. In contrast, few heterosexual children interviewed in the qualitative research mentioned using pornography to learn about their sexuality.

SURVEY RESULTS

Pornography and sexual identity

Within the survey, 56 children²⁵ identified as 'lesbian/gay' or 'bisexual' and said they had seen pornography before. Of these, 46% said pornography had helped them "learn which gender(s) they were attracted to". As a comparison, only 5% of heterosexual children reported learning this from pornography.

As identified earlier in the "Learning from pornography" pull-out box, LGB-identifying children were also much more likely to have learned about one or more aspects of sexual behaviour from pornography.

The process of exploring different types of pornography was cited as a factor in helping young people realise their sexuality. Indeed, some parents within the focus group were happy for their children to watch pornography if they thought it would help them to discover their sexuality.

CASE STUDY

Luke (18) began by watching heterosexual pornography with his cousin at the age of 12. He then increasingly explored the variety of videos and categories. After initially watching heterosexual pornography, Luke increasingly began to watch gay pornography, eventually transitioning into only watching gay pornography. Luke felt this process helped him to realise his own sexuality and feel comfortable with his sexual identity.

²⁵ 56 children represents 5% of the total sample

Both sexes used pornography for gratification

As they got older, often aged 14 to 16 years old, both boys and girls frequently watched pornography for sexual gratification. Indeed, many boys claimed they had never masturbated without pornography, indicating that their pornography use was potentially higher than they had said. In particular, there was a narrative among boys that pornography was a way to “unwind” or “de-stress”.

// I don't watch porn on its own, it doesn't appeal to me without masturbating to it //

STEVE, 18, MANCHESTER

// I'd say I started watching porn for pleasure around 15 [years old] and probably watch it about once or twice a week since... normally I would [masturbate whilst watching it] //

LORNA, 18, CARDIFF

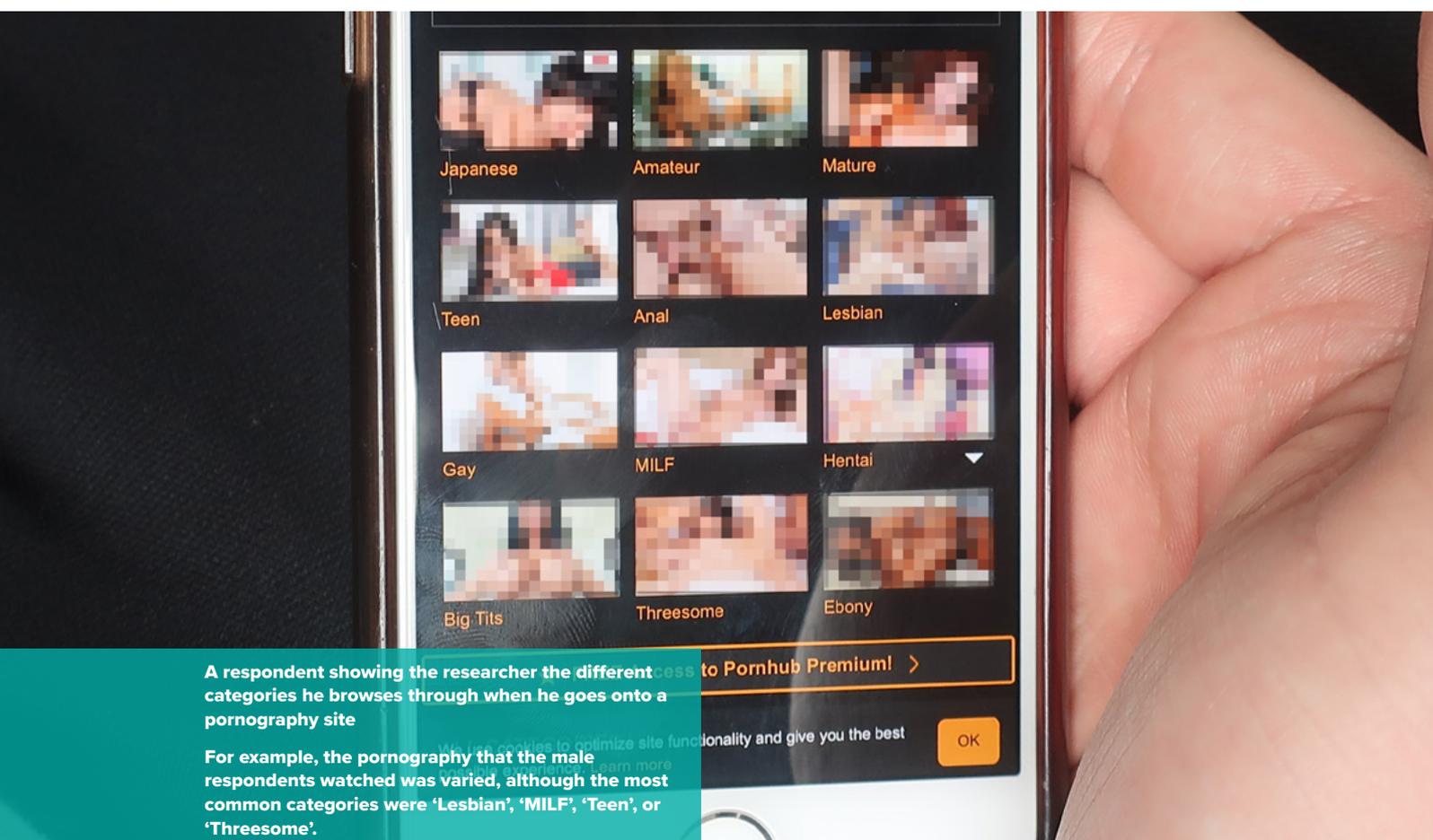
Boys and girls chose to watch different categories of pornography

Many respondents commented on the sheer range of pornographic categories and content available. However, there were commonalities in what genres boys and girls across the sample watched.

For example, the pornography that the male respondents watched was varied, although the most common categories were 'Lesbian', 'MILF', 'Teen', or 'Threesome'.

In general, there was a wider range of preferences for different categories among the girls, from 'romantic' to 'rough' pornography, and girls were more likely to mention BDSM¹ than boys their age. When young people referred to "BDSM porn" they often described watching rough or dominating sex rather than the elements of control that are linked to those practising BDSM in real life. Therefore, it is important to note that BDSM-style pornography may not accurately reflect BDSM sexual behaviours.

However, other girls stated that they preferred lesbian or solo female masturbation pornography because they didn't like how men treated women in heterosexual pornography, and specifically wanted to avoid seeing "rough" sex.



