

The Online Services Bill: Theories and Evidence of Pornographic Harm

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On the 1 January 2000, the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999 came into force. It aims to censor online what is currently censored offline. Information Technology Professionals should be concerned about censorship of the internet both in their capacity as a member of the profession and as a citizen. The Bill is mainly aimed at pornographic content, and how a society treats it is a good test of its openness. The paper addresses the primary research question - "Is censorship of internet pornography justified?" Five theories about pornographic harm are distilled from an analysis of a multi-disciplinary literature, including the parliamentary debates on the Bill, and the hearings of the Senate Select Committee on Information Technologies. The research findings on pornographic harm are also summarised. The conclusion of the analysis is that censorship of internet pornography by the Australian Government is not justified on three grounds. First, suppressing speech that is offensive to some members of society, even the majority, is inconsistent with free speech that characterises an open society. Second, the research findings do not support the view that pornography directly causes harm. Third, pornography may confer positive societal benefits for both men and woman.

1 Background

In the western tradition, information ethics has its roots in Athenian democracy. It was characterised by an oral culture and freedom of speech. Later freedom of written expression after a great struggle was added. In this age of electronic networks, freedom of access must also be added. Currently, freedom of access to the internet is under sustained attack worldwide. The Australian Government has joined this attack justifying its actions by citing pornographic harm to men, women and children.

On 1 January 2000, the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999 (hereafter The Bill) came into force. The purpose of The Bill is to establish a framework for the regulation of the content of online services. The legislation seeks to:

- provide a means of addressing complaints about certain internet content
- restrict access to certain internet content that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, and
- protect children from exposure to internet content that is unsuitable for children.

On receiving a complaint about internet material the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) can require an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to take down X rated or refused classification material hosted onshore, and, to take all reasonable steps to prevent access to X rated or refused classification material hosted offshore. In respect to R classified onshore content the ABA must be satisfied that restricted access arrangements are in place. No proposal is made in respect to offshore-classified R material. The Bill expressly specifies time frames for the take down process and penalties for non-compliance. The Bill expressly does not apply to live internet content such as news groups, chat channels, or Email. A body to monitor online material envisaged by The Bill has been established.

The internet is a new medium but there exists disagreement about the nature of online services (Australian Broadcasting Authority 1999; Whittle 1998; Commonwealth of Australia 1999a; Commonwealth of Australia 1999b). Some writers (Poster 1997; Foster 1997) argue that the internet is so important in promoting an "open society that it should be treated different to the traditional media. Others (Healy 1997; Lockard 1997; Stratton 1997) criticise the extravagant claims that are made about it. They also express concern about the "undemocratic" access to it, and the negative influence of a dominating American culture. Minister Alston (Commonwealth of Australia 1999c) in presenting The Bill argues that what is censored offline should also be censored online. However, The Bill prescribes a level of censorship that treats the internet like a film, which is more restrictive than other media.

The Bill is mainly concerned with "pornographic" speech. This paper deals only with this type of "speech" and with the question of "offence to a reasonable adult". However, Electronic Foundations Australia [2000] claim that The Bill is a direct attack on freedom of speech itself not just pornography. Adult themes rather than violence or sex is the reason why most films and videos are restricted. Much of what is discussed in this paper also

applies to adult themes. It also makes some reference to the other objectives of The Bill namely, protection of children, and monitoring and addressing complaints about internet content.

2 The Research Question

Passage of The Bill raises again the question - *Under what circumstances is censorship of any media justified?* However, the primary research question addressed is *Is censorship of internet pornography by the Australian Government justified?*

This question may be disaggregated to a number of secondary questions. They are:

- What are the main "theories" of pornographic harm?
- What are the underlying assumptions of each theory?
- What are the contradictions and deficiencies of each theory?
- Is a particular theory supported by the empirical findings on pornographic harm?
- What limits on pornographic speech do the adherents of each theory advocate?

In order to address these questions a comprehensive analysis of the literature from a range of disciplines was conducted. The Hansard debates on the second reading of The Bill, and the hearings of the Senate Select Committee on Information Technologies were also analysed. Space does not permit extensive citations of the literature.

