

Keynote Speakers

The '**Digital and sexual citizenship in an age of social media bans: Interrogating the rights of children and young people**' conference is an initiative of the ECU Ethical Digital Futures Group and will be held in Perth in July 2026.

Here are the conference keynote speakers:



Professor Tama Leaver

Tama Leaver is a Professor of Internet Studies at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. He is a regular media commentator, a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, and a past President of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). He can be found online at www.tamaleaver.net.

Abstract

All stick, no carrot? Deploying Australia's social media ban for under16s

In December 2025, Australia's "world-leading" ban on children under the age of 16 holding social media accounts came into effect. Legislated a year earlier, the majority of the details of the ban were largely outlined in the period between being legislated and becoming active. This talk will offer an overview of the ban in terms of how it was initially popularised, how a number of the key features of the legislation, including age assurance, were implemented, and what can be said after the first 100 days of the ban. Particular attention will be paid to paths not taken, including the last-minute decision to remove an exemption framework which would have more explicitly stated what social media platforms would need to have done to avoid being banned. In doing so, this paper argues that the ban is largely focused on being seen to do something to protect children, but misses some of the key opportunities that could have arisen. In effect, rather than offering a roadmap for better social media experiences for teens, the ban largely displaces these issues to later in a young person's life.



Associate Professor Megan Lim

Associate Professor Megan Lim is the Deputy Program Director of Disease Elimination, and Head of the Young People's Health research group at the Burnet Institute in Melbourne. She is a public health researcher working to improve the health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those who experience marginalisation. Megan works with young people to centre their experiences and expertise in their own lives. Her work spans many health topics, with pornography being a particular area of interest.

Abstract

Young people's perspectives on age verification for online pornography

Age verification for access to online pornography was introduced in Australia in March 2026. To understand young people's perspectives on this policy, we surveyed 794 people aged 15 to 29. A majority (60%) supported the age verification in theory, stating that they believed it was necessary to protect children's wellbeing and development. But open-ended responses showed that the issue was considered complicated and there were no specific methods of verification that were widely supported. Participants lacked trust in governments or websites to keep their user data private and secure. Some expressed concerns that the policy would allow for linking of their sexual preferences to their legal identities, which could lead to further harms. Some described potential adverse effects of blocking access to pornography on young people's sexual development, particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals. They also doubted that the technology would be effective, outlining different workaround strategies. Those aged under 18 years, those who viewed pornography more frequently, and those identifying as LGBTQIA+ were less supportive of age verification. Less regulatory strategies, such as comprehensive sexual health education, were discussed as more suitable and viable approaches.



Katrina Marson

Katrina Marson was a criminal lawyer for a decade, specialising in sexual offences. She researched the implementation of relationships and sexuality education in Europe and North America on a 2019 Churchill Fellowship (report: Ignorance is not Innocence), a continuation of research that was the subject of her 2012 Honours thesis. Katrina is undertaking her PhD in sexuality education and human rights. Her first book, *Legitimate Sexpectations: the power of sex-ed*, was published in 2022.

Abstract

Young people's access to comprehensive sexuality education and information, including out-of-school and online, is a human rights issue. Rights relating to health, information and education, and the elimination of discrimination, as well as child rights, have been argued to impose an obligation on states to ensure sexuality education and information is not censored or withheld. Australia does not appear to consider itself so obliged, despite the nation's putative commitment to human rights, both at home and globally.

For example, the federal government's recent amendments to the Online Safety Act 2021—the so-called 'social media ban' for people under sixteen—has caused alarm^[1] for the limits it imposes on human rights, including those applying to children. Social media and other online platforms are critical avenues through which young people can access sexuality education and information, particularly when access to such education in schools remains inconsistent and constrained. Yet the amendments were declared compatible with relevant human rights and freedoms, because they “[promote] the protection of human rights, particularly in consideration of the best interests of the child,” and, with respect to those rights the amendments impose limitations on, “any interference with human rights ... is in pursuit of a legitimate objective.”^[2]

This session will consider: What is the nature of this rights contest over sexuality education and information access, in Australia? Which rights, and whose, are prioritised? And what empowering possibilities do human rights offer young Australians, beyond legal containers?

[1] Axel Bruns and Aleesha Rodriguez, 'An Age Ban on Social Media Is Unworkable – What Are the Alternatives?', October 2024, Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Proposed Social Media Ban for under-16s in Australia', (updated 21 November 2024) <<https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/proposed-social-media-ban-under-16s-australia>>, accessed 11/11 2025. [2] Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 Explanatory Memorandum, at [40] and [41].



Professor Alan McKee

Professor Alan McKee is an expert on entertainment and healthy sexual development. He was named as the Australian newspaper's leading researcher in the field of sex and sexuality studies for 2025 and 2026. He currently leads the \$350,000 Australian Research Council-funded project "Improving digital sexual literacy in Australia". His latest book (with Paul Byron, Katerina Litsou and Roger Ingham) - called *What Do We Know About the Effects of Pornography After Fifty Years of Academic Research?* - emerges from an ARC grant entitled 'Pornography's effects on audiences: explaining contradictory research data'. He has published on healthy sexual development, and entertainment education for healthy sexuality in journals including the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, the *International Journal of Sexual Health*, the *Journal of Sex Research and Sex Education*.

Abstract

Addressing the harms of social media: Learning about kink

This paper asks for input on a wicked question: how and when should school-based sex education deal with kink? I will explore why this question is important in thinking about the harms of social media for young people, and why I have struggled with answering it; and then invite discussion on possible paths forward. There exists significant public and policy concern about sexual choking in pornography, among other kinds of kinky behaviour (spanking, restraint), misleadingly framed as gendered violence. It is impossible to stop young people learning that non-heteronormative sex exists and kink is not a fringe part of sexuality - up to 62% of women have reported having rape fantasies. Young people need education about negotiation, boundaries, safewords, aftercare. However, despite the fact that the majority of Australian parents support comprehensive age-appropriate sex education in schools, governments remain scared of a small minority of extremely vocal and conservative parents and opinion columnists who oppose it. This places strong constraints on what can be taught in school sex education. In this context, how can we provide education about kink?