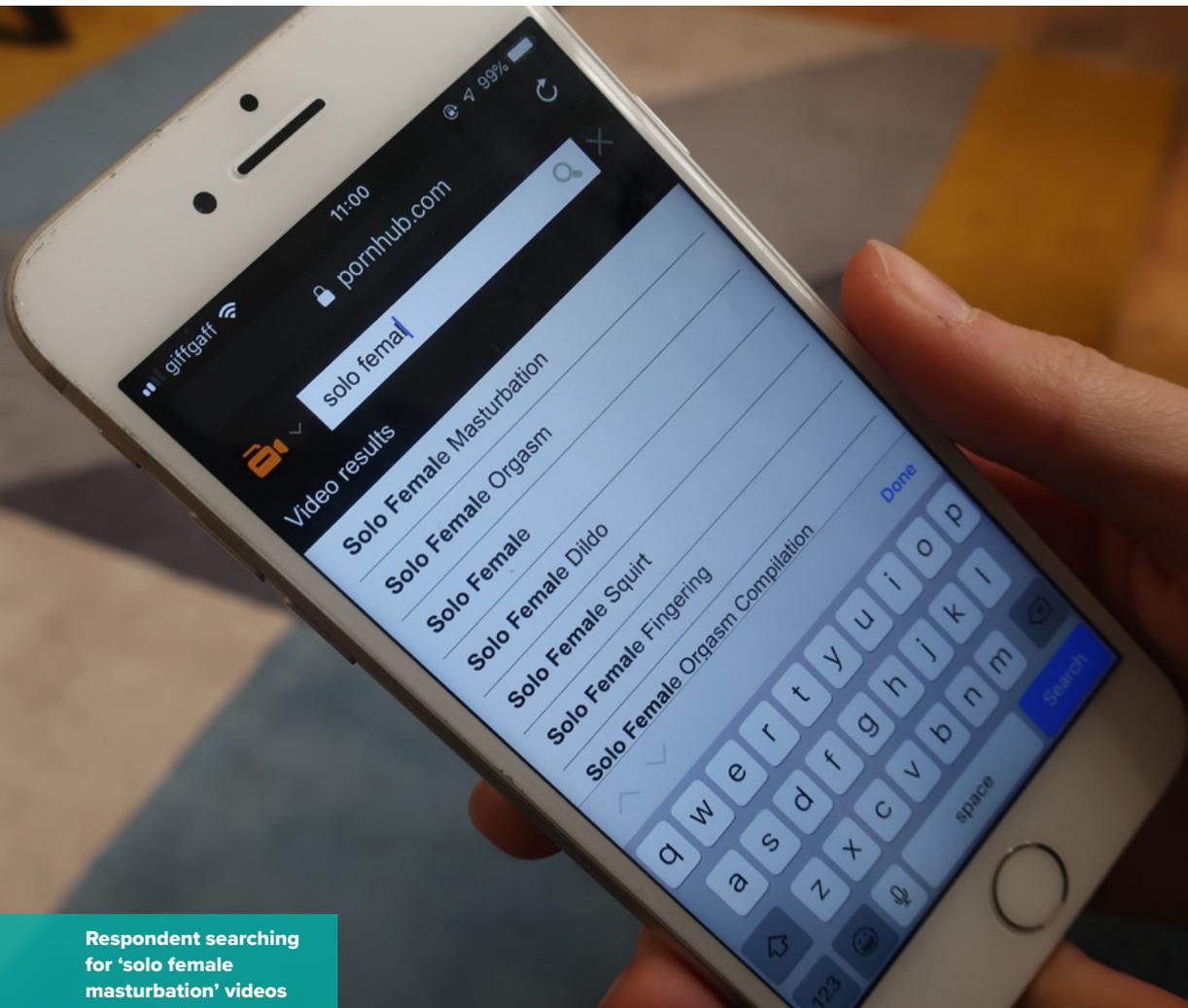
¹ BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) pornography typically involves dominant or submissive behaviour/role-playing by one or more performers

CASE STUDY

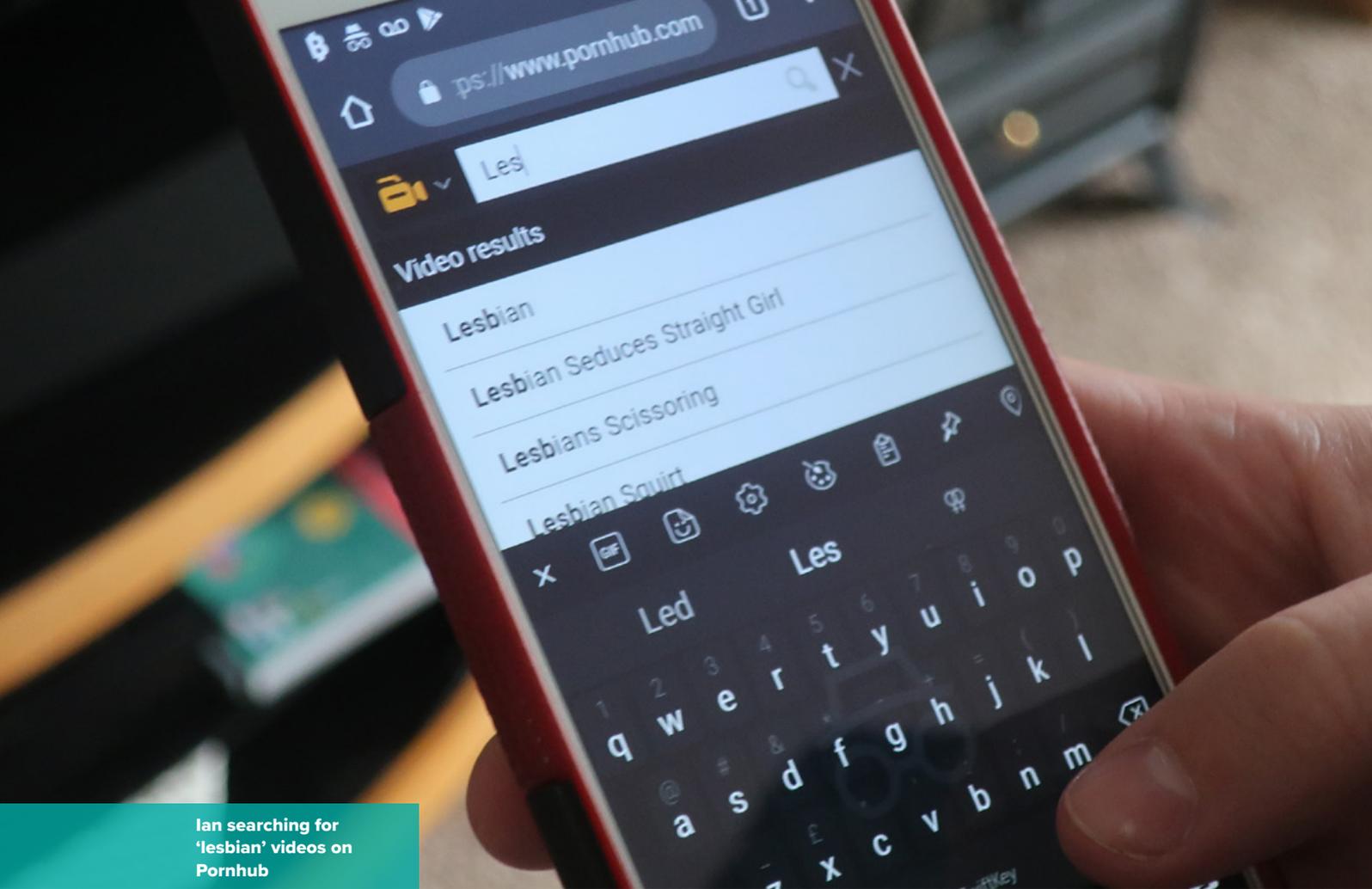
Lorna (18) from Cardiff didn't like heterosexual pornography because of how the man can be "forceful and degrading" towards the woman and would just "shove her around." As a result, she normally watched solo female masturbation or lesbian pornography where she could just see people "enjoying themselves" and "treating each other nicely". Lorna began watching this type of pornography at age 16 with her boyfriend, and explained it was usually his idea to "get her in the mood".

// Porn can objectify women—especially when they show 'babysitters' and 'cheaters' they are treated like they deserve to be grabbed and treated toughly. //

Lucy, 17, from Glasgow



Respondent searching for 'solo female masturbation' videos



Ian searching for 'lesbian' videos on Pornhub

Nevertheless, across the sample some boys and girls stated they had no preferences and were happy “just to scroll” through the ‘Most viewed videos’ on the homepages of pornography sites until something captured their attention. Often when they first started watching pornography they described not knowing what to search for.

When asked about their perception of what other people were watching, most respondents made it clear that there were not many conversations happening between boys and girls on pornography use. Boys often had very little idea of what girls watched, but nonetheless assumed that girls did watch pornography.

For instance, **Mark** (17) guessed that girls would watch “big dick” pornography, whereas **Sid** (18) thought that girls wanted to see pornography that was “sweeter” and that foreplay in pornography was predominantly for women. Many boys also assumed that girls enjoyed male gay pornography because there were simply “more” penises, which they thought girls would like to see. By contrast, girls tended to think that boys watched lesbian pornography because they were either not attracted by the men’s penises or were worried about being perceived as gay.

What are the negative consequences of watching pornography for young people?

This section describes, from the perspective of parents and young people themselves, some of the stated and perceived potential negative effects that watching pornography has on young people.

Some children had been exposed to potentially harmful content at a young age

Many of the young people who had seen pornography at a young age, often under the age of 11, reflected that they had been “too young” to understand what was happening and retrospectively thought it was “unhealthy” to have seen such content at such a young age. Many felt that they shouldn’t have seen pornographic content until the ages of 14 or 15, when they said they had started to understand what was going on.

Some described feeling “grossed out” or “disturbed” when they saw pornographic content at a young age, although few felt it had affected them negatively in the long term. April however was one respondent who worried it might have had affected her in the longer term.