This paper is a distillation of these analyses, and postulates five distinct theories of pornographic harm. It also summarises the research findings worldwide on any causative link between pornography and harm. It concludes that censorship of internet pornography by the Australian Government is not justified because:

- suppressing speech that is offensive to some members of society, even the majority, is inconsistent with free speech that characterises an open society
- the research findings do not support the view that pornography directly causes harm
- pornography may confer positive societal benefits for men and women

3 Ethical Considerations

Information Technology (IT) professionals should be concerned about censorship of the internet. The internet is rightly the subject of study, development, use, and management by them. Many are responsible for the development and use of technology products like filtering and blocking software, and internet content grading systems for instance. Should IT professionals be ethically neutral concerning the use of these products and the internet in general? It should be of concern to the profession that the Government whose internet

pornography as a first issue to debate and legislate about rather than the more important issues of internet security, internet accessibility, and facilitation of adoption of eCommerce. IT professionals are also members of the Australian society. Most would support its openness with its freedoms, and require that if a freedom is circumscribed by the State that it be justified.

How a society treats pornography is a good test of its openness. Pornography is subversive. It challenges fundamental values and names deepest fears. It challenges the institutions of the traditional family and church. It exposes the hypocrisy on gender relations, class bias and sexuality. It tells us things about ourselves that we do not wish to acknowledge. It is not surprising that many will demand that this speech be suppressed. This attempt to censor internet pornography is a recent example.

4 Three Key Concepts

4.1 Introduction

The divergence of theories about pornographic harm is largely explained with reference to three key concepts about which an assumption is made. These are the:

- nature of pornography
- nature of sexuality
- meaning and power of the image

The literature reveals that each concept can be treated in a binary way. The acceptance of one of the two opposing ideas becomes an underlying assumption on which a particular theory of harm is based. These binary views are now briefly described for each concept.

4.2 The Nature of Pornography

One view (Wilson 1992; Cossman 1997) treat pornography as a single definable entity. It is distinguished from art and erotica. If art is a reflection of the highest ideals and social values then pornography is the underside. Again, erotica is life-loving and a positive expression of sexual values then pornography is the reverse. Traditionally legislation and the courts accept that pornography or obscenity exists and therefore is definable. The test usually invoked is that of the reasonable adult or community standard. This is enshrined in The Bill.

The opposing view (Gotell 1997; Webster 1992; Williams 1992a) challenges the existence of pornography as such, and whether it can be distinguished from art and erotica. It suggests that what is defined as erotica and what is defined as pornography depends on personal taste, moral boundaries, sexual preferences, cultural and class biases. If pornography does exist there is a wide range of pornographic genres.

In this paper, the term pornography is retained although there is a preference for the alternative term sexually explicit.

4.3 The Nature of Sexuality

One view (Cossman 1997; Smart 1992; Heinemann 1990) is that sexuality for a western society tends to be characterised by:

- Sexual essentialism, where sex is treated as a biological or physical urge that must be satisfied or suppressed
- Sexual monism, where there is one (legitimate) way to have sex, ie the missionary position, and sex is primarily for purposes of procreation
- A sexual hierarchy where some forms of sexual behaviour are better than others. Marital sex is superior. Masturbation and same sex activity are inferior (and illegitimate)
- Legitimate sexual activity is that conducted in the private sphere of the patriarchal family

The opposing discourse (Cowie 1992; McIntosh 1992; Duggan and others 1992) to that which is dominant tends to be characterised by:

- Sexual activity is positive and good compared to it being bad or dirty
- Sex is sensual and spiritual and so entails mind and spirit as well as body
- Sexual expression is varied and complex and can be for no other reason than pleasure.
- There is no sexual hierarchy as to which expression is better (legitimate) and no prescribed gender relations are assumed

4.4 The Meaning and Power of the Image

Vital to a view on pornographic harm is the meaning and power of the pornographic image. The literature almost exclusively discusses harm (to woman) from pornography produced and consumed by men. It ignores, for instance, pornography consumed by woman, produced, and consumed by woman, and gay pornography.

One view (Cowie 1992; Masson 1990; Morgan 1980) is that the pornographic image is a master text to practices it portrays. It does represent real attitudes and desires, and, it teaches the consumer these attitudes, and to expect to recreate these practices in reality.

The opposing view (Gibson and Gibson 1993; Cowie 1992; Segal 1992) is that the pornographic image is a signifying system and a fantasy scenario. What is portrayed is not the object of desire but a scenario in which certain wishes are presented. This may involve scenarios that are illegal as acts. Fantasy is clearly a separate realm from reality and cannot be taken at face value.