CASE STUDY

In one rare example, **April** (18) from London reported watching “violent, extreme” pornography from the age of around 7 years old. She described “violent” pornography as that in which the woman was being forcefully dominated by the man. She says that initially she was watching this content regularly for “weird fascination and obsession,” but not for pleasure. This ended when her mum noticed that something wasn’t right, asked her if she had been watching things on the internet and suggested that she saw a therapist.

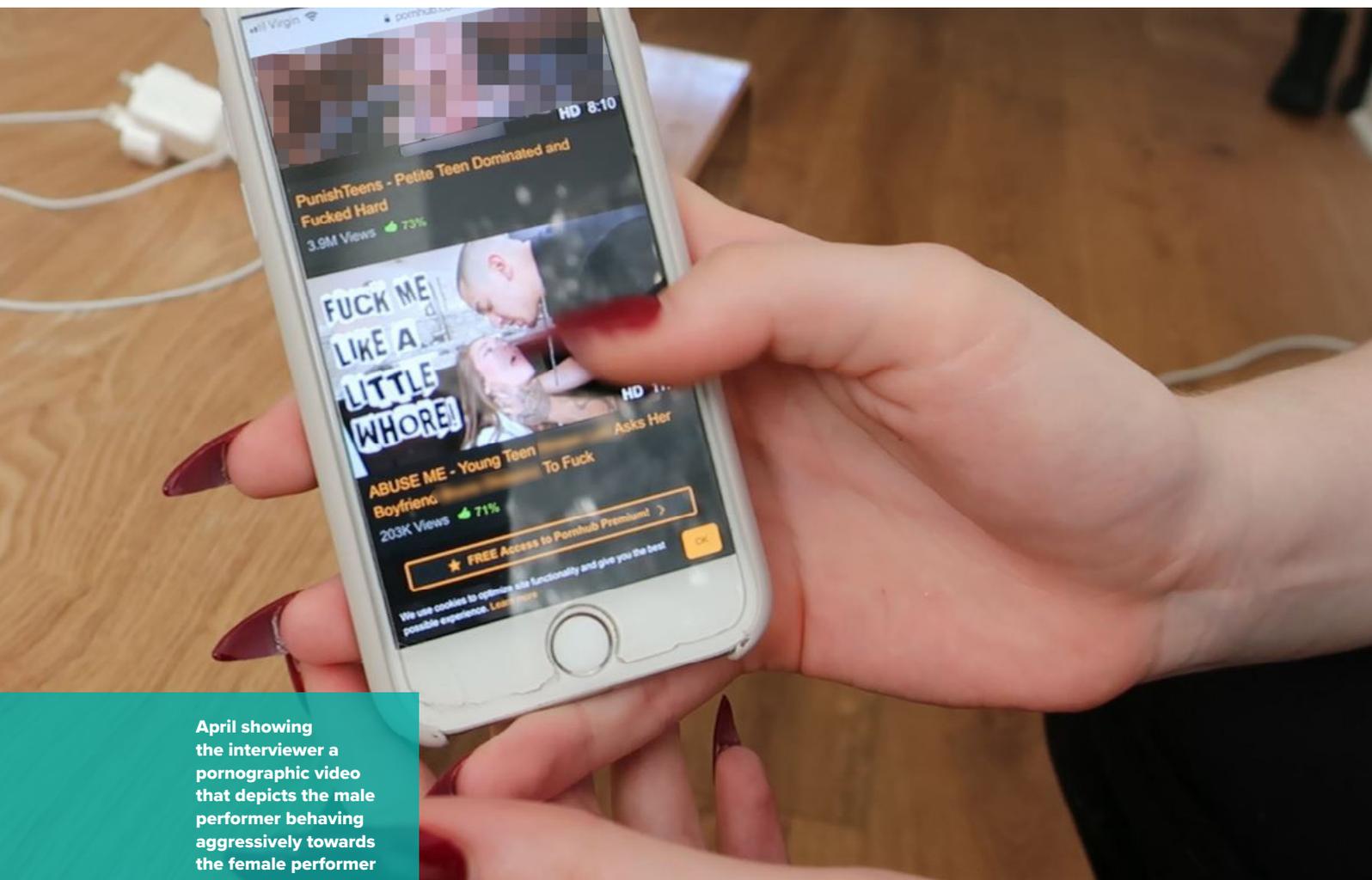
However, from the age of 11 she “discovered” masturbation and then returned to watching violent pornography for sexual gratification. She felt that her enjoyment of this type of pornography conflicted with her views on feminism and she now tried to limit her watching to every other week.

April also felt that the pornography she had seen at a young age may have influenced her current sexual preferences.

It is worth noting that April’s experience was an anomaly within the research however, with most watching pornography regularly much later in their teens.

“ At 13 you’re just a kid... watching porn at that age is very harmful ”

DAN, FATHER, LEEDS



April showing the interviewer a pornographic video that depicts the male performer behaving aggressively towards the female performer

“ I’ve made a link between the violence that I saw and my sexual preferences, I’m very sexually submissive [...] I don’t know whether I’d be like that regardless of the porn. It’s hard to say, I really don’t know. ”

APRIL, 18, LONDON

Stumbling across “violent” or “extreme” pornography

Many respondents reported having seen forms of pornography they were not comfortable with, which some described as “extreme”²⁶. Several boys described getting “lost” in a “rabbit hole” of pornography, where they found increasingly graphic, violent, or obscure images and videos. Indeed, most boys and girls across the sample admitted to having seen content they found upsetting or disturbing at some point, usually relating to “violent” or “aggressive” pornography. Often, they were first exposed to this type of content accidentally, through videos appearing on homepages of pornography sites or as a suggested video following the one they were watching. However, some would then go on to seek it out intentionally after becoming curious about it.

CASE STUDY

Joss (18) from Essex described getting lost in “rabbit holes” where he would be exposed to increasingly violent videos. He said that he thought the website xHamster had particularly “out there” fetishes such as fake rape videos.

Cory (18) from Cardiff describes feeling, in retrospect, ashamed at having masturbated to pornography that is “really messed up”, such as entire family group sex, pornography parodies of cartoons and “amputee dwarf porn”.

Alex (18) from London has previously enjoyed categories such as BDSM and rough sex, and went through a phase of enjoying interracial pornography. Despite finding interracial sex “demeaning”, because black men were “fetishized” by being shown as “thuggish”, he admitted enjoying it. He was, however, left confused by this ethical concern.

Parents in the qualitative focus groups also worried about their children being exposed to depictions of rough or aggressive sex, arguing that it created unrealistic expectations of sex and what happened in a “normal, loving relationship”. Specific categories of concern included pornography that involved rough or violent sex, imitation of incest or rape, bondage and ‘gangbangs’. This was echoed among the young children, some of whom referred to the potential “trauma” of such content. Many parents felt that pornography had become more violent than it used to be and that now these types of pornography are more accepted.

// I think if it was portrayed as normal and everything was consensual, and if it were shown as a more loving kind of standard, I don’t think I would have a problem with it. It’s about how they look and the violent acts that I object to. //

SARAH, MOTHER, LEEDS

²⁶ This was how respondents characterise the pornography they’d seen, but it is worth noting that most of the pornography they described as ‘extreme’ was not extreme in the legal sense—i.e. it would not be considered illegal online under UK law <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/section/63>

Pornography may have created unrealistic and undesirable expectations of sex

Many recognised the “exaggerated” nature of pornography

There was widespread recognition among the sample that pornography was “exaggerated” and different to sex in real life, though not all people had reflected on this prior to the interviews.

For example, young people felt pornography created expectations that they should be “good” at sex and enjoy a variety of different sexual activities. Broadly, both boys and girls believed that pornography suggested sex should involve different types of sexual activities and a mixture of positions.

Many only realised how unrealistic pornography was when they had sex for the first time, with some saying they felt “disappointed” that it did not live up to their expectations. Once they started to have sex they realised how “exaggerated” and “different” sex was in real life, often reporting that it was more “awkward” or “funny” than they had expected. This was reflected in the results from the online survey, shown below.

// If you look online you’re not going to find normal sex, you’ll find exaggerated sex and take that as normal... It [pornography] makes everyone so adventurous, like doing it outside and bizarre things that aren’t normal sex, but a boy or girl aged 13 who doesn’t know anything might think they are meant to do these things too. //

LUCY, 17, GLASGOW

// Porn sets you up for a lot of disappointment. You think sex is going to be smooth and easy but it is so awkward. //

NADIA, 17, YORK

// Some of the stuff you see in porn, if you tried to do that, it would really hurt. //

CORY, 18, CARDIFF

SURVEY RESULTS

Real sex vs. pornography

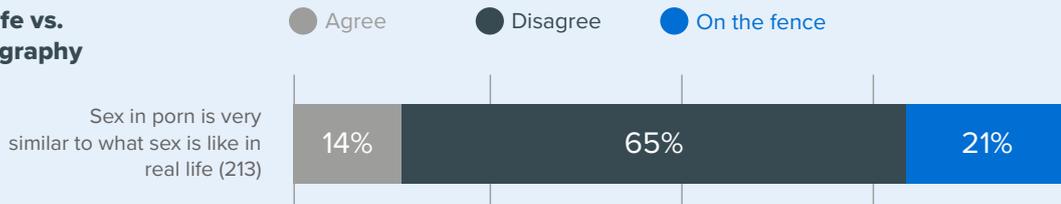
The survey asked all respondents aged 16 and 17 whether they agreed or disagreed with two statements:

- “Sex in porn is very similar to what sex is like in real life.”
- “Real sex hasn’t lived up to my expectations from watching porn.”

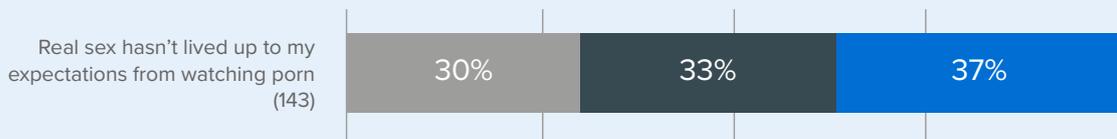
A number ruled themselves out by selecting, “This doesn’t apply to me / I’m not having sex”. Among the remainder:

FIGURE 6

Real life vs. pornography



Boys were much more likely to agree than girls: 20% of n=132 vs. 4% of n=81. While these samples are relatively small, it suggests a worrying disconnect between boys’ and girls’ expectations.



The sample sizes by gender are too small in this case for robust comparison, but the figures suggest far less difference in the views of boys and girls around this sentiment.



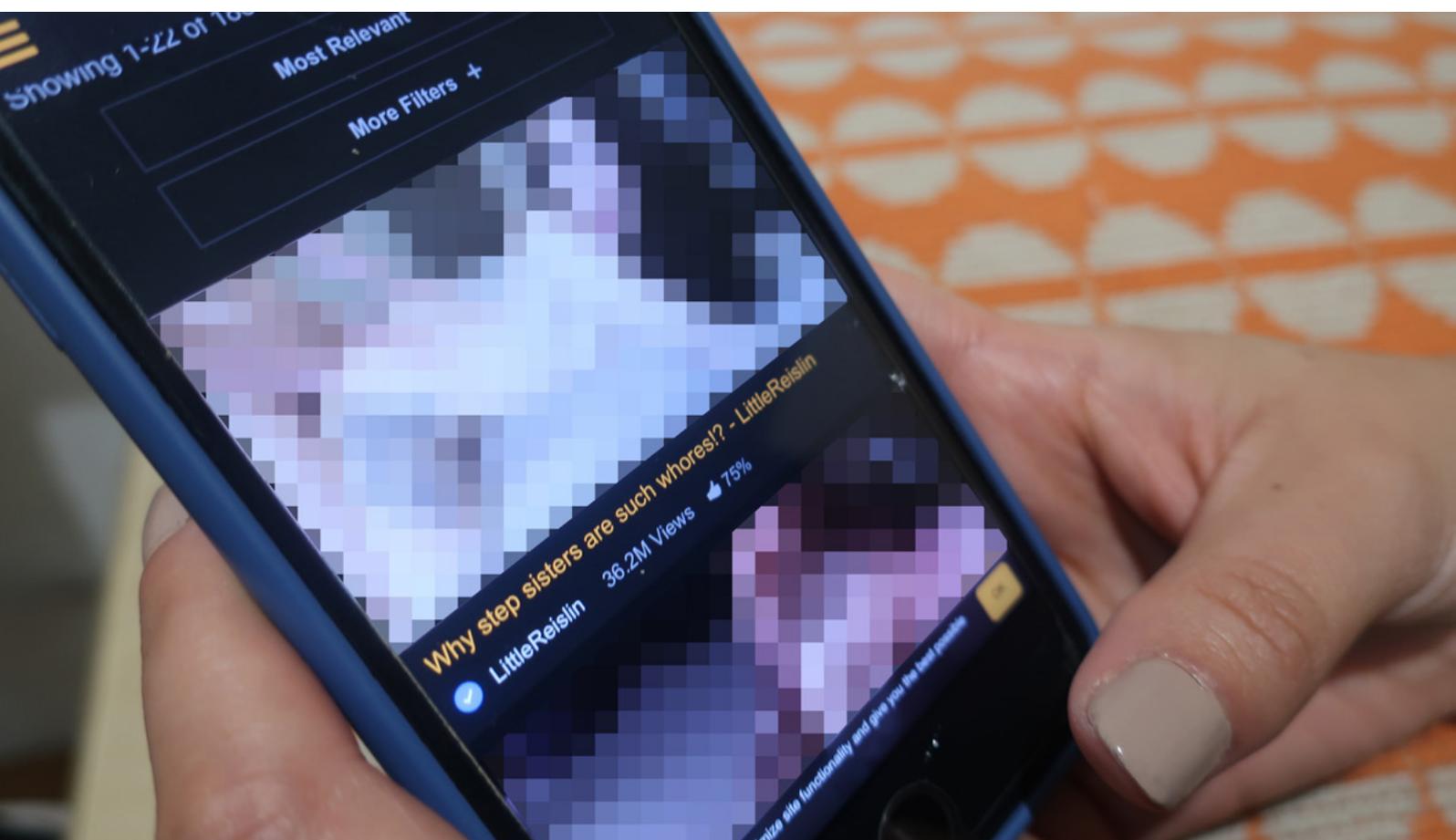
Some felt pornography was primarily oriented towards male pleasure and could be degrading to women

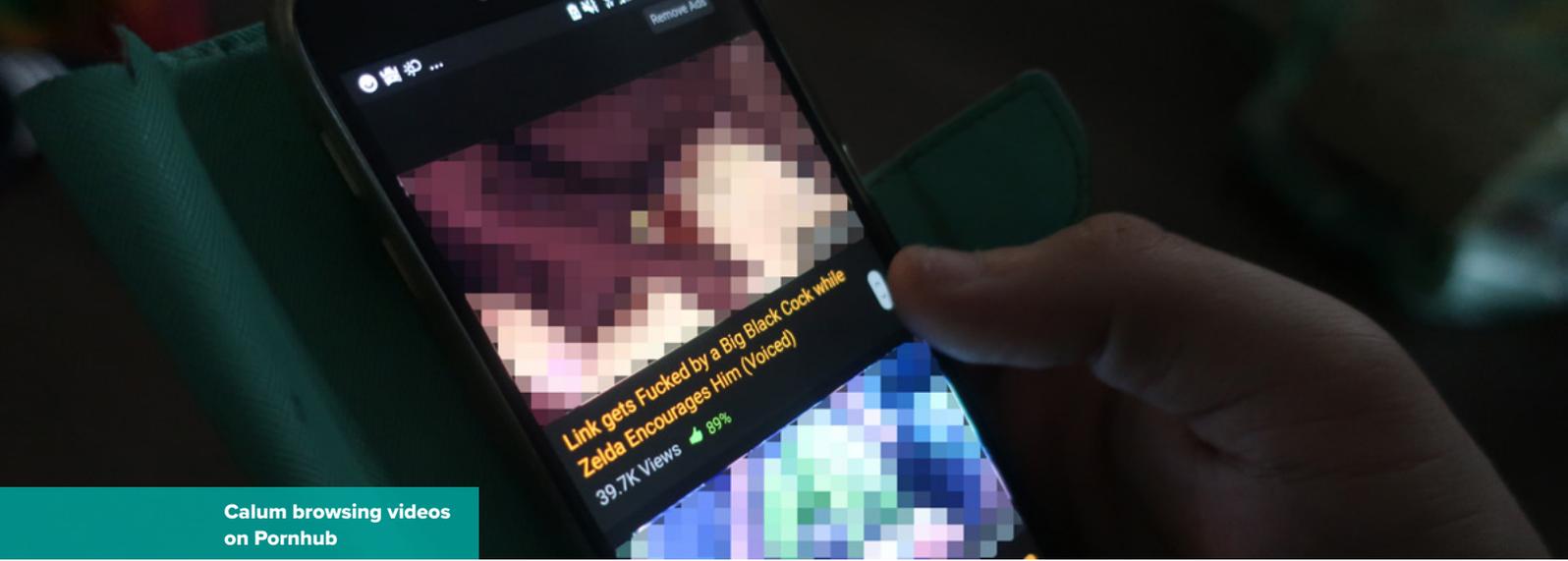
Some girls felt that heterosexual pornography portrayed sex as being primarily oriented towards male pleasure and believed it promoted girls performing or behaving in specific ways during sex, such as pulling certain facial expressions, making certain noises, and feeling pressure to always achieve orgasm. Although many girls thought it was “standard” or “expected” to perform oral sex on a man, far fewer had experienced oral sex on themselves, with many saying they wouldn’t feel “comfortable” asking for it as they think boys would find it “disgusting”.