5 The Existence of a Community Standard

In determining what is illegal and what is to be controlled, the notion of community standard is invoked. This is used worldwide. The Bill makes use of this test. It will censor internet content that is likely to

cause offence to a reasonable adult. A reasonable adult is defined officially as possessing common sense and an open mind and able to balance personal opinion with generally accepted community standards (Commonwealth of Australia 1999d). The Attorney General (Williams 1999) states that the reasonable adult test seeks to measure community standards of morality, decency and propriety whilst acknowledging that adults have different personal tastes. This test is critical for the classification of offline media in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 1999d). The Bill seeks to ensure that what is illegal or controlled offline according to this test also applies online

Others (Whittle 1998), for instance, argue that for Australia (and elsewhere) no one community standard exists, or that such a notion is inappropriate (Weckert 1998). Australian society is composed of many communities of widely differing standards in relation to sexuality, gender relations and sexual expression. One of Australia's greatest assets is a social structure that is highly pluralistic. In reality, the test results in the majoritarian norm being forced on all communities, or worse that of a powerful minority. In an open society like Australia, speech that is deemed illegal or controlled should depend on proving its demonstrable harm. In the absence of this mere offensiveness to a group is no justification for censorship by the state. The evidence of harm from pornography is now summarised.

6 Research Studies

6.1 Introduction

Most research studies on pornographic harm are for media other than the internet. One classification of the studies is to distinguish between sexually explicit material with no violence, sexually explicit material with violence and violence unaccompanied by sexually explicit material. Reporting the findings using this classification is difficult because it is not usually followed in the studies. As is common for many contentious areas each group holding different views claim the research findings support their particular view. Pornographic harm is no exception. The findings summarised here are from reviews (Felson 1999; Segal 1992; Wilson and Nugent 1987) that may be described as independent. However, the reviews by (Carol 1994b) and (Graham 2000) are summarised even though they espouse the libertarian view because they are well argued and comprehensive.

6.2 Sexually Explicit Material with no Violence

A causative link between sexually explicit material with no violence and:

- acts of violence (non consensual acts) have not been established.
- change in male attitudes (for the worse) has not been established.

6.3 Sexually Explicit Material with Violence

- a causative link between exposure to sexually violent material and sexually aggressive behaviour (towards woman) has not been proven.
- the causes of the impulses of child abusers and rapists are found in childhood experiences, especially highly sexually repressive backgrounds often stemming from religious beliefs in their families that stigmatised all sexual responsiveness and expression.
- the significant predictors of rape in an area are population size, proportion of young adults and percentage of divorced couples — not pornography.

6.4 Violent Material with nothing Sexually Explicit

- no conclusive causative link between media violence and violent offences
- notwithstanding the point above, many researchers are convinced that there is sufficient tentative evidence of harmful effects to warrant caution

6.5 Minors and Harm

For ethical reasons, there are no reported studies that have involved minors and sexually explicit images. In the case of images of paedophilia or images of incest of minors it is widely agreed that these be illegal because it is assumed that production of such images involve non-consensual acts. During the senate hearings and during the debate on The Bill many pointed out that it is unnecessary in regard to illegal child pornography because this is already covered by the Crimes Act of 1914 (Commonwealth of Australia 1999d).

7 The Theories of Pornographic Harm

7.1 Introduction

There exists numerous views about pornographic harm but the literature reveals five generic theories of it. Each of these theories is now discussed, including their main underlying assumptions and deficiencies. The use of the terms Radical Feminist and Socialist Feminist are prominent in the literature (Wilson 1992). The term Men's Movement's from Biddulph (1994).

7.2 Libertarian View

7.2.1 Assumptions

- Free expression is an indispensable condition of nearly every other form of freedom in a democratic society.
- Pornography is neither singular nor apparent and has many genres.

- Pornography is a legitimate form of expression even if it offends many people. It can flout conventional sexual mores, ridicule sexual hypocrisy and affirm sex for no other reason than pleasure.

7.2.2 Theory

There is no theory of harm as such but follows the classic libertarian position (Commonwealth of Australia 1999a; Whittle 1998; Carol 1994a; Whitaker 1994; Pullan 1984). The onus of proof of demonstrable harm from pornography is with those who wish the State to censor it. State intervention to censor pornography without empirically proven evidence of social harm is an illegitimate exercise of state power in a democratic society

7.2.3 Conclusion

- If pornography causes demonstrable harm to a group within society then it is legitimate for the state to regulate to prevent the harm to this group. Censorship is an action of last resort.
- Empirical research finds no causative link between pornography and harm and so censorship is unjustified.