While it was unclear whether this originated from pornography, several girls reported that it was less common to see men performing oral sex on a woman compared to a woman performing oral sex on a man on pornography sites, with some saying they had to actively search for it in order to find it. Therefore, whilst videos of men performing oral sex on women were present on pornography sites, young people felt they were less common and harder to find. Nevertheless, many girls reported having seen lesbian pornography, in which oral sex performed on a woman was common.

Mothers across the focus groups expressed concern about the negative impact of pornography on their daughters. For example, they were worried their daughters would feel obliged to perform certain acts, such as oral sex on a man and anal sex; or behave in a particular way for men because of the “male-centric nature of porn”. Linked to this, some mothers were anxious that, as a result of pornography, their daughters would see sex as primarily centred around male pleasure.

Similarly, as previously mentioned, some girls found pornography degrading towards women. They reported having seen pornography in which “the woman’s body language looked like she was being forced into it”, and in which “the man usually dominates the woman”. This had led certain girls to avoid pornography that involved men.





Pornography influenced sexual behaviour

Some felt pornography had led to the copying of “rough” sexual behaviour

Beyond creating unrealistic expectations of sex, some young people felt pornography had actually affected their expectations of, and behaviour during, sex, particularly in the copying of “rough” or “forceful” sex seen in pornography. Many of the male respondents said they thought sex looked better in pornography than it was in real life prior to losing their virginity.

For example, **Calum** (18) had some preconceptions about sex from pornography prior to losing his virginity, assuming it should be “really fast”. However, after his first sexual encounter, aged 15, his partner had to tell him to be “gentler”. More broadly, some female respondents noted that pornography sometimes showed men being forceful towards the woman, whose body language might not suggest she wanted to have sex, and they worried that boys might think this was normal.

// I thought it was going to be a lot rougher and I wouldn't have to worry about hurting the girl, but it was completely different, and I had to be more careful. //

CALUM, 18, MANCHESTER REFLECTING ON HIS FIRST TIME HAVING SEX

// I just thought as if it was like a porn video, and I was like, okay, I can do what I want with this girl because whatever I do she is enjoying it. //

CALUM, 18, MANCHESTER REFLECTING ON A SUBSEQUENT SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

CASE STUDY

Lorna's (18) first boyfriend, whom she entered into a relationship with at age 14, had been pulling her hair and “yanking” her head back during sex. She said that when discussing it with her, he’d told her, “I thought you might like it. The girls in porn like it.”

// My friend tried to choke his girlfriend once when they were having sex because he had seen it in a porno... it ended with the girlfriend slapping him and when he asked why she slapped him she said ‘because you were choking me’. //

NICHOLAS, 16, GLASGOW

Some people also felt that pornography had affected their or their partner’s attitudes towards consent because consent was “implied” in pornography rather than openly discussed and spoken about by participants. They believed consent was given because the actors are paid, but some expressed concern that this was not as readily apparent in less professional or “homemade”²⁷ pornography.

Nadia (17), from York, had developed a “kink” with her current partner in which both decided that “no doesn’t mean no”, and they instead use a safe word to communicate any discomfort. Nadia spoke about the “rape culture” she had observed on pornography sites, which she believed had “kind of normalised [rape]”. She explained that even if the rape they saw in pornography was staged, “young people don’t see what is wrong with it [acting out rape fantasies]”. Given that it was not something she would discuss with her parents, “it is not corrected”. Nadia had also experimented with BDSM sex with her boyfriend, having witnessed it in pornography.

²⁷ Homemade pornography: pornography made by amateurs at home and then posted online (either on a pornography website or social media)



SURVEY RESULTS

Influences on sexual behaviours

The survey covered both attitudes to consent and respect for sexual partners, as well as integrating scenarios from pornography into their own sex lives. Starting with the former:

- **Overall, 41% of all children who were aware of pornography agreed that “watching porn makes people less respectful of the opposite sex”^{*}.** Only 13% disagreed, with the remainder being on the fence or saying, “This doesn’t apply to me / I’m not having sex”. Interestingly, there were no significant differences by age or gender of the child, or whether they say they’ve actually seen pornography or not.
- **Most young people had a good understanding of consent**, but a minority did not. For example, when asked if they needed consent when “you knew the person really fancies you”, 10% felt they did not. A gender divide is apparent here, with 14% of boys feeling this does not require consent compared to 5% of girls.
- **The sub-group that gave the most concerning statements around consent are those for whom most of the pornography they’ve seen is intentional (n=180).** For example, 29% of this group said that consent wasn’t needed if “you knew the person really fancies you”. In comparison, among those whose interaction with pornography has mostly been by accident (n=388), only 5% believed the same. Similarly, across the majority of the other five statements around consent, the proportion within this group that gave answers that would imply potentially dangerous behaviour around the issue of consent is greater by a factor of between three and six.

**We acknowledge our mistaken assumption in using the term “the opposite sex” rather than, for example “their sexual partner(s)”*

Some had incorporated things they had seen in pornography into their own sex lives

Other behaviours that some young people reported seeing in pornography and trying in real life included: replicating sex positions and copying the different parts of a woman's body on which they had seen male porn stars ejaculating, such as the face, breasts or mouth. The different ways in which male porn stars would "finish" was mentioned by both genders, with some boys saying that they experimented after seeing it in pornography or being asked to by the girl they were with. Girls also brought this topic up, with one girl, **Lorna** (18), saying: "All the boys I've been with have wanted to finish on my boobs, back and tummy, and I don't know why else they would want to do that if it's not because of what they've seen in porn."

Some girls also spoke about copying the "noises" and "facial expressions" to make during sex from watching pornography, as well as getting "tips" on how to perform certain sexual acts.

// Once I was told to look at gay porn because I was told they give good blowjob tips. //

APRIL, 18, LONDON

// Porn can be very educational given that you don't know what you have to do during sex when it comes to positions and what noises and facial expressions to make. //

CHANELLE, 18, WEST MIDLANDS

CASE STUDY

Alex (16) lives in London and has just finished his GCSEs. A little over a month ago, he bought a dildo and poppers from a sex shop in Soho, having been introduced to both via pornography. In the three to four weeks prior to his interview, he had been frequently masturbating with poppers, returning to the shop to buy more. Having recently learned about the potential effects on his health of heavy popper use, he had decided to try to stop using them.

However, there was still a disconnect between what was 'normal' in real life, and what was 'normal' in pornography. For example, while some sexual behaviours that were common in pornography, such as oral sex on a man, had become normalised among young people, other common behaviours in pornography such as anal sex were mentioned but were less normalised (although some girls were aware that boys may expect anal sex having seen it in pornography).

Therefore, while young people's sexual behaviours may be influenced by pornography, young people were not simply copying all the behaviours they saw in pornography. Other factors influenced the types of sexual behaviours young people were willing to try, such as their personal preference, and how different sexual behaviours are spoken about among friends and in popular culture.



**SURVEY
RESULTS**

Integrating ideas from pornography into their own sex lives

- 10% of 16- to 17-year-olds say that they've "asked someone to try something sexual because they'd seen it in porn" (n=265, which excludes those who haven't had sex or preferred not to say). This breaks down as 14% of boys and 5% of girls.
- Similarly, 16% of the same group said that they had "been asked to try something sexual that you suspect [your partner] had seen in porn".
- In total, 18% of 16- to 17-year-olds who had an active sex life said they had either asked or been asked to incorporate things from pornography into their relations with their partner(s). At first glance this finding does not seem to tally with the majority from the qualitative work who discussed this as highly prevalent. However, the statistic may indicate a worrying consideration: only 18% of children are aware enough of pornography's pervasive influence on their sexual behaviours to state it unprompted in a survey, with the remainder potentially unaware of this (without further prompting and discussion, as provided by the depth interviews). This conclusion is only one interpretation of this disparity. However, if accurate, it is concerning that the influence of information from pornography on sexual experiences is so ingrained as to be unrecognisable.

Pornography may have negatively affected perceptions of body image

Many young people in the qualitative research felt that pornography had a negative impact on their body image, though not all of them had critically reflected on the topic prior to the interviews. For boys, this largely revolved around penis size, though some boys also reported feeling worried about not being sufficiently muscular. Girls worried about not having large breasts and a large bum and were concerned about how their genitalia looked. Some of the boys said they thought pornography created greater pressures around body image for girls than it did for boys.

While most girls spoke about shaving or waxing their pubic hair for sex, only a few cited pornography as a direct reason for doing so, with many stating it was for “comfort” or “hygiene” reasons. For example, **Aveleen**, a 17-year-old from London, started getting waxes at the beautician with her sister when she was 16, while **Nadia**, a 17-year-old from York, had many conversations with her friends about the best ways to remove hair “in preparation for sex”. Nevertheless, many did note that women in pornographic videos were “perfectly shaved”.

In the focus group, parents—in particular, mothers—were anxious about any pressures their daughters might feel about their body image. This largely centred around the potential impact on their mental health should their daughters feel worried about having small breasts or a small bum, but also extended to concern that boys would have unrealistic expectations about what the “average” woman looked like. One father, for example, chose to sit down with his son and talk about the unrealistic portrayal of the female body in pornography. This followed an occasion when his son said he wasn’t attracted to what the father described as “normal women with normal bodies” on the program *Naked Attraction*²⁸.

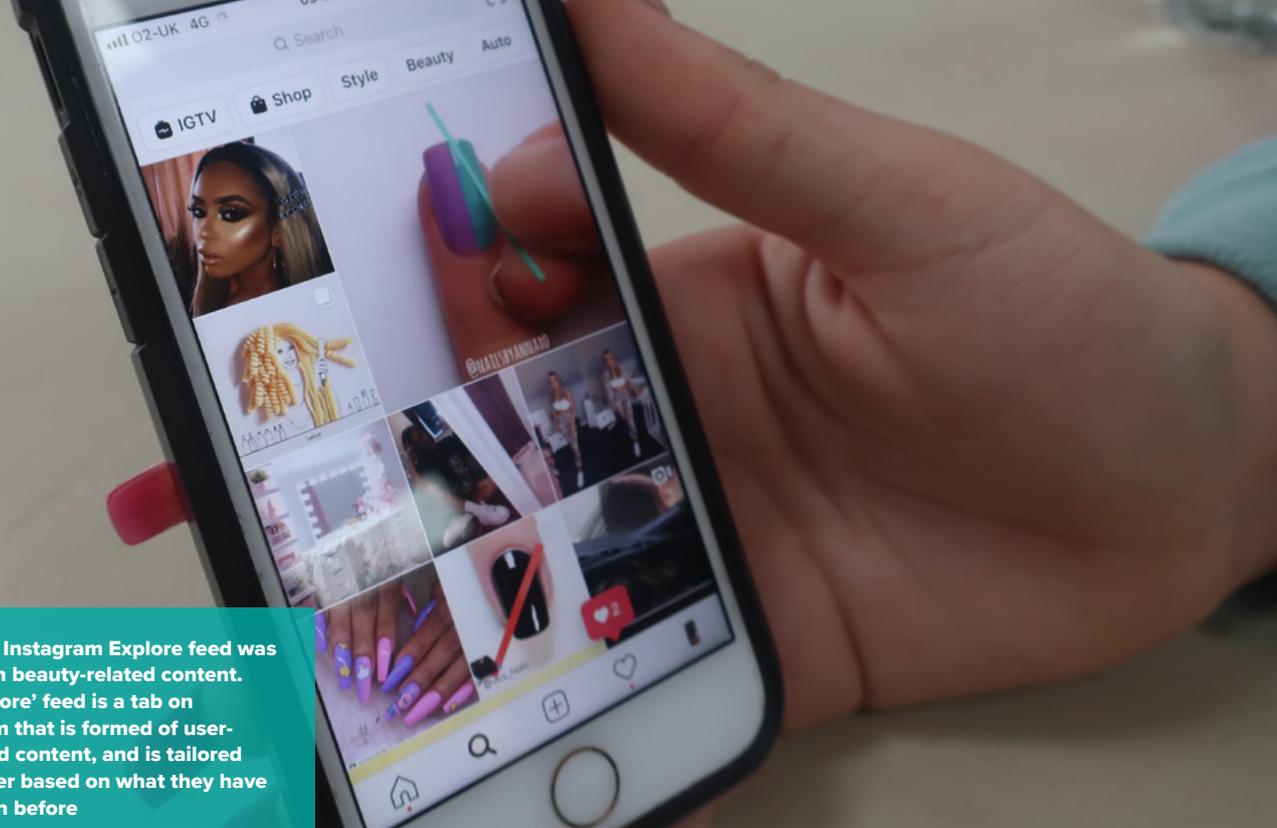
// Boys expect that [looking attractive] from you as standard if they watch porn. They expect you to look and act sexier than you are and will compare your body to them [girls in pornography videos] ... Sometimes I worry I don’t look or act sexy enough during sex. //

AOIFE, 18, BELFAST

// The women all have huge breasts. I’ve heard girls talk about anal bleaching. The female porn stars bleach their anuses so they look really, really perfect and their bodies are really perfect. They have their labia removed. The vagina is being cosmetically enhanced. They have ribs taken out. Everything is false. Girls will think ‘Wow, that’s what I need for boys to like me’, and boys will expect that too. //

KAREN, MOTHER, LEEDS

²⁸ *Naked Attraction* is a TV show on Channel 4 in which contestants try ‘to find love’ purely based on seeing the naked bodies of the other contestants



Bridget's Instagram Explore feed was filled with beauty-related content. The 'Explore' feed is a tab on Instagram that is formed of user-generated content, and is tailored to the user based on what they have clicked on before

SURVEY RESULTS

Pornography and body image

Of those who had seen pornography and gave an opinion (i.e. didn't say "This doesn't apply to me / I'm not having sex"):

- 29% agreed that "I feel bad about my body when I see how people look in porn" (n=534). There was no difference between boys and girls.
- 35% agreed that "I worry about what other people think of my body because I don't look like the actors you see in porn" (n=539). Again, there was no difference between boys and girls.

This reflects apparent under-reporting when compared to the qualitative findings, but this can be partially explained by the fact that interviewers noted that respondents did not seem to have reflected prior to the session on the influence pornography had had on their body image.

Nevertheless, a few young people in the qualitative work felt that pornography had made them feel more confident in their bodies. For example, finding actors and actresses "who look like" them, and helping them to see that certain parts of their bodies are "normal" – such as one girl saying that she felt reassured when she saw a woman with stretch marks in a pornography video.

Pressures on body image come from TV and social media too

Both young people and parents acknowledged a range of other factors and saw pornography within the context of a broader landscape. For example, parents across the focus groups cited TV programmes such as *Love Island*²⁹ and imagery from social media (with models and 'influencers' on Instagram a particular concern). Some mothers also expressed concern about the influences of models seen on online shopping sites such as Boohoo³⁰, who they claimed wore revealing outfits.

While concerns around how their genitals looked were more likely to have originated from comparisons with pornography actors, many young people felt that the way they viewed their overall body image was more likely the result of the kinds of body images they saw on Instagram.

²⁹ Love Island is a TV show on ITV2 where contestants are put on an 'island' together. The show centres around the various relationships between the contestants, and frequently shows the contestants in swimwear

³⁰ Boohoo is an online fashion retailer aimed at 16- to 30-year-olds

What do young people & parents think about age-verification?

This section details the views of parents and young people on age-verification for online pornography: whether they agree with the principle, whether they think it would work, what they think the potential workarounds could be, and what they think the results of age-verification would be.