7.2.4 Discussion

No society permits absolute freedom of speech. Libertarians are criticised for treating a complex issue as simplistic. Complexity means that it is difficult for the State to balance the competing rights of different groups in society and this is exacerbated by the internet (Clarke 1995). This is how Minister Alston portrayed The Bill (Commonwealth of Australia 1999c). In response, Libertarians argue if there is no demonstrable harm from pornography then the offensiveness of the speech does not justify its suppression. Use of censorship is counterproductive anyway. Sexually explicit images are neither reactionary nor liberating in and of themselves. To hide them away reinforces and confirms rather than undermines their power

Libertarians are concerned with freedom of speech but are criticised because they are untroubled by whose speech is heard. Woman in general and sexual minorities, for example gay and lesbian, are not "heard". In response, Libertarians argue that they are not heard because they are not part of the dominant conservative discourse on western sexuality. Censorship of pornography would disenfranchise these groups even more as has been the experience for other countries (Gorna 1992; Mills 1992).

7.3 Conservative View

7.3.1 Assumptions

- A worldview that insists that individual lives are narrowly prescribed rules and rituals. In its religious manifestation, it is a faith that offers certainty.

- The meaning of "pornography" is singular and apparent. It depicts sexual practices outside the majoritarian norm and therefore threatens the community itself.
- Sexuality is a force of nature that must be satisfied either through legitimate or illegitimate means.
- The law is a sphere of logic and rationality divorced from politics and bias. Thus, the category "obscene" is capable of clear legal demarcation. Indeed, morality (or rather immorality) has long been recognised under criminal law.

7.3.2 Theory

Sexuality as a force of nature is dangerous and out of control. It is a threat to "society" as evidenced by contemporary immorality, perversion and family disintegration. That sexuality is out of control is evident in pornography. It causes harm, especially to women and children. It degrades women, it abuses children and corrupts men (Commonwealth of Australia 1999e; 1999f; Duggan 1992). Pornography is not a legitimate form of expression in a free society and therefore should not be tolerated.

7.3.3 Conclusion

- The State must suppress pornography because it harms.
- The Libertarian concern about a threat to free speech does not apply to pornography because it is not a legitimate form of expression.

7.3.4 Discussion

Conservatives have quoted selective studies that appear to support their argument of harm. When challenged by the overall lack of evidence they tend to claim that the civilising or debasing (pornography) effects of culture cannot be measured (Gott and Linden 1994; Brod 1990) or rely on anecdotal evidence (Carol 1993; Smart 1992) or claim that the harm is self evident (Segal 1992; Betzold 1990; Mura 1990).

Even if it is admitted that pornography is offensive speech, it is still legitimate. The remedy for bad speech is not less speech but more. This is best achieved through education (Small 1990). Generally, conservatives oppose sex education in schools because it is an inviolate parent's right. However, they do expect that state to regulate what adults view or read. If children were educated with positive attitudes to sex then any harm through unsupervised access to pornography would be minimised. Religious conservatives view pornography as an attack on patriarchy, and it threatens the church's control over gender relations and sexual activities. The teaching is anti hedonistic and in the extreme case is "pleasure hating, and sex is mainly for procreation purposes (Ranke 1990). As Ellis and others (1992a) observe, only if you view sex as degrading or sinful can

you believe that sexually explicit images degrade and harm women and corrupt men.

Conservatives are charged (Simon 1990) with treating pornography as a scapegoat for real, and often imagined problems in society. Blaming porn detracts attention from the many harms inflicted on women and children (and men) imposed by current structures of society. The dislocation caused by the information revolution and the forces of globalisation aggravates this.

7.4 Radical Feminist

7.4.1 Assumptions

- The meaning of pornography is singular and apparent. It offers a master text to the practices it portrays.
- Sexuality is a social construction of the patriarchal society, which is characterised by misogyny. In such a society women are not only hated but are oppressed by men.
- Women are not free to express themselves in images of their choosing
- Women are not free to express their sexuality on their terms

7.4.2 Theory

There are two variations to the theory. One emphasises the intrinsic violence of pornography the other how pornography violates women's rights. Pornography, even non-violent pornography degrades women and arises from profound misogyny. Rape, for instance is not sexually motivated but purely violent claims Brownmiller (1976). Indeed, male sexuality can be analysed in terms of a continuum of violence. There is an element of rape involved in all heterosexual relationships asserts Griffin (1981). Sexuality is the primary source of men's oppression of women according to MacKinnon (1987). Pornography is the theory and rape the practice asserts Morgan (1980). It depicts and causes violence against women. Webster (1992) makes the ultimate charge - pornography is violence. At its most extreme, it is claimed all patriarchal culture is pornographic (Griffin 1981).

The other variation to the theory (Itzin 1992; MacKinnon 1987; Dworkin and MacKinnon 1985) is that pornography violates women's civil rights because it is discrimination against women. Indeed pornography is the speech of men that silences woman.

7.4.3 Conclusion

- All pornography harms all women and the State should prohibit it.
- Actions by the State to protect women's civil rights justify "infringement" of the "rights" of others.

7.4.4 Discussion

From a feminist perspective to have made pornography both the main cause of woman's oppression and its main form of expression is to have weakened the feminist agenda (Duggan and others 1992). It has created a new moral purity movement for our authoritarian times. History teaches us that woman's oppression predate pornography as constructed over the last few decades. The temperance movement made alcohol the symbol of male violence. Substituting pornography and prohibiting it will not work either.

The theory suffers from a serious contradiction. If the radical feminist view that all patriarchal culture is pornography then presumably this includes the legal system. However, the radical feminists want to use it against pornography. Obscenity law is morality from a male (conservative) view. They align themselves with the conservatives who are the enemies of feminists (Wilson 1995). The clearest examples come from North America and the United Kingdom (Duggan and others 1992; Duggan 1992; Segal 1992; Williams 1992b). The conservatives are interested in moral purity as defined by the religious right. This does not allow for sexual autonomy of woman (or men outside conservative church teaching on sexuality and gender relations). The paradox is that conservatives see sexual autonomy as a threat to male domination but feminists challenge pornography because it reinforces male domination.

If misogyny is everywhere why target its sexual manifestation? Much of the pornography is misogynist because the culture is misogynist not the other way around (Goldstein 1990). The reigning fantasy of male porn is not rape but women seducing men (McClintock 1992).

7.5 Socialist Feminist

7.5.1 Assumptions

- The meaning of pornography is not singular and apparent, and there are many genres.
- Pornography is about fantasy that is a separate realm from reality.
- Sexuality is a social construction of the patriarchal society. It is characterised by sexism and misogyny is prevalent.
- Sexuality is not just a private phenomenon. Sexual expression tells us something about ourselves that some of us at least prefer not to know.

7.5.2 Theory

Pornography is not a simple reflection of male sexuality but it can reinforce or pander to male prejudice. It is not surprising that much of male pornography is sexist and misogynist given the patriarchal society. Pornography is about a fantasy scenario and what is portrayed cannot be taken at face value. It is not a master text to the practices it portrays. Indeed, the meanings of pornography may

be outside the standard male/ female relations and recognition of this weakens any argument of harm to woman. Pornography can be liberating for woman and allow them to express themselves in images of their choosing (Ellis and others 1992b; Segal 1992). Any harm inflicted on woman by pornography is insignificant compared to the oppression of woman imposed by the patriarchal society, the state and the capitalist mode of production. Poverty is the major factor in violence and sexual abuse of women and children. It imposes immense harm on woman, children and men (Ellis and others 1992b).

7.5.3 Conclusion

- Pornography is used as a scapegoat by the conservatives to distract attention from the many harms inflicted on women and children (and men) from the inequalities in society. These arise from its structures and the dislocations from the information revolution and globalisation. Society must abolish poverty by transforming itself. In doing so it will address the great harm that comes from poverty.
- Blaming pornography for society's ills imagined and real is a simple solution because we want to believe there is a simple solution when there is not.
- Anyway, an image in itself is not pornographic. It is the imagination that can be pornographic. How can that be censored? Education and more pornographic speech by woman and the sexual minorities best combat sexism and misogyny.
- The profusion of pornographies that exist should be welcomed and their development encouraged rather than censored.

7.5.4 Discussion

The radical feminists accuse the socialist feminists of deserting the feminist cause because of their perceived softness on porn and reluctance to censor it. Both groups have much in common with a high priority to attack sexism and misogyny. The major difference is the means employed (Ellis and others 1992a). The socialist feminists claim a truly feminist agenda would emphasise the need for comprehensive sex education, to challenge the quasi monopoly ownership of the media, to attack political censorship and resist the erosion of civil liberties. Much pornography is a reflection of what is wrong with contemporary society but they observe (Gott and Linden 1994; Duggan and others 1992; Simon 1990) if society removed pornography today most women would notice no difference in their circumstances

7.6 Men's Movement

7.6.1 Assumptions

- Contemporary western sexuality is socially constructed by the patriarchal society and is

characterised by sexism and misogyny, sexual repression, and homophobia.

- The meaning of pornography is not singular and apparent, and is about fantasy not reality.