A respondent sees a warning sign on a video he is watching

Many of the ways in which young people first stumbled across pornography would likely have been prevented by Age-Verification

Many young people in the qualitative research felt age-verification would have delayed the age at which they had first seen pornography. In particular, they thought it would have stopped them from accidentally stumbling across explicit content, such as through uninformed Google searches, pop-ups, and being sent links to pornography sites from friends. Given that 63% of children aged 11 to 13 who had seen pornography said their first exposure had been unintentional, age-verification is likely to have a significant impact here.

Young people thought that if age-verification was in place when they had accidentally stumbled across pornography it might have “scared them off” from accessing pornography by requesting proof of age. Indeed, many felt that for younger children who weren’t already “into porn” it would be perceived as “too much effort” to circumnavigate the restrictions. Parents and children recognised that age-verification would be effective in preventing younger children from early exposure to pornography. Few thought that age-verification would deter *all* people under the age of 18 due to knowledge of potential ‘workarounds’, but most agreed that age-verification would likely prevent children from viewing pornography accidentally at such a young age.

“If I was 15, I probably wouldn’t have tried to get around it. For people who are just starting to see pornography it is too much effort—you don’t even know you like it yet, but if you already watch a lot of pornography you will find a way. ”

EMMA, 18, EDINBURGH

“ It might stop the really young people, aged 11 or so, watching it. ”

STEVE, 18, MANCHESTER

“ At age 12 or 13 you’re not thinking about it [porn and sex] unless it is introduced to you, so maybe these people will stop seeing as much porn. ”

LUCY, 17, GLASGOW

“ I think it will stop a lot of people accessing porn, especially young children. You shouldn’t be able to see any videos until you have logged in with age-verification and pop-ups should be banned. ”

PAUL, FATHER, LEEDS

Younger children were unlikely to know about workarounds – but knowledge increases with age

Just under a quarter of children surveyed (23%) reported knowing how to use a potential ‘workaround’ (i.e. a VPN, file torrenting, the use of Tor or the ‘dark web’). The youngest children (between 11 and 13 years old) were the least likely to report knowing how to use any of these functions (14%), compared to the older children—25% of 14- to 15-year-olds, and 33% of 16- to 17-year-olds.

A number of respondents, both young people and parents, felt that age-verification measures would not always prevent older, more determined teenagers who wanted to watch pornography, and who were technologically proficient, from accessing pornographic content.

The majority of parents and young people (aged 16 to 18) interviewed in the qualitative research felt that older children would be able to circumvent age-verification by a range of potential online workarounds. Additionally, many 16- to 18-year-olds interviewed in the qualitative work who could not identify a workaround at present felt they would be able to find a potential method for circumventing age-verification if required.

Some of the most commonly known workarounds that older children thought may potentially negate age-verification included³¹:

- Using a VPN³² to appear as if you are accessing adult content from elsewhere in the world
- Torrenting files³³ by downloading the data in chunks
- Using Tor (the ‘onion’ router)³⁴ to disguise the user’s location
- By accessing the dark web³⁵
- By using proxy websites³⁶

Parents also seemed concerned that their children would resort to using their credit cards without their permission, or asking adults to buy an age-verification card from shops on their behalf. Some fathers drew a parallel with young people getting adults to buy alcohol, while others envisaged age-verification cards being sold in playgrounds. Indeed, many young people in the qualitative interviews thought that using someone else’s age-verification pass or credit card could be an option.

31 See the Appendix 1 – Landscape mapping for more detailed explanation

32 VPNs (virtual private network) allow users to encrypt their communication data by giving access to private networks. This can disguise the user’s internet use and location

33 A ‘torrent’ file contains metadata (data about other data), rather than containing the actual contents that someone might want (such as a book, film, music or document). A BitTorrent software is then required in order to open this file. It will scan for the locations of the corresponding file and if successful, begin downloading the file. <https://www.my-private-network.co.uk/what-is-a-torrent/>

34 Tor is free and open-source software for enabling anonymous communication. The name is derived from an acronym for the original software project name “The Onion Router”

35 The part of the World Wide Web that is only accessible by means of special software, and not by typical search engines, allowing users and website operators to remain anonymous or untraceable

36 A proxy website acts as a relay between a user and an internet server. All requests to the internet go through the proxy server first, which then forwards it on to the internet. Responses are then delivered back through the proxy service then on to the user.

Experience of online controls at home and at school

The findings from parental focus groups were mixed in terms of parental controls: some reported having placed restrictions on their children's internet usage, while others did not. Restrictions on internet access included having time limits on accessing particular devices or the internet and having parental filters on what was accessible on the internet.

Despite this, many parents at the focus groups also felt that the increasing ubiquity of phones and technology among young people meant that trying to monitor their children's internet activity was futile. Many mothers, for example, were concerned that their children would simply be able to "outsmart" them online.

Indeed, in the qualitative research, some respondents reported using VPNs at home to get around website blocks their parents had put in place, as well as for accessing films and TV shows that were unavailable in the UK. For example, a few young people mentioned using VPNs to access foreign versions of Netflix, enabling them to access specific content only available in that country.

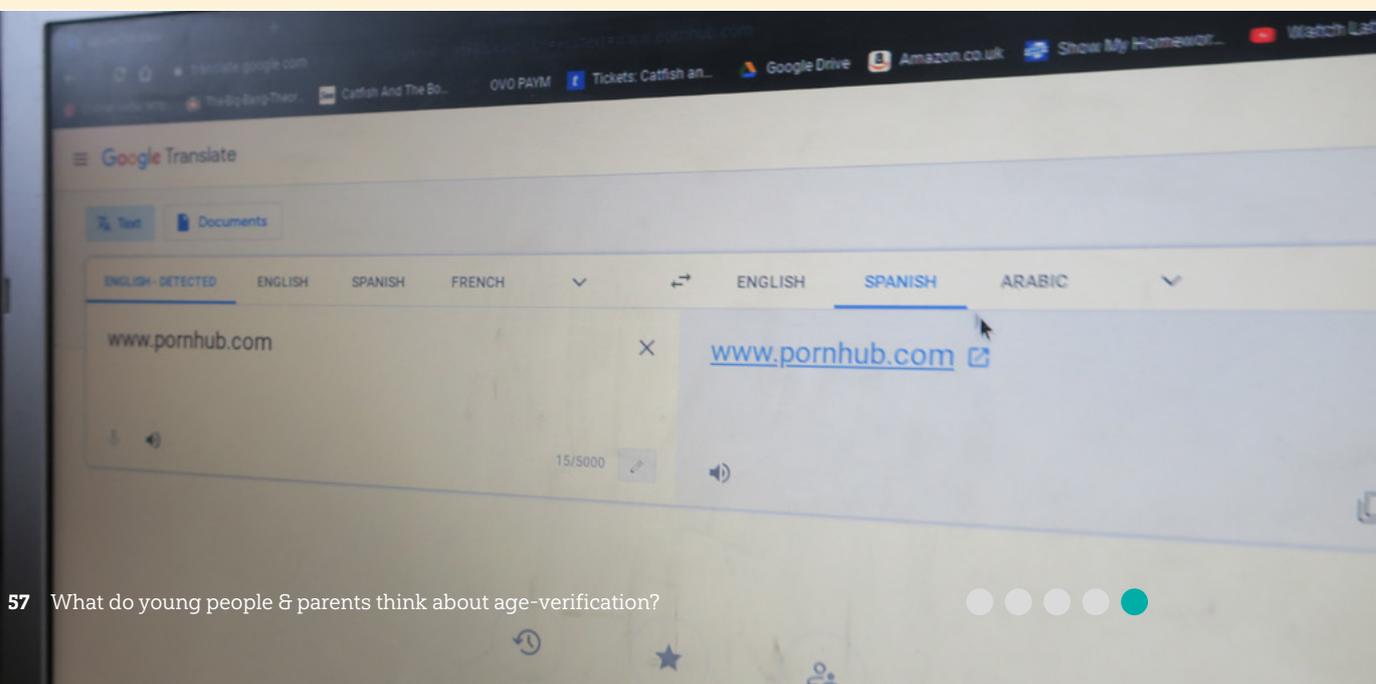
// The kids know a lot more about the devices and that's a massive issue. I don't understand so many of the things they do online. If our kids wanted to pull the wool over our eyes, they'd be able to. //

HOLLY, MOTHER, STOCKPORT

Young people also often described having filters on their school WiFi systems throughout secondary school, which meant they could not access social media or games, as well as adult content. However, it was relatively common for them to know workarounds, whether it be use of their own mobile data, VPN apps or proxy websites.

CASE STUDY

One male respondent, **Joss** (18), from Essex, and his friends used Google Translate to translate webpages like Netflix and pornography sites that were blocked at school, given the translated website links were not blocked. Joss was also using a Turkish email to access Netflix at a lower payment rate.



Some felt there could be unintended consequences of restrictions on pornography

Some worried it would be harder to learn about sex, particularly in relation to LGB respondents

While recognising the benefits of preventing younger children accessing pornography, young people had some concerns about age-verification restrictions. For example, some young people were worried that, in the absence of other adequate sources of sex education, they would struggle to find ways to learn about sex without pornography.

This was felt particularly strongly by LGB respondents in the qualitative research, who believed that pornography had helped them to understand their sexuality and learn about different types of sexual behaviours that they weren't taught in school.

Lucy, who is gay, said:

// It [age-verification] doesn't seem fair. When I was younger porn helped me a lot ... [without it] it would have made me more anxious and nervous to try sex as school doesn't teach it. //

LUCY, 17, GLASGOW

However, as discussed in Section 4 exploring the negative consequences of pornography, young people did not consider all of the things they were learning about sex from pornography to be healthy or positive—for example, learning certain “rough” sexual behaviours, and a focus on activities relating purely to male pleasure. Nevertheless, many young people saw pornography a key source in learning about sex, given what they feel to be a lack of sources of sex education, particularly for LGB respondents.

Moreover, some parents also felt that age-verification contradicted the principle of an “open society”. Rather than attempt to “shut down” young people accessing pornographic content, they felt it was more important to educate them about pornography. This, for example, would involve including pornography in sex education to understand the effects of watching pornography and to outline its potential to misrepresent sexual relationships and create unrealistic expectations. Rather than prevent children from accessing pornography, some parents felt schools had a role in promoting open dialogue about pornography.

Some young people also felt that the difference in the age of consent for having sex—16—and the age at which age-verification is targeted—18—was contradictory. They also struggled to understand why, for instance, they could serve in the armed forces and have a family and yet be blocked from watching pornography.

Some worried it would become more popular to access pornography on social media

As well as thinking they might be able to circumnavigate age-verification, some young people and parents envisaged possible negative consequences as a result of it. However, it is worth noting that hypotheses about the unintended consequences of age-verification were often thought of on the spot, as many hadn't processed the effects or even heard of age-verification prior to the interviews and focus groups. This can be illustrated by conflicting and somewhat unrealistic responses. For example, some young people thought it might lead young people to have sex earlier to "meet their needs", whereas others thought it might delay the age at which people have sex because they "won't know what to do".

Some fathers were concerned the enhanced restrictions would make pornography "cooler" and children more curious, drawing comparisons with the criminalisation of drugs such as cannabis. They felt this would result in a drive towards accessing pornography by making it "scandalous". Yet, this concern didn't resonate as much with young people.

Others felt that the restrictions on pornography websites would drive young people to use other platforms. One father, for example, noted that "sex is always there" and discussed pornography's evolution from magazines through to pornography studios and more recently to more 'homemade' pornography. He envisaged pornography being increasingly shared online via social media or through direct messaging platforms as a method to circumvent age-verification restrictions.

Alternatively, some felt young people would simply buy pornography as files from adults, exposing them to interactions with strangers.

Additionally, there was concern among parents and some young people that age-verification would force pornographic content to become increasingly user-generated and shared online. A perceived consequence of this was that any pornographic content would also be more "extreme" in the absence of any supervision or regulation.

“ The effect will be a bit like prohibition. You'll cut it off and send them all down another avenue, which is less monitored and more dodgy. ”

DAVID, FATHER, LEEDS

Most parents and children supported a form of restriction on pornography

Across the sample there was consensus that restrictions on pornography were positive, especially among parents and younger children: 56% of 11- to 13-year-olds in the survey wanted to be “locked out of websites for 18-plus year olds” and 83% of parents agreed that there should be age-verification controls in place for online pornography, as can be seen in the survey results below.



Views on age-verification

Just under 8 in 10 parents (79%) say they are “very” or “fairly” concerned about their child seeing pornography online. Concern is slightly greater among parents of 11- to 13-year-olds (82% vs. 74% of parents of 16- to 17-year-olds).

Accordingly, 83% of parents agreed with the statement “there should be robust age-verification controls in place to stop children (under-18s) seeing commercial pornography online”. Only 7% disagreed, with the remainder expressing a neutral opinion.

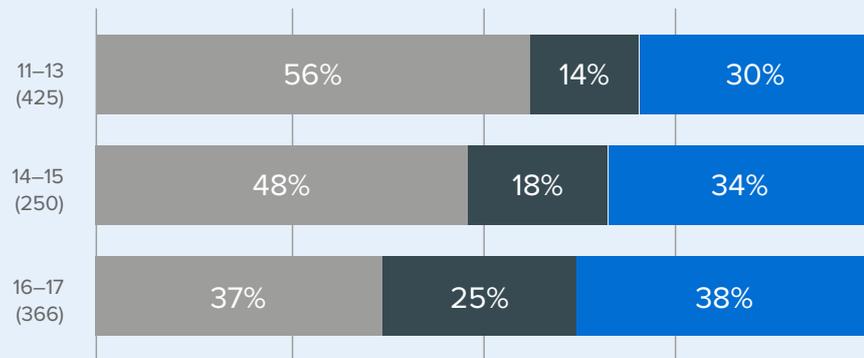
Among children, 11- to 13-year-olds were most positive when asked whether “I want to be locked out of websites that are for 18-plus year olds”, as the graph below shows:

FIGURE 7

Desire to be locked out of adult websites by age

Base: All

- Agree
- Disagree
- Neutral or n/a



While firmly supportive of the concept, based on their current understanding, parents have differing views on the potential effectiveness of age-verification, with 55% saying they think the introduction of age-verification will be “very” or “fairly” effective in reducing the likelihood of children seeing commercial pornography online. 36% suggest it will be not that effective or not at all effective, with the remainder stating, “Don’t know”.

Parents were asked to reflect on who has a responsibility to ensure their children only see content that is appropriate for their age, and nominated themselves as having the primary role (on average). They could attribute 10 points across different influences, with more points meaning a greater level of responsibility:

- Themselves = 4.3
- Provider of online services = 2.1
- Their child = 1.5
- The government = 1.4
- Schools = 0.7

Despite this self-appointed level of importance, the use of site-blocking or other technological solutions was not universal. Half of parents overall (52%) had either site-blocking or safe search functions in place (although this also assumes that they are set up correctly). This rises to 63% among parents of 11- to 13-year-olds but falls to 40% of parents of 16- to 17-year-olds.

Often support for age-verification stemmed from the desire to restrict children seeing “extreme” pornography

Both mothers and fathers in the focus groups saw some restrictions as a positive way to prevent young people from being exposed to “extreme”³⁷ pornography. Across the four focus groups, parents identified “gangbangs”, “violent or aggressive sex” and “bondage” as pornographic categories they were especially concerned about.

Indeed, many young people, as well as parents in the focus groups, considered pornography as a spectrum ranging from “normal” sex through to “extreme” content, with the latter used to describe less “mainstream” content (although mostly not illegal content). There was a strong sense that restrictions were required around the latter. Notably, however, some mothers claimed they would accept their children watching pornography if it were realistic and featured “normal sex between normal-looking people”, citing its potential educational benefit.

However, parents were not able to articulate what exactly “normal” sex would entail, and how regulation could distinguish this from more “extreme” content.

CASE STUDY

Jay (18), an army cadet based near Leicester, felt “there should be a content restriction, but not an age restriction”. He felt that people mature at different ages and that, while there should be limits on more extreme content, “pornography really helps you understand how it’s done.” He said that it had guided him in how to pleasure his girlfriend in his relationship.

³⁷ This was how respondents characterise the pornography they’d seen, but it is worth noting that most of the pornography they described as ‘extreme’ was not extreme in the legal sense—i.e. it would not be considered illegal online under UK law <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/section/63>

The BBFC would like to thank everyone who participated in the online survey, interviews and focus groups