7.6.2 Theory

Pornography is not about harm to women but about the needs and fears of men (Segal 1992; Steinberg 1990). Men's sexual fantasies are fuelled by sexism and sexual repression (Kimmel 1990). This is revealed by the three prominent features of pornographic images that date back to Victorian times (Marcus 1966). First, the ubiquitous sexually desiring visible sexually satisfied female. Second, the depiction of a huge, hard, magical male member always erect. Third, the depiction of two or more men engaged in joint sex with one woman.

This reveals the fears of men, which are: First, fear of female rejection. Second, terror of phallic failure. Third, homosexual feelings disguised or legitimised by the presence of the woman (Stoltenberg 1990).

Young men learn sexual scripts that teach them that sex is secret, dirty and morally wrong with few exceptions (Biddulph 1994; Beneke 1990). In reality, sexual experiences are immensely pleasurable. This results in guilt and shame and young males learn to detach emotions from sexual expression (Brod 1990). Women are taught to experience sexual desire only in the context of emotional commitment or expression of affection. Lust is unwomanly or worse (Segal 1992). Pornography is a utopian fantasy where men's fears are allayed and psychological scars healed or forgotten. Pornography is not a means for men to achieve power over woman but rather is proof that men lack power over woman (Segal 1992, Kimmel 1990; Beneke 1990). This can engender anger in some men toward the 'superior' woman (Steinberg 1990). Women have the ultimate power over men - that of refusal. This never happens in the fantasy world of pornography.

7.6.3 Conclusion

- Men's pornography is not directed at harming woman but conferring positive benefits on men. This includes useful information about sexual matters, providing fantasy scenarios by which men may enrich their sex life, and as an outlet for some of the anger towards woman engendered by men's feelings of sensual aesthetic inferiority.
- Pornography exists not only because of sexual need but also psychological need. It is about men's self-acceptance and respect arising from men's loneliness and alienation.
- Censorship of pornography would harm men. The shame and guilt would remain, as would the anger of some towards the 'superior' woman.

7.6.4 Discussion

It is recognised (Simon 1990) that much pornography is of low quality and at an adolescent level. Consumption of it is likely to reinforce the misguided sexual scripts learnt by young men. Given the sexually repressive nature of our society any expression of sexuality, even if pornography is thought of as 'distorted' can easily appear to be liberating. What is required is for a comprehensive sex and gender relations education in all schools that aim to instil positive attitudes in young males to sexuality and sexual expression. Such a programme would combat sexism, misogyny, and homophobia.

8 Conclusions and Postscript

Censorship by the Australian Government of internet pornography is unjustified. First, worldwide empirical evidence does not support demonstrable harm from non violent pornography. Second, suppression of speech because it is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult is incompatible with an open society. Presumably, each adult holding one of these theories described here would claim to be reasonable. Third, is the failure to recognise that pornography may confer positive benefits for men and women of all types of sexual orientation and who enjoy varied consensual sexual practices.

The author (Sandy 2000) has argued elsewhere that The Bill is primarily due to the influence of the conservative right, especially the religious right. Censorship of the internet is yet another example of the persuasive influence of this group in Australian society. These people wish to use the state to compel others to accept their views on gender relations, sexuality and sexual expression. The prevailing discourse in Australia provides fertile ground for accommodation of these views. In Popper's terms (Popper 1969; 1973) they may be considered as enemies of the open society and a free internet.

IT professionals should:

- As the Australian Computer Society reminds us (Commonwealth of Australia 1999a) start with the premise that the internet is an adult medium. If minors use the internet, it is a parental responsibility to decide what images the minor consumes.
- Be mindful of our professional involvement with internet content grading systems, and the development and use of filtering and blocking software. There is an ethical responsibility to ensure technology is used appropriately.
- Continue to encourage the Government to debate and legislate about important issues like internet security, internet accessibility, and facilitating and promoting adoption of eCommerce.
- Oppose government regulation of the professional activities of development and use of the internet when this results in restrictions on free speech.

IT professionals as citizens of Australia should:

- Vigorously oppose and counter advocacy of internet censorship
- Advocate that the online services bill be repealed along with much of the censorship legislation governing other media.
- Support a comprehensive sex and gender relations education in all schools that aims to instil positive attitudes to gender relations, sexuality and sexual expression.
- Support the production of better quality pornography of all genres as a counter to the current dominance of the adolescent sexist and misogynist pornography, and allow woman and sexual minorities to express themselves in images of their own choosing.

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